Venerable Servant, Book 2

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The Life of the Venerable Servant of God

Vincent de Paul

Founder and First Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission

(Divided Into Three Books)

by

Louis Abelly, Bishop of Rodez

BOOK TWO

New City Press
The original edition of Abelly contained as a frontispiece an engraving by René Lochon, based on the portrait by Simon François de Tours of Vincent de Paul in choir dress. Below the portrait is a quatrain, the translation of which is:

If you wish to see in a single face
the portrait of two great saints
Paul and Vincent are depicted here;
but for his spirit, read this work.
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PREFACE

Although we spoke in Book One of the great works that engaged the virtue and zeal of Monsieur Vincent, we had to do so succinctly, not interrupting the flow of his life story by too frequent or too extended digressions. This is why we have judged it necessary to include a more ample account, here in Book Two, so that the readers will not be deprived of the consolation and spiritual advantage that may come from a more extended treatment. By this they may be moved to admire the wisdom of God in his directing his servant for the salvation and sanctification of a great number of souls, to thank him for the abundant graces he lavished in this last age by the ministry of Monsieur Vincent, and to draw lessons for their own edification and imitation for those occasions when they too may participate in similar good works. Holy Scripture says that the way of the just shines forth like the light, growing to perfect day, enlightening all who would follow. It is perfumed with the good odor of Jesus Christ, which they spread by the practice of virtue, which consoles and strengthens those who would walk in their footsteps. To praise God perfectly for his presence in the saints means to recall the noble actions of their lives, to study their virtues, to imitate their piety, to perpetuate the good works they began, and to try to glorify God on earth as they did, and as they will do eternally in heaven.

It is true that this second book may appear a bit long, and those who appreciate brevity may not savor its length or the development given in some of the chapters. If these persons would consider the nature of the things discussed, and the end proposed in writing, they would see that we could not be dispensed from doing otherwise.

We are trying to make known in more detail the great deeds God accomplished through Monsieur Vincent, the motives that inspired him to undertake them, the means he used to bring them to a successful conclusion, and the great fruits which these charitable works produced. Our hope is to inspire our readers to thank and glorify God, and provide them with the thought of undertaking something similar should the occasion present itself for helping their neighbor. This could come about only if we go into considerable detail. If we stick only to general terms much less light would be thrown on these marvelous enterprises.

If it should be the case that our readers do not have sufficient time to read what is given in this second book an appreciation of the life and virtues of
Monsieur Vincent could be derived readily from Books One and Three alone.
BOOK TWO

His Main Works and the Great Results Which Came From Them
CHAPTER ONE

The Missions of Monsieur Vincent

SECTION ONE

His Missions in General

IT SHOULD not be necessary to speak at length to have the reader appreciate the necessity and utility of the missions which Monsieur Vincent and his followers conducted. Forty years' experience bears out their value. Were one not persuaded of this, he would need only to cast a glance at the deplorable condition of most people before the missions began, particularly those of the countryside. They seemed engulfed in the darkness of a profound ignorance about their salvation, and as a result, given to all sorts of vices. On the other hand, think of the good results produced by the missions of Monsieur Vincent, especially the wonderful conversions which occurred. These make us recognize and confess that the hand of God was with his faithful servant. Among other exterior means for the salvation of souls, his mercy made particular use of these missions in recent years. These were one of the most efficacious ways of helping people and upon them he lavished an abundance of divine blessings.

A noted virtuous priest who had helped Monsieur Vincent and even had worked on a mission in a large village in the province of Anjou, wrote to him more than twenty years ago:

Among all who have made their general confession there are more than fifteen hundred who have never made a good one. Besides, many people have committed enormous sins over ten, twenty, or even thirty years, which they have not confessed to their pastors and ordinary confessors. Ignorance is widespread, but malice is even worse. Their shame is so great they have not confessed all their sins even in the general confessions they made to the missionaries. But moved by their sermons and catechetical instructions given on the mission they have finally come and openly confessed their sins, with groans and tears.¹

¹ CED II:40.
Another prelate, Jacques Lescot, bishop of Chartres, whose name is held in benediction, wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1647 on this same subject:  

I could not have received better news than that you would like to continue your mission in my diocese, if I agree. There is no diocese in France where you will be more welcome. I don't know of anywhere the mission is more necessary and useful, for the strange ignorance I encounter in my visits horrifies me. I give no directives, neither place, time, or faculties. Everything is up to you. To use Abraham's words, *Ecce universa coram te sunt* ["Behold, all things lie before you"],\(^3\) and so I am in truth, and from my heart, etc.\(^4\)

Another prelate, whom we shall not identify because he is still living, wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1651:

The mission is one of the greatest goods I know of, and one of the most necessary. In my diocese there is the greatest ignorance you can imagine among the poor people. If you could see the extent of this ignorance, you would be moved to compassion. I can truthfully say most of those who are Catholic are so in name only, because their fathers were before them, and not because they have the slightest idea of what it means to be a Catholic. What gives me great pain is that we cannot establish any order in the diocese among people who would just as soon go hear a Protestant sermon as come to mass.\(^5\)

Monsieur Vincent was only too well convinced by his own experience of the extreme need the people had of being instructed in what was required for their own salvation, and of being encouraged to make a good general confession. And since it was in the missions that one could fulfill these duties of charity with the greatest fruit and success, he applied himself to them with all his power. Insofar as he could, he recruited for the work those whom he judged to be suited, both of his own Congregation and of others. In the following section we will give a summary of a brief familiar instruction he gave one day to his community on this matter. From it we can gauge his feelings on the necessity and utility of missions.

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2. Jacques Lescot, a doctor of theology of the Sorbonne, and Cardinal Richelieu's confessor. Named bishop of Chartres in 1641, he was consecrated in 1643. He died in 1656 at the age of sixty-three.
PART ONE

Some Remarkable Words of Monsieur Vincent About the Mission

One day, speaking to his community, he said:

We have the duty of working for the salvation of the poor country people because this is what God has called us to. Saint Paul urges us to be faithful to our vocation, to correspond to the eternal designs of God upon us. This work for the poor is the foundation of our Congregation, all the rest is accessory. We would never have worked with the ordinands nor with the seminaries for priests if we had not judged them necessary to preserve the people in good condition and to maintain the good results of the missions, by providing good priests for them. In this we imitate military conquerors who leave garrisons in their conquered territory lest they lose what they won with such difficulty. How happy we are, my brothers! We live the very vocation of Jesus Christ. Who imitates his life on earth better than our Missionaries? I speak not only of our own members, but those apostolic workers of all different orders who give missions both within and outside the kingdom. Those are the great workers, while we are only in their shadow. Look at how they go to the Indies, to Japan, to Canada, to advance the work of Jesus Christ who remained faithful to his call from the first moment his Father had sent him.

Imagine his speaking to us: Go forth, Missionaries! Go where I send you. These poor souls await you, for their salvation depends in part on your preaching and your catechizing. We ought to think hard about this, my brothers, for God has destined us to work in this particular place, this time and with these people. In other times he chose prophets in the same way, to preach in a certain place, and to certain people, not expecting them to go anywhere else. What will we answer to God if by our fault some of these poor people die and are lost? Will we have nothing to worry about, if we in some way are responsible for their damnation by not having helped them as much as we could? Should we not fear that we will be held to account at the hour of our death? If on the contrary we cooperate with the grace of our vocation, will we not have reason to hope that God will increase his grace in us every day, strengthen our Company by new members of such character that they will act in his spirit, and bless all our efforts? All those souls who attain eternal salvation through our ministry will be our advocates before God in heaven.
How happy they will be at the hour of their death who will see accomplished in themselves these beautiful words of our Lord: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus!* ["the Lord has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor"]. See, my brothers, how it seems our Lord wants to tell us by these words that one of his main concerns was to work for the poor. Cursed shall we be if we fail to serve and help them. After we have been called by God and have given ourselves to him for this purpose, he relies in some way upon us. Remember the words of a holy Father of the Church: *Si non pavisti, occidisti,* ["If you have not fed them, you have killed them."] which applied to corporal things, but could equally be said of the spiritual, and with even greater justification.

Think if we do not have reason to tremble if we fail on this point, if by age, or because of some infirmity or indisposition, we pull back and lose our first fervor. Despite my years, even I do not feel excused from the service I owe the poor. What could hinder me? If I cannot preach every day, what about twice a week? If I am not strong enough to reach all my congregation from great pulpits, could I not speak from small ones? If my voice is not strong enough for even that, what prevents my speaking simply and familiarly to these good people, like I am doing at this very moment, with them gathered around, just like you are now?

I know of some older persons who on the day of judgment may rise against us. Among others there is a good Jesuit of saintly life who used to preach at court. When he was sixty years of age he became ill, and came within a hair's breadth of death. God made him aware of how vain and useless his polished and studied sermons were, to such an extent that he was filled with remorse. When he recovered he sought permission to catechize and preach to the poor country people. He spent twenty years in this charitable work until his death. On his deathbed he asked that the pointer he used in his catechism lessons be buried with his body. As he said, it would be a symbol of his having left the court to serve the Lord in the person of the poor country people.

Perhaps some wish to live a long life, and so fear that work on the missions will shorten their days and hasten the hour of their death. They may seek to exempt themselves from this work as though it were an evil to be avoided. I would ask those who think like this if it is an evil for one who has been traveling in a strange country to come back to his native shores? Is it an evil for the sailor

to arrive safely at his port? Is it an evil for a faithful soul to see and possess God? Is it an evil for missionaries to rejoice in the glory merited for them by the suffering and death of our divine master? What? Do you fear this day which should be so highly prized, and which can never come too soon?

What I say to the priests here, I say as well to those who have not been ordained, to you brothers. No, my brothers, do not think that because you do not preach you are excused from working for the salvation of the poor. You do so in your own way, perhaps more effectively even than the preachers, and certainly with less danger to yourselves. You are obliged to it because you form a single body with us, just like the various members of the body of Jesus Christ. All his members participated in their own way in the act of our redemption. The head of Jesus Christ was crowned with thorns, but his feet were pierced with nails and attached to the cross. After the resurrection of Jesus, the head of Christ was crowned with glory, but the feet too participated in his triumph.7

PART TWO

*Monsieur Vincent’s Convictions about the Virtues Most Needed by the Missionaries, and How They Should Preach*

This great servant of God was filled with a truly apostolic spirit. As a result, he knew well what virtues were most suitable for missionaries, since he had possessed and exercised them himself in a most eminent degree, as we shall see in Book Three. It was not simply from his mind, but from his own experience, that he concluded the most needed virtue was that of a profound humility and distrust of self. This meant not attributing to one’s own labors or solicitude the conversion of souls or other benefits of the mission. They should refer all to the glory of God, save their own faults and failings. The Missionaries ought to have a great faith and confidence in God, not allowing the difficulties and contradictions they were sure to meet in their work to discourage them. They needed the virtue of charity, of course, and zeal for the salvation of souls, to search them out, to help, and to serve them. They should have meekness and patience to attract their hearers, and simplicity and prudence to lead them to God.

They should be detached from worldly goods to become freer in the works they undertake for God, and be able to inspire others to hunger for the goods of heaven. The Missionaries should be mortified in both body and spirit, so

that the movements of nature would never impede the operations of grace. They should be indifferent about position, place, time, or persons, having no other motive than to do in all things the will of God. Those who preached were to be ready to cede the pulpit to others, even in the midst of a mission, if this should be ordered by a superior.

He insisted that the Missionaries defer to religious or other preachers in the parishes, especially when these others had some standing there. They should willingly give up the pulpit to them and show them every respect. He wished his followers to be prayerful and edifying, being convinced they would produce more fruit this way than by any knowledge or eloquence they might display. Prayer would attract upon themselves an abundance of grace and interior unction, and their good example would dispose their audience to receive what they themselves had been given by God.

Monsieur Vincent wrote to one of his priests in 1633 about how to preach:

I have heard from several sources the blessing it has pleased God to shower upon your mission at N.8 We were most pleased to hear this, because we know these blessings come from God, who bestows them especially upon the humble, those who appreciate that any good they do comes from him. I pray God with all my heart to give you the spirit of humility in your work. You must believe most assuredly that God will take away from you this grace should any thought arise in you to take complacency in your work, and attribute to yourself what belongs to God alone. Be humble then, Monsieur, remembering that even Judas received greater graces than you, and these graces were more effective in him than in you, and yet he was lost. What would it profit the greatest preacher in the whole world, endowed with the greatest talents, if after he received the plaudits of an entire province and even converted countless souls to God, he were to perish?

I do not write this, Monsieur, because I fear this defect in you or in your helper, Monsieur N.9 I do so only to warn you that if the demon attacks you from this angle, as he will, you must be on the alert to reject his suggestions, and instead honor the humility of our Lord.

In my recent conference to the community I have taken as my theme the simple style of life our Lord led upon earth. He preferred this common and abject way of living, just like so many other persons of his time. He abased himself as much as possible (O marvel, surpassing all human understanding) although he was the uncreated wisdom of the eternal Father. His manner of expounding

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8. Probably Mortagne sur Gironde (Charente Maritime).
9. Lambert aux Couteaux, or Robert de Sergis.
his teaching was even more simple and direct than his own apostles. Please read some of his teachings and compare them with those of Saint Peter or Saint Paul, and the other apostles. This would lead you to believe he was a person without learning, whereas the apostles appear to be better instructed than he. Even the success of his teaching was astonishingly less than that of the apostles, for in the Gospel we see him persuading his apostles and disciples one by one to join him, and that at a cost of much effort. Saint Peter, on the other hand, converted five thousand at his first sermon. That single incident gave me more understanding of the great and marvelous humility of the Son of God than any other consideration I have ever had on this subject.

Every day at mass we say the words, *in spiritu humilitatis*, etc. ["In the spirit of humility."] A holy person told me once that he had learned from the lips of the blessed bishop of Geneva that this spirit of humility, which we ask for in each of our masses, consists chiefly in a continuous attitude of humbling ourselves, on all occasions, both interiorly and exteriorly. But, gentlemen, who can give us this spirit of humility? Our Lord alone, if we ask it of him, and if we remain faithful to his grace, and exercise this virtue in ourselves. Please do this, then, and let us remind each other of this when we say these words at the altar. I hope in your charity you will do this.10

Speaking one day to the priests of the Congregation of the Mission on this same topic he said:

The Company must give itself to God to explain the truths of the Gospel in familiar comparisons in our work in the missions. Pay close attention to forming your own mind to using this method, in imitation of our Lord, who, as the evangelist says, *Sine parabolis non loquebatur ad eos* ["He spoke to them in parables only"].11 Do not use quotations from the profane authors, unless you use them as stepping stones to the holy Scripture.12

He also recommended to the missionaries not to become too emotional in their preaching, nor speak too loud. He preferred that they speak to the people simply, with moderate voice, both to make their words more acceptable, and to conserve their strength and health. Having to preach every day of the entire year, and sometimes twice a day, they run the danger of destroying their health. By their shouting they would ruin their voice and their lungs.

One day he wrote to one of his priests:

I have learned that you put too much of yourself into your preaching, and have suffered some bad effects. In the name of God, Monsieur, take care of your health by moderating your voice and your emotional involvement in your preaching. I have spoken before of how our Lord blesses sermons spoken in familiar and simple language, because this is the way he himself taught and preached. This way of speaking is more natural, less draining than a forced way of speaking. The people like it better, and respond more readily. Believe me, Monsieur, the actors in the theaters realize this. They have changed and no longer use the elevated tone they used to employ in reciting their parts. They now speak with a moderate tone of voice, as though they were conversing familiarly with their audience. This is what I heard from an actor who happened to be speaking with me within the last few days.

If the desire to please the world has led these people to change, what a subject of confusion it would be for those who preach Jesus Christ if their love and zeal for the salvation of souls would not have the same result? I was sorry to learn that instead of teaching the longer catechism lesson in the evening, you have substituted a sermon in its place. This ought not to be done: (1) because the morning preacher might have trouble preparing the evening talk. (2) The people need the catechism lesson, and will profit more from it than from a second sermon. (3) We honor better the way Jesus Christ set out to teach and convert the world. (4) This is our tradition, to which it has pleased Our Lord to give many blessings, and using this method we find more occasion to practice humility.13

PART THREE

The Order Which Monsieur Vincent Observed and Wanted to be Observed by the Members of His Congregation

Since all things coming from God are done with order, as the apostle teaches,14 and since order leads us to God, according to Saint Augustine,15 it is not surprising that the missions were well organized and regulated. The missions were works of divine grace helping souls return to God when they had been estranged by sin. Each group of Missionaries was like a company of well-trained troops, or like a small army, whose organization and efficiency made it terrifying and formidable to the enemies of Jesus Christ.

15. PL 32:976-77.
From the beginning Monsieur Vincent prescribed a definite order for the missions, which he wanted all his priests to observe in the following manner. First, the Missionaries were never to begin a mission unless the bishop of the diocese had invited them, and they had then presented themselves to the pastors before beginning any service in their parishes. They sought their blessing on their work, or that of their vicar if they were absent. If they were refused the Missionaries simply retired. They would humbly take their leave in imitation of the acceptance of the rebuffs our Lord had received in similar situations, as reported in the Gospel.

After the invitation of the bishop and the consent of the pastor of the parish where the mission was to be given, a priest would give the opening sermon on a feastday or a Sunday to alert the people to the coming of the missionaries. The services they hoped to render the people were explained, then they were exhorted to penance, and to dispose themselves to making a good confession. On the same day, after vespers, a second sermon would be given. This one discussed how to make their confession, especially on how to examine their conscience. It explained briefly the more common sins committed against the commandments of God, or other serious sins, to move them to sorrow for offending God.

Several days later, when the other priests who were to work on the mission had arrived, they began the usual functions and exercises of the mission. These consisted mainly in preaching, hearing confessions, the longer and shorter catechetical instructions, reconciling those estranged from one another, visiting and consoling the sick, admonishing hardened sinners, remedying abuses and public disorders. It general they devoted themselves to all the works of mercy and charity possible to them, and which providence brought to their attention. Meanwhile, the priests attended to their own spiritual exercises, such as mental prayer, the divine office said in common, the holy sacrifice of the mass, examens, both general and particular, and other similar spiritual practices.

All their activities were regulated, the hour for rising, retiring, meals, meditation, mass, divine office, and the other exercises of which we have spoken, such as preaching, catechism lessons, confessions and the other aspects of the mission, all done with great attention and devotion.

Ordinarily each day there were three public functions. The missionaries preached early so that the poor country people might attend, then a short catechism lesson around midday, and lastly a more extended catechizing in the evening, after the peasants had returned from their work.

The usual subjects of the sermons, besides the two we have already spoken of at the opening of the mission, were the various aspects of the sacrament of penance, the last things, the enormity of sin, the rigors of divine
justice, hardness of heart, final impenitence, false shame, relapse into sin, slander, envy, hatred and enmity, swearing and blasphemy, intemperance in eating and drinking, and other similar sins most often committed by country people. Also, the topics chosen might include patience, the good use of adversity and poverty, charity, the good use of time, how to pray well, how to receive the sacraments and how to assist devoutly at the holy sacrifice of the mass, the imitation of our Lord, devotion to his most blessed mother, perseverance and other virtues and good works appropriate to people in their state of life.

The order and topics of preaching were changed according to circumstance and needs. Sermons were added or curtailed depending on the length of the mission, which in turn depended on the number and disposition of the people. Ordinarily the mission continued until all the people of the region were sufficiently instructed and put on the road to salvation through their general confession, to which they were encouraged by all possible means.

The evening catechism lessons ordinarily took as subject the principal mysteries of religion, the Trinity, the incarnation of our Savior, and the blessed sacrament of the altar. Then the commandments of God and of the Church, the articles of the Creed, the Our Father and Hail Mary. All this was done in consideration of the length of the mission, as explained above. If the mission did not last long enough to cover all these matters, only the most important and necessary were treated, according to the capacity of the hearers.

This longer lesson ordinarily took place in the pulpit for the benefit of the hearers. It normally began with a short repetition of the previous lesson, on which the instructor asked the children questions for about a quarter of an hour. Following that, he explained the main topic. At the end the instructor made some applications to daily life, to join instruction with edification of his hearers.

The shorter catechism lesson was held at one in the afternoon for the instruction of the children. The first day began with a short exhortation in a familiar style to urge them to attend, and to behave well. On the following days they gave instruction on the faith, the main mysteries of religion, on the commandments of God and other topics covered in the principal catechetical instruction of the evening, but presented in a more familiar style and suited to the mentality of the children. This catechism lesson was given with the instructor moving among the children instead of mounting the pulpit. He had the children sing the commandments of God to impress them more firmly on their minds.

Toward the end of the mission, those children capable of doing so, but who had not yet made their first communion, were carefully prepared to do so. Besides the other instructions given during the mission, an exhortation
was given on the eve of their communion to dispose them better for receiving
the sacrament. Immediately before receiving, another talk was given in the
presence of the blessed sacrament to excite the children to greater devotion
and reverence toward this adorable mystery. After vespers a solemn proces­sion was held, in which the blessed sacrament was carried. The children who
had made their first communion walked two by two before the blessed
sacrament, each carrying a candle, followed by the clergy and people.
Following the procession another brief exhortation was delivered to children
and adults, and finally a Te Deum was sung to thank God for his graces.

On occasion a mass would be sung early the next morning to thank God for
his gifts, and a sermon given on perseverance, if one had not been given the
previous day. Monsieur Vincent also had the practice of looking into the
establishment of a Confraternity of Charity, composed of the women and girls
of the region to look after the spiritual and corporal needs of the sick poor.
Toward the end of the mission, sermons were preached on the subject of charity
toward the poor, and on the rules and practices of this confraternity.

Near the end of the mission, when most of the work was done, the
missionaries saw to hearing the confessions of the children not yet old enough
to receive communion, but with enough discernment to commit sin and offend
God. To dispose the children to respect this sacrament, and to teach them how
to confess well, some instructions were given suited to their situation. They
sought to remedy two abuses which had crept into most of the country parishes.
In some places, the children made their confession publicly, in front of
everyone. In other places no confession at all was practiced, or at least not until
the children were at an age to receive communion.

During the mission the sick, and especially the poor, were visited and
helped as much as possible, both spiritually and corporally. They were urged
to make a good general confession as an assurance for their salvation.

The Missionaries visited schoolteachers and gave them advice and in­
struction on how best to fulfill their ministry of cultivating virtue in the
children, and inspiring them to piety.

Monsieur Vincent himself observed one more practice, and took care that
his priests did also. All the instruction and services of which we have spoken
were to be given free of charge. They accepted lodging and the use of those
utensils which could not conveniently be carried. The priests of his Congre­
gation have scrupulously observed this practice up to our own time.

Besides all these services given to laity, Monsieur Vincent was anxious
that his Missionaries do what they could for any clergy in the area. He used
spiritual conferences for this purpose. In them he discussed with them the
obligations of their state, the faults they should guard against, the virtues
they should practice as most fitting their state, and other similar topics.
As we said in another place, Monsieur Vincent was most assiduous in giving missions because he recognized their necessity and the good reception they had among the people. When he had to return to Paris, it seemed to him, as he said several times, “that the gates of the city would fall upon him” for turning to other duties when the salvation of so many poor people depended upon his help.

He soon recognized by his own experience that this type of activity was most tiring, and took a toll on even the strongest. It was impossible to continue without some relaxation, which he proposed to give his priests each year. It appeared the best time for this would be the harvest and vintage time, when the peasants were so taken up with their harvest they could not participate in the exercises of the mission without great inconvenience. Monsieur Vincent gave his Missionaries this time to study and prepare the sermons and catechism lessons they were to give in future missions. After they spent themselves completely for others they were now to take time for themselves. They were to give themselves with greater leisure and tranquility to recollection and prayer, just as our Lord did with his apostles when they returned from their preaching, and reported to him all they had done. He said “Come apart to a solitary place, to spend some time in rest and tranquility.” This is what Monsieur Vincent hoped to provide his Missionaries. During this time they made their annual retreat, their annual confession, and looked to the renewal of their interior life.

It happens often enough that those who work for the salvation of others, and are concerned with apostolic undertakings, themselves need to be restored by interior recollection, after so much exterior dissipation, just as the great clocks which serve the public need periodic repair. In this connection Monsieur Vincent said several times, “The life of a Missionary ought to be the life of a Carthusian in the house, and an apostle in the countryside. The more he cares for his own interior development the more his labors for the spiritual good of others will prosper.”

In a letter he wrote in 1631 to one of his priests, on this same question, he said:

At Paris we lead a life almost as solitary as the Carthusians. We neither preach, nor catechize, nor do we go to the city for confessions, and almost no one comes here on business. We, in turn, have no business of our own. This solitude makes us long for work in the country, and the work makes us long for this solitude.
Since heretics lived in places where missions were given, particularly in such provinces as Guienne, Languedoc, Poitou, and others, where the weeds had taken root more deeply than elsewhere, Monsieur Vincent was deeply concerned about them. His limitless charity was such that he hoped for their salvation as much as for anyone else's. He wanted his Missionaries to bring about their conversion, if possible. To succeed in this he laid down several rules of conduct that experience proved to be effective.

First, he felt that contentions and disputes in matters of religion, particularly those carried on in an argumentative spirit with sharp exchanges, were totally unsuitable for encounters with heretics. He recommended to his confreres to avoid absolutely all invective, all reproach. In this connection he said that the learned can gain nothing in dealing with the devil through pride, since he is better equipped than they in this regard. On the contrary, humility easily overcomes him, because he does not have this weapon in his arsenal. He added that he had never seen or heard of a single heretic being converted by subtle arguments, but only by kindness and humility.

Although Monsieur Vincent did not want his Missionaries to dispute with heretics, he still wanted them to be prepared in the theology of the contested points. They should be ready to give a reason for the faith they held, according to the maxim of the prince of the apostles. This study would enable them to sustain the truth and refute the contrary errors. All the while they would deal amicably with the heretics, replying gently to their objections, and more to convert them than to confound them. He directed his priests to attend conferences on these points and to make a special study of current heresies. This is what he wrote, in 1628 from Beauvais to the priest he had left in charge of the College des Bons Enfants during his absence.

How are things going with the Company? Are all in good disposition, and happy? Are the regulations well observed? Are the students studying the points of theology which are in such dispute? Are you following the schedule? I beseech you, Monsieur, pay attention to this. Take care that your students learn the matter in the shorter Becanus very well, for I cannot tell you how useful this little book is.

I must tell you how God used this miserable person (this is the
way he referred to himself) to convert three heretics since I left Paris, using the most basic arguments of kindness, humility, and patience in dealing with these poor unfortunate souls. It took two days to bring one around, the other two, less. I wanted to say all this to my own confusion, so the Company can see that if God has used the most ignorant and most wretched of his flock to do this, how much more can we expect from the others.  

It was his maxim to join to teaching and study of the controversies the virtues of humility, gentleness, and patience when one conversed or conferred with heretics. He wanted them to be treated with respect and affection, not to flatter them in their mistaken beliefs, but more readily to win over their hearts. Above all, he felt that the virtuous and exemplary lives of Christians, especially of priests and missionaries, were more powerful arguments than any others in leading them to renounce their errors and return to the true religion. He often spoke of this in his letters, such as in this one, written to the superior of the house at Sedan:

When the king sent you to Sedan, he did so on condition of your never disputing with the heretics, neither from the pulpit nor in private. He knows that this does little good, and often produces more noise than fruit. A good life and the good odor of the Christian virtues attract people to the right path, and confirm Catholics in their beliefs. This is the way our Company can profit from its stay in Sedan. It will add to good example the carrying out of our usual functions, instructing the people in our usual way, preaching against vice and bad morals, speaking of the virtues, showing their necessity, their beauty, their practice, and the means of acquiring them. This is what you should do. If you wish to speak on the issue in dispute, do so only if the day’s Gospel gives you occasion to refer to this. You can then speak of the truths denied by the heretics, but do not mention them by name nor even refer to them.

A brother of the Congregation of the Mission, trained as a surgeon, offered to contribute his skill and charity to evangelize the island of Madagascar. Monsieur Vincent sent him to La Rochelle in December 1659, together with several priests of the Congregation to embark on their mission. This brother learned that several Huguenots were also embarking on that ship for the same destination. He was most distressed at this news, which elicited this reply to his letter to Monsieur Vincent.

I was grieved to learn several heretics will accompany you on

22. See also CED I:295.
23. CED VIII:526.
CHAPTER ONE, SECTION ONE

your voyage to Madagascar, and that you anticipate great difficulty in traveling with them. God is the Master of all, and he has allowed this to come about for reasons of his own which we do not know. Perhaps it was to compel you to be more reserved in their presence, more humble, and more devoted to God and charitable toward your neighbor, so that seeing the beauty and sanctity of our religion they may be inspired to return. You must carefully avoid any sort of dispute or argumentation with them. Show yourself always patient and well-mannered toward them even if they murmur against you or argue against our beliefs and practices.

Virtue is so beautiful and so lovable that they will be forced to admire it in you if you practice it well. It would be well not to distinguish between Catholics and heretics in the services you give to God on this ship, for by this they will know you love them in God. I hope your good example will benefit both groups. Take care of your health, please, and that of our missionaries with you.24

PART FIVE

The General Results of the Missions Given by Monsieur Vincent and the Missionaries of His Congregation

The Gospel maxim recalls that we know the tree by the fruit it produces. There is no more assured way of judging its vigor and fertility than by examining what it brings forth. In a similar way, we can judge the excellence and usefulness of the missions and the labors of the Missionaries by looking at the great good they have engendered in all the Church. We will speak first of these results in general, and then in more detail, but simply and without exaggeration. We are not writing a panegyric, but a simple recital of events. The reader will derive greater satisfaction and even edification from this seeing that what is reported is done so with sincerity and without any attempt at cleverness.

We have already spoken in Book One25 of how, even before he founded the Congregation, Monsieur Vincent had begun the first missions in 1617, and continued to give them up to 1625, not only in the towns and villages of several dioceses but also in the hospital of the Petites Maisons in Paris and in the galleys at Bordeaux. Several learned and pious priests, and even some of noble birth, helped him in this work. We do not know the number of missions given by Monsieur Vincent himself during these seven or eight

24. CED VIII:182-83. Letter to Brother Philippe Patte, born 1620 at Vigny in the diocese of Rouen. He was received into the Congregation in 1656. He died in Madagascar in 1664.
25. Ch. 8.
years. He gave them, however, in almost all the territory of the house of de Gondi, including that which belonged to the wife of the general of the galleys, in the villages, towns and hamlets which number close to forty, not to mention those he gave elsewhere.

Since the beginning of the Congregation in 1625 until 1632 when it moved to Saint Lazare, either he or his confreres gave more than one hundred forty missions. From 1632 until the death of this great servant of God, the house at Saint Lazare alone hosted nearly seven hundred, at some of which he himself participated, with great blessings. If we add to these the missions preached by the other houses of the Congregation, established in more than twenty-five dioceses both inside and outside the kingdom of France, who can conceive the extent and the diversity of benefits they reaped, tending to the glory of God and the good of his Church?

Who can count the number of persons in blameworthy ignorance of the truths of salvation who were instructed in the truths they were obliged to know? How many others had lived their entire lives in a state of sin, from which they were freed through a good general confession? How many sacrileges committed by receiving the sacraments unworthily have been redeemed? How many enmities and hatreds and cases of usury have ended? How many bad marriages and other scandals have been rectified? How many pious practices and charitable enterprises have been encouraged? How many good works and virtues have been begun in places where they were scarcely known? How many souls were sanctified and saved, who now glorify God in heaven? Without the help they received in the missions they might otherwise have died in their sin, and might now be blaspheming and cursing God with the demons in hell. God alone knows the extent and number of all the good his grace effected through his faithful servants, and which will one day be revealed to his own greater glory. To put all this in few words, it seemed his merciful Providence wished to use the missions to accomplish the ends which brought about the incarnation of his Son, and which were foretold by the prophet: “to banish iniquity, destroy and exterminate sin, and reestablish sanctity and justice.”

While awaiting eternity, when God will reveal all that was accomplished, we will give in the following chapters some small samples of the effects of the missions. First, however, we must say a few words about them.

We must first say that the Missionaries did not make an accounting of their successes. They were too busy in doing good to spend time writing about it. What we have learned, almost by chance, comes from extracts from letters written by the bishop of the diocese in which the missions had been given, or possibly from superiors writing to Monsieur Vincent to tell him of

what had occurred on the mission they were responsible for. If it had been possible to examine every letter, undoubtedly even better things would have come to light, but the recital would have been too long. The little we will mention will enable us to judge all the rest.

Our second remark is that Monsieur Vincent did not want his Missionaries to conduct the missions in haste or on the run. He wanted them to take all the time necessary to accomplish all they had set out to do, that is, instruct the people, convert sinners, sanctify souls, and reestablish the service of God. When working in a particular place they would not leave until all the people had been well taught, their status rectified, using for this all the time necessary. In the larger places the missionaries would remain for five or six weeks, but in the smaller towns or villages they might stay three weeks or so. For even smaller places, two weeks might suffice.

Monsieur Vincent set down as a rule that all who would give themselves to God to serve him in the Congregation must be free from all business or financial obligations. If so, they could devote themselves completely to the work of the missions, in imitation of the Son of God who went from town to town preaching the Gospel to the poor.

Although Monsieur Vincent’s main care was meeting the extreme needs of the poor of the countryside, and he was chiefly committed to them, he was also mindful of people in the larger cities. He encouraged other virtuous priests, especially those who attended the Tuesday Conferences at Saint Lazare, to undertake missions in the larger cities of the kingdom, and even in Paris itself. Partly because of his charitable advice and directions, these missions were abundantly blessed.

Even in other provinces, a large number of other priests recognized the good effects of the missions given by Monsieur Vincent and his confreres and grouped together. They founded companies to give missions and work for the instruction and salvation of the poor. Some did this in imitation of his zeal, while others were moved, perhaps, by a spirit of emulation. But the great servant of God, animated by a truly apostolic charity, approved, appreciated, and highly praised these works undertaken for the service of God, whatever their motivation. It made no difference to him, as long as Jesus Christ was preached, his holy name known and glorified, and souls, redeemed by his blood, were sanctified and saved.

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27. See CED VII:56.
SECTION TWO

The Most Notable Fruits of the Missions Given in Various Parts of France

PART ONE
The Diocese of Paris

We learn from Monsieur Vincent himself the great fruit of a mission given in a village of the diocese of Paris, when he reported the success to his community to have them give thanks to God for it.

I beg the community to thank God for his blessing on the exceptional missions we have just finished, especially the one at N. There had been a marked division in this parish between the pastor and his parishioners. On the one hand they had a strong aversion to the pastor, and on the other he had a deep resentment at the bad treatment received from the parishioners. He had gone so far as to begin a lawsuit against them, and had succeeded in having three or four of the ringleaders put into prison for having laid a hand on him in the church, or on some of his relatives. Most people not only did not want to attend his mass, but would leave the church when they saw him approach the altar. The affair had gone so far out of hand that I never saw the like. They protested that under no circumstance would they ever go to confession to him, and they preferred not to receive communion even at Easter time.

Things had grown so bad that several of these people came to us a while back to ask that a mission be given in their parish. We did so, and by the mercy of God, they all returned to their religious duties. What moves us ever more to bless and thank God is that the parishioners have become perfectly reconciled to their pastor, and a great peace and union has come to the parish. Both sides are pleased and grateful. Ten or twelve came, speaking for the whole parish, to thank us, telling us how much the mission had accomplished among them. I was embarrassed to hear what they had to say.

Who was responsible for this, gentlemen? God alone. Was it within the power of man to bring about this union of hearts? Even an entire Parlement would not be able to bring a solution to a situation where people were so divided, except for policing the
parish to avoid criminal activity. God alone was the author of this outcome, and it is to him we give thanks.

Gentlemen, please give thanks to him with all your hearts. Ask him in his divine goodness to confer on this Company the spirit of union which is no other than the Holy Spirit himself. We should be so united that we can bring about this union among others. We were founded to reconcile souls to God, and man to man.²⁸

Another brief mission was conducted in the parish of N., near Paris, having in all only three hundred souls in the entire village. However, we can remark nine different outcomes worthy of comment. Although these things refer to this particular parish, much the same will be encountered in almost any of the places where missions are given.

(1) Two church wardens were elected each year, but for ten or twelve years they had never given an account of their office. They kept for themselves some of the money belonging to the Church, but since they had been challenged on their administration they made a report and made good the money they had held back.

(2) Several persons had kept papers and documents belonging to the Church for many years. They have now turned them over, and they have been stored in the parish strongbox.

(3) Some concubinage has been rectified, with the guilty parties separating or leaving the parish.

(4) The entire population, men, women, and children, received the seed of God's word. They were so responsive to the mission that with marvelous attention they attended every morning and evening sermon, and even the midday catechism lesson.

(5) Although poor, they made a tabernacle and presented a ciborium and silver chalice to the parish. The previous ones were only tin.

(6) They repaired their church, which was in imminent danger of collapse. They decided to rebuild it completely, although the cost would come to at least twelve thousand livres.

(7) All lawsuits and differences were settled, so that there remained not a single one of which anyone was aware which was not resolved. This was done in such a Christian manner that the parties in dispute fell to their knees, asking pardon of each other.

(8) All the sick poor were visited, consoled, and helped, both corporally and spiritually.

(9) Each person in the parish made a good and praiseworthy general confession. They acquitted themselves so well during the mission that they

²⁸ CED XI:5-6. Jacques Tholard directed this mission, which took place in 1655; the village is not identified. See CED V:360.
were well instructed and strengthened, not only in the faith, but also in the disposition to lead a Christian life in future.

We will not speak in such detail of other missions, for that would take much too much time, and be repetitious. We will recount only some significant events which we learn from the accounts of the missionaries themselves, or from other persons worthy of credence.

PART TWO
The Diocese of Saintes

Monsieur Vincent had sent the priests of his Congregation to present a mission in the diocese of Saintes around 1634. A pious person wrote the following account:

Our Lord blessed in an unbelievable way the mission at Saintonge. Many conversions took place in morals and even in religion. What was so praiseworthy in the work of the missionaries was that they made the people see the beauty of the Catholic religion in their usual way, without dispute. This in turn led several heretics to return to the Church. Madame de N. told me that she thought of these missionaries as the apostles of the primitive Church, in the way in which they accepted all who came to them, whether Catholic or heretics.

Monsieur Vincent sent other priests of the Congregation of the Mission to this same diocese in 1640 at the urgent invitation of the late Bishop de Raoul, who with his clergy welcomed them for their missions.29 It pleased God to bless their work, for they produced much good, according to the reports of the superiors, confirmed by several letters of this good prelate.

In one of his letters, a missionary said:

We are at the end of our mission in N., which has lasted seven weeks. I hesitate to tell you of all the blessings we have received, for fear of vainglory. It will be enough to say that this parish, which had the reputation of being the worst in Saintonge because of its enmities, discords, and even murders, not to mention other abominations, is now, by God's mercy, completely changed. It has made public reparation for scandals given. A large number of people attended every service of the mission, even the short catechism instruction. Quarrels have been settled, spite has disappeared, and reconciliations have been achieved even without our active intervention. We attribute all these graces to the goodness of God and

to the merits of the holy family of our Savior, to which we dedicated this mission. The people of another parish some distance away requested their pastor to bring a mission there. When this proved impossible they asked him to preach each morning, teaching them how to pray, and how to serve God well. He has begun to do this with much success.

Another priest wrote of a mission in another parish of the same diocese. This mission has received many blessings, some most extraordinary, by the grace of God. Some important reconciliations took place between certain persons of considerable standing, which in the past even the bishop had not been able to bring about. For a long time there had been much bitterness and deep divisions within the parish. This in turn led to angry lawsuits, but now by the mercy of God these have ended, and the persons involved have become perfectly reconciled.

Although we found the parish completely divided, we leave it united in great peace, by the mercy of God. He has conferred other singular graces as well, in favor of noted public sinners who have been converted. These have, both privately and publicly, made restitution for their wrongs. God has touched the hearts of several converted heretics.

Another Missionary reported on the mission in 1647 at Gemozac, in the same diocese, at which, besides the more usual fruits of the mission, a group of seven or eight heretics were converted. Several others seemed disposed to make this same change, but hesitated for fear of added taxes because the board which imposed them were all heretics. Most of them were pleased at the king's order obliging all to go to mass, for this provided a release for the human respect which had kept them away.

One of those converted was an old man whom we had exhorted several times, but without effect. Just before leaving, seeing that we had made no headway, the thought came to us to have recourse to the blessed Virgin Mary, to obtain the conversion of this poor soul. We had barely finished reciting the litany on our knees for this intention when the man came to tell us that he now recognized the truth and that he wished to abjure his heresy. We received his profession of faith, had him make a general confession, and then gave him holy communion. In saying farewell to us he earnestly begged that he be recommended to the prayers of all Catholics.30

The superior of the mission in Saintes stated in one of his letters that, after working for a solid month in the village of Deniat, he and the missionaries

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30. CED III:164.
with him were so overwhelmed by the crowd of people from all the surrounding areas that they were forced to end the mission ahead of time. They were so weak they collapsed in the confessional. With regret, they had to leave a large group of people without the usual closing services of the mission. He added in his letter that more than four hundred reconciliations had been effected, and a hundred lawsuits ended.

These good people earnestly desired to make their confession. Since they knew that we would not give absolution to those not reconciled or at least to those who had not made every reasonable effort to be so, they went from door to door, seeking out those who might have something against them. On the eve of our departure a large crowd gathered in the church for evening prayers. The pastor announced the missionaries would be leaving the next day, and took the occasion to exhort the people to make good use of the instructions they had received during the mission. The people were deeply moved, and began to cry and weep so much that not a word could be understood of what the pastor was saying. The Missionaries did not find it easy to leave, for the people did not want to let them go.

Almost the same thing happened in the town of Usseau, near the village of Niort. After working for a month there, the Missionaries were so worn out and so weakened that they had to close the mission, leaving a large number yet to confess their sins. These people were so upset they tearfully begged the Missionaries to stay, and cried so loudly that no heart was left untouched. A large number of reconciliations took place here also, but in the beginning the Missionaries experienced great resistance, especially in their attempt to abolish the public dance held on the feast of Pentecost. It had occasioned many disorders, including the kidnapping of young girls and even murders. The sermon for Pentecost dealt with this abuse, but even so several of the townspeople went to the dance in the evening. The superior of the mission was alerted, and he and some other priests went to the scene, whereupon all the revelers fled. The next day a strong sermon was given before a large group of people, during which the violin used at the dance was broken into bits. The effect on the hearers, by God's grace, was such that all who had attended the dance were moved to repent. They came to throw themselves at the feet of the preacher, and asked pardon for their sin. The people conceived such a horror for dancing and all the evils accompanying it that they banished it entirely from their parish.

Another benefit of this mission took place at a meeting of the priests of the region, numbering seventeen pastors. The conferences there were so effective they all resolved to lead a more truly priestly life, in both their exterior demeanor and their interior spirit.
The missions of this diocese had been so blessed and had produced such good results that the late bishop of Saintes wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1642 to tell him the people had come to thank him for arranging them. In another letter of the same year, he said: "I have had your Missionaries come to this city to take a bit of rest. For the past six months they have worked with such devotion that I am astonished they could manage it. I went myself to invite them here." In another letter of 1643 he wrote: "I have spent the feast of Pentecost with your Missionaries, who work with such marvelous zeal. They have the consolation of seeing the blessing God gives to their work. I cannot thank you enough for what they have accomplished."

PART THREE

The Dioceses of Mende and Saint Flour

The diocese of Mende in the Cevennes was overrun by heretics. On several occasions Monsieur Vincent had sent his missionaries, either to attempt to bring the heretics back to the faith or to strengthen the Catholics and prevent them from falling into error. This worthy superior of the mission decided to go himself to the region in 1635. At the time one of his priests at Rome, well versed in Hebrew and Syriac, had been asked to work on a translation of the Syriac Bible into Latin. Monsieur Vincent thought it would be better if he came to help him on the mission in the Cevennes. He wrote to him as follows:

Monsieur, please do not accept the proposal made to you, to work on the translation of Scripture. I know well it would satisfy the curiosity of some, but would not contribute to the salvation of the souls of these poor people to whom the Providence of God, from all eternity, has called you. It ought to be enough that by the grace of God you have spent three or four years learning Hebrew. You now know enough to defend the cause of the Son of God in the original language and to confound his enemies in this kingdom.

Think of those thousands of souls who raise their arms to you and say: "Alas, Monsieur, God chose you to help in our salvation. Have pity on us, and give us a hand to draw us from the pitiful state in which we find ourselves." Come to draw us from the ignorance in which we live, unmindful of the truths necessary for salvation, and living in sin which through shame we have never

32. *CED* II:267.
33. *CED* II:397.
34. The original text of this sentence is shorter: "Have pity on us."
confessed. Without your help we are in great danger of losing our souls."

Besides the cries of these poor souls, appealing to the charity within you, listen, Monsieur, if you will, to what my heart says to yours. It feels called to work and die in the Cevennes, and it will, if you do not come at once to these mountains. The bishop cries for help, and says that this region, once the most flourishing of all the kingdom, is now in sin and the people die of hunger for God’s word.35

Monsieur Vincent sent other missionaries several years later to work in the same diocese. This led the late Bishop de Marcillac to write: "I assure you I esteem the work of your missionaries in my diocese more than if you had given me a hundred kingdoms. I am delighted to see my people responding so well. My pastors derive much profit from the Conferences your priests have set up with such success and blessing."36

In a letter of the following year, 1643, this same prelate wrote:

Your missionaries have left here to report to you on their activities in the Cevennes, in my diocese, where I have just made my visitation. I have received thirty or forty Huguenots who have recanted their errors, and I expect an equal number of others will do the same in the next few days. We had the mission here with unbelievable success. And as these blessings come from God, with your help, I know of no one, other than these good priests, who could give you a more accurate account of all that took place.37

In 1636, the late Father Olier, who later became the founder and first superior of the seminary of Saint Sulpice, a great servant of God of renowned virtue, and whose name is held in such benediction, requested of Monsieur Vincent several priests of his Congregation to give missions in the lands of his abbey at Pebrac, in the diocese of Saint Flour.38 He, together with several other priests, accompanied them to the first of these at Saint Ilpise. The priest was so taken by the evident signs of grace on this occasion that he wrote the following letter in June to Monsieur Vincent and the priests of the clergy conference at Saint Lazare, of which he was a member.

I cannot remain long absent from you without writing to tell you what has happened here. The mission began the Sunday after Ascension, and lasted until the fifteenth of this month. The people came at first the way we hoped they would, that is, as many as we

35. CED 1:251-52, addressed to Francois du Condray.
36. Sylvestre de Crusy de Marcillac became bishop of Mende in 1628; died October 20, 1659. CED II:266.
37. CED II:405-06.
38. These priests were Antoine Portail and Antoine Lucas.
could manage in the confessional. These people were so manifestly influenced by grace that we could tell where the priests were hearing confessions by the sobs and sighs of the penitents. Near the end of the mission the press of people was so great it became almost impossible to manage. From dawn to dusk they remained in church without eating or drinking, awaiting their turn to go to confession. Even so we had to extend our catechism lessons to over two hours to take care of the strangers who came. They left the service with as much hunger for the word of God as when they first came. We had to use the pulpit because of the crowd. There was no other place in the church for the priest to stand. The people crowded the church to the windows and doors, all eager to listen to the instructions. The same thing happened at the morning sermon and the evening instruction. I don’t know what to say about all this except blessed be God, who reveals himself with such mercy and generosity to his creatures, especially the poor. We have noticed that he resides mainly in them, and he seeks our cooperation in helping them. Do not refuse, gentlemen, this service to Jesus Christ. It is such an honor to work in his vineyard, and to contribute to the salvation of souls, and to the glory he will receive from them for all eternity.

You have begun well, and your first successes made me leave Paris to work here, in this location. Continue in this divine work, of which earth can show no equal. O Paris! You distract many who could with the grace of God convert a multitude of souls. Alas! How many there are in Paris who work with nothing to show for it! How many apparent conversions, and how many pious sermons given which fall on deaf ears because of the poor dispositions in those who attend! Here, a single word is a sermon, and the poor, poorly taught as they are, find themselves blessed with an abundance of God’s grace.\textsuperscript{39}

In another letter written February 10 of the following year, he said:

Our fourth mission was given two weeks ago. More than two thousand people made general confessions, although we had only six priests, and eight toward the end of the mission. We were overwhelmed with people who came from distances of seven or eight leagues from here despite the frigid weather and the remoteness of the location, a true desert. These good people would bring their provisions for three or four days, sleep in the barns, and often talk together about what they had heard in the sermons and the catechism lessons. We see peasants and their wives here who in

\textsuperscript{39} CED I:332-34.
their own homes continue the mission. Shepherds and farmers chant the commandments of God in the fields, and question each other on what they had heard during the mission.

In fact, the nobility, for whom it seemed we were not speaking, using so coarse a language as we were, after they did their Christian duty in an exemplary manner, they took their leave of us with eyes moistened with tears. Five Huguenots abjured their heresy at this last mission. Previously four of them had avoided us, but now came of their own accord to seek us out. They taught us, gentlemen, a lesson you have often given, that the work of conversion of souls is a work of grace which we often hinder by our own interference. God works always in and by our nothingness, that is to say in and by those who recognize and acknowledge their own powerlessness and uselessness.40

PART FOUR
The Dioceses of Geneva and Marseilles

We cannot better show the fruits the missionaries from Annecy achieved, through the grace of God, than by calling upon His Excellency Juste Guerin, bishop of Geneva, who wrote to Monsieur Vincent in June 1640.

Would to God you could look into my heart, for I truly love and honor you with all my affection. I acknowledge myself obligated to your charity more than to any other human being in the whole world. I cannot express the blessings and fruits your missionaries, your dear children in the Lord, have produced in our diocese. They would not be believed by anyone unless he had witnessed it for himself. I saw these results with my own eyes on the occasion of the visit I made after Easter.

The people love the missionaries, they cherish them without exception and speak their praises. Certainly, Monsieur, their doctrine is holy, as is their conversation. They are very edifying in their manner of living. When they finish their work in one village to go to another, the people weep and say as they accompany them, "O good God, what will become of us, now that our priests have gone?" For several days they go to the other village to see them once more. Persons from other dioceses come to confess to them, and many admirable conversions have been attributed to their ministry. Their superior has great gifts from God, and has a marvelous zeal for the

40. Dodin, Supplément, 14.
glory of God and the salvation of souls. He preaches with much fervor and fruit.\textsuperscript{41} We are much obliged to Commander de Sillery for underwriting this mission. How admirable divine Providence is to have so gently inspired the heart of this noble person to provide these evangelical missionaries for us! The good God has done this without any human intervention but simply because of our great need, situated as we are in the shadow of that wicked city, Geneva.\textsuperscript{42}

In a letter of October 1641, he said:

I must tell you I am ever obliged to you and to your dear sons, the priests of the Mission. You have continued to succeed, and have won more and more souls for heaven. Indeed, Monsieur, I never cease to admire the care divine Providence has taken of this diocese in sending us these good workers from your great community. I never cease to thank him, and you too, for I would be truly remiss if I did not do so. Alas, we have to our great regret lost Commander de Sillery, our great benefactor.\textsuperscript{43}

This same prelate wrote again, in August 1644:

Your missionaries continue to enrich paradise with souls set on the path of salvation. They showed them the way through instruction, catechism lessons, exhortations, preaching, and the administration of the sacraments. Add to this the good example of their exemplary lives wherever they give the mission. The only regret I have is that they are so few compared with the vast extent of our diocese, which has five hundred eighty parishes. Alas, if our Lord would give me the grace of seeing the mission given in every locale, I would say with all my heart, and with great consolation: \textit{Nunc dimitis servum tuum Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace} ["Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace; you have fulfilled your word"].\textsuperscript{44}

The missions given at Marseilles and in Provence are of two kinds, one given at sea, the other on land. The first has to do with the convicts of the galleys, and the second with the peasants in the countryside, both blessed by God.

The mission for the galleys began in 1643, to the great satisfaction of Jean Baptiste Gault, the worthy bishop of Marseilles, who died soon after in the odor of sanctity. He wrote on March 6 to the duchess of Aiguillon, who took an interest in this mission because her nephew, the duke of Richelieu, was

\textsuperscript{41} Bernard Codoing, superior at Annecy, 1639-1642.
\textsuperscript{42} CED II:52.
\textsuperscript{43} CED II:199.
\textsuperscript{44} Luke 2:29. CED II:473.
the general of the galleys.\textsuperscript{45} She had earlier asked Monsieur Vincent to assign some of his priests to this work.

Although it has not been long since I wrote you about the arrival of the missionaries whom you caused to be sent to work in the galleys, I must tell you of what has happened since, and of the satisfaction all experienced who work at this difficult task.\textsuperscript{46} I, too, rejoice with them at their success, and I know you will share this happiness. We began the mission in the galleys with eight priests from Provence, two to a ship.\textsuperscript{47} The priests who came directly from Paris have gone to the other three ships. I have tried to help out where I could, especially in regard to the many Italians in the galleys. The results of the missions surpass anything we could have hoped for. It is true that at first not only were persons ignorant of their religion found there, but many who were hardened in their sin. They did not want to hear things of God spoken of, being hardened to the highest degree by the miserable condition in which they were. Little by little, by the grace of God and the work of these missionaries, their hearts were softened to such a degree that they show contrition equal to their previous defiance.

You would be astonished, Madame, if you could see the number of those who had passed three or four years or even ten without going to confession. Some who had been away for twenty-five years even said they would not do anything about it as long as they remained in their cruel punishment. Finally our Lord conquered and chased Satan from these souls over whom he had exerted such power. I praise God for inspiring you to make it possible for these missionaries to come. Since their arrival I have resolved to work at this mission, which before I might have hesitated to do. It is to be feared that some among them will die in the unhappy state in which they are. I hope we will be able to reap the same fruit in the other galleys. I cannot tell you, Madame, how deeply these poor convicts appreciate the aid they have received, and which has proved so helpful for the good of their souls. I am looking for a way to perpetuate the good dispositions in which they now are. I am on my way to give absolution to four heretics who were converted while serving in the galleys. Others plan to return, for the extraordinary events of the mission have moved them deeply.

\textsuperscript{45.} Armand de Wigneron. At the death of the cardinal, he inherited his title of duke of Richelieu. He also inherited the title of the general of the galleys from his father, Francois de Wigneron de Pont Courlay, who in turn had succeeded Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi when he retired to the Oratory.

\textsuperscript{46.} Vincent sent five missionaries, led by Francois du Coudray.

\textsuperscript{47.} These were the missionaries founded by Christophe d'Authier de Sisgau.
Two or three months later Monsieur Vincent received a letter from the superior of the missionaries at Marseilles, telling him the sad news of the death of this holy bishop. He reported plans for further work:

We still have one more mission to give on one of the galleys, but that will finish up for this year. The work is trying, but what helps us bear it is the completely satisfactory change we perceive in these convicts. Yesterday I taught catechism to seven Moslems from various galleys whom I had brought here. God in his mercy has blessed this enterprise, which I recommend to your prayers. Another Moslem was baptized on board a galley, since he was gravely ill. Besides this man, about thirty heretics made their abjuration.48

This same priest wrote to Monsieur Vincent again on June 1 of the same year:

Yesterday the feast of the most holy Trinity, nine Moslems were baptized in the cathedral church, in a public ceremony before the people of Marseilles. The streets were filled with people blessing God. We chose to make such a display to encourage some other Moslems who seemed unsure of themselves. Today two new ones came to tell me they would like to become Christians. They came with another who had been baptized ten days before. We teach them catechism in Italian twice a day, to strengthen and affirm them as much as in our power. Otherwise they would be in danger of relapsing into Islam.49

Since that time Monsieur Vincent continued to support the Missionaries at Marseilles, who continued to offer their services to the galleys, even when the home port of the galleys was transferred to Toulon. These missions continued to do much good for the salvation of the souls of these unfortunate convicts.

Besides these services to the convicts, these missionaries gave their missions in the countryside with equal success. This is what one of them wrote in 1647:

We have just finished a five-week mission. It has kept us chained to the confessional and the pulpit and to the settlement of disputes. It has been so successful that I can say without exaggeration that we could not have hoped for anything better. We have rectified nine or ten marriages, and have settled twenty-five or thirty disputes involving either large sums, affairs of honor or other matters. Most of these were settled face to face, without anyone else involved. Some were arranged publicly in the church, even during the sermon, with such tearful feeling that the preaching was interrupted.

48. CED II:395.
49. CED II:398.
It happened also that a man of some modest standing had angrily replied to one of our priests, and had even publicly blasphemed at the door of the church. Some two weeks later he came to his senses, and as a penance imposed upon himself, gave a hundred ecus for the repair of the church that had witnessed his blasphemy.

PART FIVE
The Dioceses of Reims, Toul, and Rouen

Among the missions in the diocese of Reims, one of the most important was the one given by order of the king in the city of Sedan in 1643. Following is the letter of the superior of the mission to Monsieur Vincent.

I must say, Monsieur, that since it has pleased God to form the little Company of the Mission, it has never worked so usefully or so importantly as it has here. Heretics continue to be interested and come to the sermons, which they loudly praise. We must work with the Catholics almost as neophytes, for since the time four or five years ago when the town was opened to all preachers, nearly everyone is taken up with controversies. Few enough, however, trouble themselves about religious practices and exercises. We have run across some who frankly admit they have never thought it necessary to confess all their sins. The same sort of abuse exists with the blessed sacrament and other things as well. We have to begin from the first principles of religion. This is not to say this work is without consolation, for the people listen with pleasure to what we have to say and faithfully put it into practice. They cannot admire enough the graces God has given them, nor can they begin to thank him as much as they would like.

We may judge the great fruit of this mission by the evident needs of the people. The late Archbishop d'Etampes of Reims thanked Monsieur Vincent in a special letter which he wrote to the superior of the Congregation.

Several other missions were given in other places in the same diocese, among others at the village of Sillery, after the war. The superior wrote to Monsieur Vincent that only eighty persons still lived in the village, since all the others had died from the dire conditions of the times. These few survivors showed such good dispositions that nothing more could be hoped for, especially in those who came to the altar to receive communion.

50. CED III:159-60.
52. Eleonor d'Etampes de Valencay, archbishop of Reims, 1641-1651.
They communicated with such feeling that their tears were a tribute to the real presence of their divine Savior, who took possession of their hearts. They were so converted to the Lord that not only did they renounce sin, but resolved to suffer with patience and submission and out of love for him alone, whatever would please his divine will. This is how they themselves spoke, often repeating, "All for the love of God."\textsuperscript{53}

This same priest wrote to Monsieur Vincent some time later from the village of Ludes, where he had given a mission.

All has gone here as you wished. That says it all. One of the fruits of the mission was the completion of the church, which would never have been accomplished unless the mission were held here. The taverns have closed, and the evening parties stopped. The people have done away with swearing, and they speak the holy name of God only with great respect. We see people in their houses falling on their knees to ask pardon of those they have offended.\textsuperscript{54}

He wrote again from the village of Fontaine, in the same diocese.

God blessed the previous missions, and seems to have increased his grace for this one. Concubinages which have lasted twenty-five years have ended; lawsuits are settled; many people, both from this village and surrounding area, who have been away from the sacraments for twenty, thirty, or thirty-five years have recognized and repented their sins. People from the town have called their relatives even in distant places to come and share in the fruits of the mission. Some gentlemen have come from as far away as seven, ten, or fourteen leagues, mostly from the region of Rethel.\textsuperscript{55}

Lastly, this good missionary worked in the town of Ai in the same diocese. He reported as follows to Monsieur Vincent:

We arrived here to find that some of the leading people of the town had spoken against us, and had persuaded the people not to accept us. After several days of patience, God, who sent us here by the orders of our superiors, so changed the hearts of the people that never did a mission start better. The people confessed very exactly, with all signs of a true contrition. They repaid what they owed, went to ask pardon of one another in their homes, prayed both morning and evening, and resolved to change their way of living to a truly Christian behavior. They could not hear enough of the word of God.

\textsuperscript{53} CED VI:616-17.
\textsuperscript{54} CED VII:164.
\textsuperscript{55} CED VII:151-52.
The minister who lived here has fled. The few heretics in town, unlettered vine dressers, have attended all our sermons.\textsuperscript{56}

Monsieur Vincent had sent priests of the Congregation to the diocese of Rouen several times to conduct missions with the same happy results, by God's grace, as in other dioceses. To avoid repetition, we will be content to cite a letter of the archbishop of Rouen to Monsieur Vincent, written in 1656, which expresses his appreciation of the missionaries and their work.\textsuperscript{57}

I do not hesitate to write to you, for you have been unstinting in your help for us. The help the diocese has received through the saintly workers you have sent is evidence enough. How I thank our Savior to see his spirit so abundantly poured forth upon the priests whom you have formed by his grace. I could have no greater wish for the Church and for the glory of his sacred name, than that all priests have the same ability and the same fervor. I return your valiant Monsieur N. and his generous troops who have fought so bravely against sin. I hope on other occasions they will again enlist under the standard of the primate of Normandy. He appreciates their virtue and admires their zeal, and remains without reserve, in the army of the Lord, your very humble, etc.\textsuperscript{58}

The Missionaries established themselves in the town of Toul, in the diocese of the same name, despoiled by the ravages of war. They received God's blessings upon the missions they gave there. The superior of the group wrote as follows to Monsieur Vincent at the conclusion of three missions:

I cannot fully express the goodness of God toward us. We have heard around five hundred general confessions with no relief for a full month. The harsh winter weather left the roads covered with snow up to two feet deep. Yet this did not keep these poor people, rich in faith and eager for the word of God, from showing their attachment to the kingdom of heaven despite the annoyances they had to put up with from the soldiers. All we hoped for has come about, and we may rightfully say that Jesus Christ has graciously spread everywhere the good odor of his Gospel.\textsuperscript{59}

In another letter written some time later, he said:

We have just finished a mission in the large village of Charmes. After working five weeks there we have finished. We are somewhat worn out, but our hearts are filled with joy and consolation because of the blessings God has showered upon us and all the people of this parish, and even of neighboring parishes. The pastor is a devout

\textsuperscript{56. CES VII:154-55.}
\textsuperscript{57. Francois Harlay de Champvalon, archbishop of Reims, 1651-1670; later archbishop of Paris.}
\textsuperscript{58. CES V:577-78.}
\textsuperscript{59. CES V:553.}
man, and everyone in the parish, from himself to the least person, came to make their general confession, no one excepted. These confessions were so well made, in such sentiments of true conversions, that I do not remember any in the last twenty-five missions at which I have participated where the people have seemed so moved as in this one. After being reconciled to God and to their neighbor, each one seems committed to following our counsel about living in the grace of God. There is a monastery of religious in the town, the members of which, particularly their superior, a true saint, were completely astonished to see so many miracles.

All these glorious triumphs of grace which our Lord has won over once-rebellious hearts, who now give him glory by their true repentance, demand that we give him most humble thanks.

I realize I must work more than ever before, for I recognize how the missions are such a great means of aiding souls. I have returned from this mission with this thought and resolution.

PART SIX
Various Places in Brittany

The missions in Brittany were as successful as those in the other provinces. The superior of the missionaries headquartered at Saint Meen in the diocese of Saint Malo wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1657. He said that at a mission in Pleurtuit, three thousand persons had gone to confession. Further, if the priests should return, they would need more than twenty confessors to satisfy the great number of people who would come for confession. Among other things he said that upon leaving the church, a respected person of the parish fell to his knees in the cemetery before his fellow parishioners. He asked pardon from those he had offended, to the great consternation of all at this demonstration. Another person, upon leaving the confessional, went of his own accord eight leagues away to ask pardon of someone he had offended in some rather slight way.

In another letter from 1658, he reported to Monsieur Vincent several remarkable events which occurred at the mission of Mauron.

Every day, even on working days, more than twelve hundred people came for the catechetical instructions. The leading people of the town came to hear the sermons. Several men and women

60. Capuchins.
62. Louis Serre, superior at Saint Meen, 1655-1665.
63. CED VI:281.
servants even left their employment because their masters or mistresses would not give them time off to attend the services. They preferred to lose their wages rather than miss an opportunity to hear the word of God. We saw mothers, after they had made their own general confession on the mission, take the place of their daughters in service, to give them the opportunity to do likewise. Other servants requested permission to come to the instructions, even at the cost of losing their wages for the time they would not be at work.

On Quinquagesima Sunday and the two following days, such a crowd of people wanted to receive communion that it took until seven o’clock in the evening to satisfy them all. Since the closing the mission, I have been told that, of all the taverns there, not a single one remains, for in one of our sermons we had mentioned how difficult it was for inn keepers to keep from sin in giving people drink to excess, a vice prevalent in this region. In addition, in the dealings they have with one another, instead of sealing an agreement by a drink, as is customary in this region, they now give money to the Confraternity of Charity, which we were able to set up in the locality for the sick poor.64

The following year this same superior wrote of another mission:

Our mission in Plaissala is now completed by the grace of God. He showered his blessings in such abundance that all who worked on it agree they have never seen one which accomplished so much good.

We noticed people from seventeen surrounding parishes. Several men who came to confession remarked they had waited ten days in the church. I believe the same thing could have happened to five hundred others as well. Major disputes have been settled, particularly among the nobility, helped along by the Baron du Rechau. He has a house in this parish, where he came from Saint Brieuc, his ordinary residence. After hearing our first sermon, he came to our house with his wife, to tell us he was going to stay here the entire mission. I asked him to help us settle the frequent disputes in this region, and to bring reconciliation, especially between gentlemen. He succeeded to an extraordinary degree.

The carnival days were taken up in exercises of piety. On Monday we had a solemn procession, in which the bishop of Saint Brieuc carried the blessed sacrament.65 The people attended with devotion and modesty, walking four by four in the procession which

64. CED VII:115.
65. Denis de la Barde.
lasted nearly two hours in an almost continuous rain, and only a few dropped out. The same prelate conferred the sacrament of confirmation the next day, Tuesday, in the cemetery, in the midst of wind and rain, for the church was not large enough to hold all the people.\textsuperscript{66} The bishop of Treguier had a mission given at Guingamp, after another at Morlaix in 1648.\textsuperscript{67} He wrote of them to Monsieur Vincent:

Your letter has found us busy in the mission, from which I expect a great deal. One of your priests preaches admirably and devoutly in the evening service. Another gives the main catechetical instruction at one o’clock in the afternoon, to the satisfaction of all. Another priest teaches the shorter catechism lesson, and my theologian preaches in the morning in the native dialect. In a word, everyone is working, even myself, for I preach twice a week. With God’s help, we will begin the confessions tomorrow. The people of the area are not used to missions, but are astonished at what takes place, and each expresses his thoughts differently, but all with respect. I hope that all will work out well with the grace of God.\textsuperscript{68}

In another letter, written in 1650 about another mission, he said:

I thank you for the faithful service of four of your priests in the mission they have given here. Their ability, their zeal, their care in preaching and hearing confessions have been so great that they have reaped abundant fruit. I may say the residents of this region, men and women of all ages and conditions, have been converted. I praise God that through you we have such good laborers in this vineyard. Monsieur N. exerts such energy in his preaching that no one can resist him. I have already engaged him for the mission next year at N.\textsuperscript{69}

PART SEVEN

Various Places in Burgundy and Champagne

In 1642 Monsieur Vincent sent several priests of the Congregation to give a mission in the parish of Saint Cyr in the diocese of Sens. The lord of the region wrote, after the completion of the mission:

The efforts of your priests, joined with their piety, have made such a difference in the life of my peasants that they are hardly recognizable by their neighbors. I hardly know them either, and am persuaded God has sent me a new colony to people my village.

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66. CED VII:469-70.
67. Balthazar Orangier de Liverdi.
68. CED III:269-70.
69. CED III:630.
\end{flushright}
These gentlemen who came here found such rustic types they could never be changed, except by the grace that accompanied your missionaries, especially those you sent for the conversion of my people. This is a result of the mercy of God and of your prudence that those you sent were so suited to our needs. After my thanks to you, I must pray fervently that God will endow your Company with blessings, for I judge it to be one of the most devoted to his glory of those in the Church today.

I fear these poor people, for lack of a good pastor to support them in the good resolutions taken during that helpful mission, will forget or neglect to put into practice what has been so carefully taught them. Since you have not agreed to give us a pastor, I nevertheless believe that you, as their new father in Jesus Christ, must obtain one for us by your prayers, which I earnestly solicit.70

Madame de Saint Cyr was just as thankful as her husband, as she explained in a letter to Monsieur Vincent:

I realize I am incapable of thanking you sufficiently for the honor and good you have done for our parish, yet I still must affirm that after God you are, in some way, our savior, by sending us the missionaries who have worked such marvels here. They have so gained the appreciation of Monsieur de Saint Cyr that I fear he may fall ill at seeing them leave. For myself, I cannot tell you how I feel, for I am too sad to express myself.71

Monsieur Le Boucher, vicar general of the abbey of Moutier Saint Jean, wrote to Monsieur Vincent about the mission given in Burgundy in 1644.

You do good everywhere, and you render great services to God, to the Church, and to our holy religion. I have returned from Tonnere where I met your dear children, priests of the Mission, led by a man of God. I must add, Monsieur, that these good priests have worked marvels by their teaching and example. They reconciled many souls to God and to their neighbor.72

One of the missionaries who worked in this province in 1650 wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

I must tell you the results of your prayers and sacrifices have been equally great in Joigny as at Longron, where we now are busy with a mission. I have nothing special to say of the people of Joigny, except to admire their faithfulness to the sermons and catechetical instructions, and their care about rising in the morning. Sometimes

70. CED II:242-43.
71. CED II:243.
72. CED II:451.
we began our sermons at two o’clock in the morning, and even so, the church was full.

I must say in truth I find greater blessings in the countryside than I do in the cities. I see there more marks of true and sincere penitence, and also the signs of uprightness and simplicity marking primitive Christianity. These good people present themselves to their confessor bathed in tears. They judge themselves the greatest sinners in the world and ask for even greater penances than those imposed upon them. Yesterday, a person who had confessed to another priest came to me to ask for a more severe penance than the one he had received. He suggested I order him to fast three times a week for the rest of the year. Another asked for the penance of walking barefoot in the snow. Another man came to tell me: “I heard in the sermon the best way to overcome swearing is to throw yourself on your knees before those who heard you swear, and that’s what I’ve done. As soon as I realized I had sworn “my faith,” I fell to my knees, asking God’s mercy upon me.”73

About two months later this same priest continued his report of events in the missions of Burgundy:

If it is right that the one who plants the tree should enjoy its fruit, just so you should know of the blessings God has given in such abundance to your little flock. I can assure you that in the missions we have given since Joigny, I don’t think anyone failed to make his general confession. It is wonderful to see how much the people were affected. Because of this, I limited myself to speaking of truths that would lead to repentance to the first few days because of their tender consciences. I feared I would otherwise excite their imagination too much.74

We should remark that the priest with this gift of moving the people to repentance was a noted penitent himself. He practiced what he preached.

Among the missions preached in Champagne, one of the most notable took place in 1657 at Nogent, in the diocese of Troyes. The bishop sent two of his priests, and came himself, to work on the mission for several days. The mission lasted six weeks. God greatly blessed it, for which the people were most grateful to their bishop. All possible blessings which a mission might accomplish were fulfilled in this one. The vicars general were in admiration. They said that the time of priests was wasted if it was not devoted to the salvation of souls, and that the most effective way of assuring success was to preach and catechize according to the method used by the Mission-

73. CED III:621-22.
74. CED IV:26.
aries. The people were so faithful to the sermons and catechism lessons that the pastors stated they had never seen so many people in church, even on the feast of Easter, as they saw during the mission.

The bishop of Chalons sur Marne requested several priests of the Mission from Monsieur Vincent in 1658 to conduct missions in various places in his diocese. He had several of his pastors attend the exercises to learn how best to instruct their parishioners. One of the missionaries wrote this account to Monsieur Vincent:

Our mission at Vassy received all the blessings we could have hoped for. Four pastors and another priest, all able and virtuous, helped us. Two of them learned our method so well that, even though formerly they were uneasy speaking in public, they now were quite capable and as good as any I have seen. Catholics influenced by heretical doctrines have recanted, have been confirmed in their faith, and have been launched on a truly Christian way of living. Not only did we serve the people of this town, but others came as well from four or five leagues away.

We are now at the mission in Holmoru, where even more good is expected from the many people in attendance. The appreciation of the pastors is so great that today twelve of them came from three or four leagues away to help out and learn our method of instructing the people.

PART EIGHT

Various Other Places in France

From the time when Monsieur Vincent had first sent his priests to work outside the diocese of Paris to most distant parts of the kingdom, a noted abbot wrote a letter of congratulations in 1627, on what he had observed.

I have just returned from a long trip into four of the provinces where the good odor of your holy institution which works for the instruction and salvation of souls of the countryside has been noted. In truth, I believe that in the Church of God none is more edifying and praiseworthy among those who have received the character and the order of Jesus Christ than your priests. We must pray God to bestow his spirit of perseverance upon a work so advantageous to the good of souls, to which so few of those consecrated to the service of God give enough attention.
Monsieur Vincent sent two priests to the diocese of Montauban around 1630 to strengthen Catholics in their faith. Living among heretics, they ran the constant danger of falling into their errors. After two years of constant effort he recalled them. Although they had been sent mainly to work with the Catholics, God allowed them to convert twenty-four heretics while there.

Several years later the late Bishop de Murviel of Montauban wrote to Monsieur Vincent about several sorcerers who had appeared in his diocese, and his difficulties in eradicating their influence. 78

The priests of the Mission are most necessary in this diocese, for the places they formerly worked show no signs of either sorcerers or sorceresses. This shows what good the catechetical instructions and general confessions have brought about. They put the people in such a good state the devils can make no headway by their charms and spells, as they can with those sunk in ignorance and sin. 79

In 1634 Monsieur Vincent sent other Missionaries to work in the diocese of Bordeaux. They wrote to tell him people came from far away to the mission with such devotion that many passed entire weeks living where the mission was being given, awaiting their turn to make their confession. Some fell to their knees and openly confessed their sins to receive absolution. Others said they would rather die than return home without making their general confession. 80

In 1638 several priests of the Mission were sent to work in the diocese of Lucon. Three years later one of them wrote to Monsieur Vincent about the mission they had given:

It is hard to imagine how much our labors have been rewarded by the consolation sent by God to encourage us. These souls of Poitou, who seem hard as rocks, have caught the fire of devotion so ardently that it seems it will not be easily extinguished. 81

Another priest wrote in 1642 from the mission at Essarts, stating that seven heretics had been converted, and that wonderful changes had been brought about among the nobility and the officers of the law. 82

Still another priest wrote from the mission of Saint Gilles on the coast. He reported that dissensions and quarrels had been settled, hearts reconciled, difficult lawsuits ended, appropriate restitutions made when necessary, the poor aided, and the sick poor consoled and helped by the Confraternity of Charity. Catholics were strengthened in practicing the true religion. 83

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78. Anne de Murviel, bishop of Montauban. Richelieu had captured this city from the Huguenots and reestablished Catholicism. Murviel, who had been chased from his see, was also reestablished there. The following year he asked for missionaries to evangelize his diocese.
79. CED II:429.
80. CED I:289-90.
81. CED II:168.
82. CED II:266.
83. CED IV:108.
The late Bishop de Nivelle of Lucon wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1642 about the mission which the priests of his Company had presented in his diocese.

If it shall please God to preserve the institute of the priests of the Mission in the Church for many years, we can expect much fruit from it. The diocese of Lucon in which, by your appointment, your priests have worked for the last three or four years, has received such blessing that I am infinitely grateful to Cardinal Richelieu for arranging to have them come, and to yourself for having sent them. Their superior, especially, has worked hard and earnestly. He has the gifts needed in his position, especially his zeal, to everyone's admiration. His only fault is that he perhaps works too hard, if it be possible to be excessive in working to gain souls to God.\footnote{CED II:244.}

Other priests of the Mission went to the region of Angouleme in 1640. A noble woman there had wished to have them give a mission in the village of Saint Amand which belonged to her. She received the following letter from one of her officials:

I imagine I could not begin my letter on a matter more agreeable to you than by telling you the happy success of the mission you arranged in your territory of Saint Amand. It was so blessed that not only your dependents but thirty or forty neighboring parishes shared in its marvelous fruits. The Minims and the Capuchins were no less zealous, and their example attracted a large part of the leading people of Angouleme. I assure you, Madame, that according to common report, the missionaries have never labored so successfully for the glory of God. They have converted five or six of the leading Huguenots of Montignac, and the Duke de la Rochefoucauld is so pleased he will ask Monsieur Vincent to arrange a mission next spring at Verteuil and at Marcillac. The lords, N. and N., who attended this mission were so touched that one decided to give up his paramour and the other has married the woman who was living with him.

Monsieur Vincent sent other missionaries to the diocese in 1643, but we know no details of their work. Nevertheless it seemed so useful to Bishop du Perron of Angouleme that he wrote in January of the following year as follows:\footnote{Jacques Noel du Perron, the nephew of Cardinal Jean Dovy du Perron, archbishop of Seus.}

Although I have already thanked you for sending your missionaries into this diocese, I felt I could not send off this letter to our
little Conference without expressing, however feebly, my apprecia-
tion of the great fruit this diocese has received from your charitable
hands. My happiness will ever be incomplete, Monsieur, until that
day when we shall have a permanent mission in this diocese, which
needs it so much more than other places. When I learn that you can
do us this favor, I shall do all in my power to find the means of
making this establishment. I believe this will contribute much to the
glory of God and will aid the Church in its mission for the salvation
of souls. I know it is the sole motive you have in view in all your
efforts.

This letter was followed two weeks later by another, written to Monsieur
Vincent by a priest from Angouleme.

I am just about to leave by horseback for Blansac, with the money
you sent me for the needs of your missionaries who have been
working there. Once again, please let me repeat my humble prayers
in favor of this poor and desolate diocese. It begs you to send
permanent workers to tend to its extreme spiritual needs. These can
be remedied only if persons of an impartial charity and zeal such as
your priests of Saint Lazare come to take charge. I know well,
Monsieur, that the providence of God can use a thousand other
means to help us, should it please him. Yet it seems clear enough
that he has chosen you among these thousands to help the poor
dioeses of this kingdom, but especially those that seem to be the
most abandoned of all.

The late Archbishop de Montchal of Toulouse wrote to Monsieur
Vincent in 1640:

I cannot allow these two priests you sent to us to leave without
thanking you, as I do with all my heart, for the great service they
have rendered to God in my diocese. I cannot adequately express
the pains they have taken, nor the fruits they have reaped for which
I am especially grateful since they work in my stead. One of them
learned the language of the region to the admiration of those who
speak it, and has shown himself untiring in his labors. When they
have recovered a bit I wish you would send them back, for I am
thinking of establishing the ordination retreats, and I will need their
help. All will work out for the glory of God if you will help us.

In 1648 the superior of the mission at Richelieu wrote to Monsieur

86. This was a conference of ecclesiastics, founded on the model of the Paris conference.
87. CED II:441-42.
88. CED II:443-44.
89. CED II:88-89.
Vincent to tell him three Missionaries had given a pair of missions in Bas Poitou. Among the graces God had given through their ministry, not the least was the conversion of twelve heretics.  

It is proper to note an important consideration in the conversion of heretics, such as those we just mentioned, and in the great number of others effected from the time of the first missions of Monsieur Vincent until the present. Their conversion was not brought about in arguing with them, nor was it accomplished by helping them, finding them jobs, or by other temporal favors. By God’s special favor, the instruction and good example of the missionaries made them see Christian verities in their true light and attracted them to the Catholic religion. The appeal was the stronger the more removed it was from any mere human consideration.

About this time, the same Missionaries gave their services to the parish of Sache in the diocese of Tours. They wrote to tell Monsieur Vincent that, although only six hundred people lived in the parish, twelve hundred participated in the general communion. They told him the mission had produced many reconciliations, restitutions, true conversions, and other similar fruits. The pastor, his vicar, and five other priests had made their general confession. One of the richest men of the parish, a miser, was so touched by this that he told the preacher that in future he would distribute bread three times a week to any of the poor who would present themselves at his door.

After this mission another was given in the village of Villaine, in the same diocese. The same blessings seemed to be upon it also, in the number and devotion of the people, in the conversions of sinners, and in the reconciliations of enemies, thirteen or fourteen of which were significant. The general communion was made in an atmosphere of much feeling. At the procession of almost two thousand people, the eighty-eight-year-old pastor wept for joy at the sight of such graces given to those under his care. He had never seen such devotion in his church as he saw on that occasion.

There was yet another mission in 1650 in this same diocese of Tours, in the parish of Cheilly. Besides the graces God ordinarily bestowed on the people, four or five notable reconciliations took place. One occurred between the pastor and one of the villagers who had insulted him. Another took place between the churchwardens who managed the goods of the parish the previous five years, and the one now in charge. This settlement was advantageous to the church, which was very poorly furnished. The third was between several officers of justice, who for five or six years had lived in

90. CED III:302.
91. CED III:269.
great enmity. The fourth was between two noblemen over something or other. The fifth was between a landowner and his tenant over some accounts, much to the disadvantage of the worker.

We omit mention of a great many other situations which occurred in various parts of the kingdom. If reported, they would be repetitious and besides would require several volumes to recount. The few we have given may serve as a sketch of how it pleased God to bestow his great blessings on the work of Monsieur Vincent throughout the kingdom. I use the words "great blessings" advisedly, measuring them by what they cost Jesus Christ. He in turn taught us the way we should value the conversion of sinners and all that contributes to it. He said in his Gospel "that there will be great joy among the angels of heaven upon one sinner being converted, and doing penance upon earth."92 We can well believe these wise and enlightened spirits rejoice at what is truly worthwhile.

SECTION THREE

Further Discussion of the Fruit of the Missions Given in Italy

PART ONE

In Various Places Near Rome

We now move from France into Italy, accompanying the Missionaries sent by Monsieur Vincent to establish themselves in the first city of Christendom. Since the sovereign pontiff, Urban VIII of happy memory, received them favorably, they were able with their usual zeal to fulfill the orders given them by His Holiness, by the ordination retreats, spiritual conferences, retreats, and other services offered to priests, especially in Rome. They were able, also, in various other places near the city and elsewhere in Italy, to present missions for the people.

We will speak first of an extraordinary form of mission which was as difficult as it was charitable. They began it more than twenty years ago and still maintain it today, that is, the missions for the shepherds and cowherds of the countryside.

So that those who have not been to Rome will better understand what we

are describing, it should be pointed out that this great city lies in a sort of
desert, so that within four or five leagues there are neither villages nor towns.
This is not because the soil is not arable, but because the quality of the air is poor.
It is difficult to find people willing to live in the area and to till the soil
since they cannot survive there. Since the ground is not cultivated, there is
abundant pasturage for cattle. Flocks and herds from everywhere are brought
here to spend the winter, after which they are led back to the kingdom of
Naples, or wherever else they came from.

The shepherds and cowherds remain five or six months in this deserted
countryside. They almost never attend mass or receive the sacraments, and
they do not regret it, because for the most part these are rough people, poorly
instructed in their Christian duties. During the day each one goes his separate
way to pasture the animals. At night they come together in a common area
where they set up portable huts for themselves which sleep ten or twelve
persons and sometimes even more.

Monsieur Vincent was always particularly concerned about the souls of
the most neglected poor. Knowing of the condition in which these shepherds
passed the better part of their lives, he directed the priests he sent to Italy to
relieve and help the poor, to minister to these poor people while they were
caring for their flocks. He had great compassion for them and wanted to help
them. He devoutly honored their work as shepherds. Though it was abject
and base in the sight of men, it was nevertheless one of the greatest attributes
of the Savior of the world. In the Gospel, Jesus calls himself above all the
Good Shepherd. He transmitted this attribute to those to whom he confided
the care of his flock, the Church, particularly to him who is the first and the
head of the faithful, that is, the sovereign pontiff.

These good Missionaries received this commission from their spiritual
father and, moved by their own zeal, thought of how best to instruct these
poor shepherds. It was obvious that they could not be brought together in a
church for sermons and catechism lessons, as was done in other missions,
since they could not leave their flocks unattended. It was unreasonable to
expect them to come together, in view of the difficulties of the situation.
Charity suggested that the best course of action would be to meet these poor
shepherds in their huts. They would pass the night with them, taking
whatever opportunity presented itself to speak with them and teach them as
best they could. It seemed that Lent would be the most appropriate and
fruitful time to begin. Following this plan, the Missionaries went out, one to
ea hut, awaiting the return of the shepherds in the evening. There they first
attempted to win over their hosts by pointing out that they did not come to
ask for anything, but only to offer their help. At first they asked only to pass
the night with them in their humble quarters.
While the shepherds prepared their evening meal, the Missionaries spoke with them about what was necessary and useful for their salvation, of the main truths of faith, and of the proper dispositions for worthily receiving the sacraments, particularly penance and the eucharist. They also spoke of how a person ought to live as a good Christian, and how to fulfill the obligations of this calling. When the hour for sleep came, they helped them pray to God, then took their rest on a sheepskin or upon the bare ground.

They continued these instructions at irregular intervals. When they saw that the shepherds were sufficiently prepared, they administered the sacrament of penance, and helped them in their general confessions, either in the evening or during the day, as was most convenient for them. When they had ministered in this way to all the huts in the area, they had all the shepherds assemble on a feastday, or a Sunday, in the nearest chapel, if there were one in the open countryside. There they celebrated mass, gave a sermon, and distributed holy communion to all. Afterward, these poor shepherds, in imitation of those who came to adore Jesus Christ in his crib, returned, praising and glorifying God, thanking him for the graces his mercy had given them through the ministry of the good Missionaries. They continued from time to time to render this charitable service to them.93

Although these charitable efforts in favor of the poor shepherds, together with all their other work in the city of Rome, took up most of their time, they still managed to exercise their zeal in all the surrounding area, in neighboring dioceses, and even in several more distant ones. They gave missions in these places, with no fewer blessings than those given in France. We do not intend to speak of all of them here, nor even of the twentieth part of them, but rather only of a few of the more remarkable ones. We hope to give the reader some idea of the spiritual advantages which the people of these regions received and continue to receive up to our own time, by the grace of God, and the zeal of Monsieur Vincent, and the efforts of his spiritual sons.

In 1642 the superior of the Missionaries of Rome wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

We gave a mission in a place which I will not name, a walled town of about three thousand souls, on the road between Rome and Naples. During the month the mission lasted we had our share of troubles and encountered terrible disorders. Most of the men and women know neither the Our Father nor the Creed, much less the

93. The first of these missionaries was Louis Lebreton, sent by Monsieur Vincent from France in 1638. Also sent was Jean Baptiste Taoni, a priest of the diocese of Nice, who had entered the Congregation. What these missionaries did for the shepherds in the Roman countryside they also did for the poor sailors and fishermen of the Italian coastal dioceses. Urban VIII was pleased with their efforts and authorized the Congregation to establish a house in Rome in 1641. Louis Lebreton died from an illness while evangelizing the diocese of Ostia on October 17, 1641.
other things necessary for salvation. There were many profound enmities among them. Blasphemies were not only common, but they were such as to make your hair stand on end. Some people of every class live in concubinage. Prostitutes openly seduced the young. Along with all these disorders, we ran into much opposition and resistance, with the evil spirit leveling violent attacks against us, even from those who should have been supporting us. In short, this mission has been almost a constant source of grief for us.

There seemed no way to win over the hearts of these people. They considered it a point of honor not to allow themselves to be taught or converted. The only way to make peace with them was to stop preaching or hearing confessions. However, after two weeks of patience and perseverance in the ordinary exercises of the mission, the people began to open their eyes and recognize their condition. In the end God’s grace won out. Many reconciliations were effected, enmities ended, and blasphemies stopped. Four street women have been converted. One of the most obstinate mistresses has been converted. She had lived fourteen years in public adultery and caused much difficulty in the family involved, not to mention scandal in the town. She gave up her life of sin, and has removed herself from the scene.

Another completely unexpected fruit of the mission was that they gave up an abominable sin which shall not even be mentioned, to which they were much given. They made a general communion in good dispositions, and all were touched to hear their weeping, and groaning and to see their tears. This mission was finally brought to a close with great blessings, despite all the efforts of the evil one to undermine it.94

Another priest of the Mission of Rome wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1654 of several missions given in the diocese of Sarsina in Romagna. After telling him of all the most interesting aspects of these missions, he continued:

In the last mission, which took place in the high mountain regions of the Apennines, we found a general state of disorder. This is common enough in Romagna, but is much worse in these isolated places. The young men and women interact with much familiarity, even when they have no intention of marrying. They never confess these faults, much less the dangerous consequences which follow, since they spend a good part of the night together. This happens especially on the eve of feastdays. Because of their wicked attraction for each other, they have little respect for the churches. They often go

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94. *CED II:319-20.*
only to be seen, or to leer at the others and make immodest gestures. Besides the bad thoughts and other interior ills, this conduct sometimes results in scandalous affairs. This still does not restrain the others, or make their parents more careful to prevent such things.

When we became aware of these abuses and their dangerous and sorry consequences, we spoke in our sermons as strongly as possible in attempts to stop them, but with little success. They used all sorts of sophistries to justify their conduct, to our great chagrin. At length, by God’s grace, we were able to bring a remedy to this evil by refusing absolution to those not firmly resolved to renounce absolutely this amorous behavior. This had the desired effect, for almost all changed their ways.

I had read to them in Italian a chapter of the book Philothea, which treats of this matter. They heard their behavior described as though the author had written it expressly for them. Several tearfully resolved to repent the past and improve in the future. May God give them perseverance in their good dispositions.

Lastly, Monsieur, although the pastors of the locality at first took us for spies, and had put it into the minds of the people that we were suspect, they too eventually came around. When they saw the simplicity with which we acted, how we deferred to them and behaved during the missions and, above all else, when they saw that we had no selfish interest, they came to appreciate us. I might say that we carried away their hearts, as some told us with tears.

I should not fail to mention here another extraordinary event. An evil priest had publicly boasted that he would never come to any of our services. Shortly after, by God’s just judgment, on the very spot he had made this boast, another evil priest killed him. The victim had told me in fine words that he was about to change his life, but this had no effect.96

PART TWO

In the Dioceses of Viterbo, Palestrina, and Other Places

A priest of the Mission in Rome wrote to Monsieur Vincent, in December of 1655, about a mission given in the diocese of Viterbo.

Cardinal Brancaccio did us the honor of calling us to his diocese of Viterbo. He sent us to Vetralle, a large town in the diocese about

95. Introduction to the Devout Life by Saint Francis de Sales.
96. CED V:133-34.
97. Francesco Maria Brancaccio, successively bishop of Capua and then Viterbo. He became a cardinal in 1633, and died in 1675.
two days journey from Rome. Once we arrived there, we had some difficulties in beginning our mission. Nevertheless, we ended by having seventeen hundred persons come to make their general confession, with all the signs of repentance one could wish for.

The most ordinary things seem to have moved these people the most, as for example, (1) the explanation we made every morning after the first mass of what it means to be a Christian; (2) the instruction on the main mysteries of the faith, and the way to confess well; (3) the general examination of conscience, which we performed aloud with the usual prayers in the evening services after the sermon. What seems to have made the greatest impression upon the minds and hearts of the people is the powerful warning given by our preacher at the end of his exhortation about preparation for communion. He said, speaking in the name of God, that no one should dare approach the holy table without first being reconciled with his enemies. I am convinced that this vigorous sermon, filled with the spirit of our Lord, has been more effective than all the rest of the mission, particularly in regard to reconciliations among those living in mortal hatred of each other. Since this sermon we have seen and heard practically nothing else but many reconciliations and tearful mutual pardons, not only in the privacy of their homes but publicly in the streets and particularly in the church before everybody. The same thing happened with the restoration of ill-gotten goods, and the repayment of long-delayed debts. This was done publicly and courageously, without any regard for one's reputation.

If I were to tell you all the details of these events, I would never finish. I will limit myself to three or four of the main ones. The first occurred during the procession, where one of our priests had arranged for the men to walk two by two. Divine Providence was pleased to bring it about that two of the local people with a long and deep-seated hatred for one another found themselves walking side by side without knowing who the other was. Once they realized who their neighbor was, they were both touched by grace and found their enmity turned into friendship. Before the entire assembly they embraced and asked pardon of one another in a way that caused the admiration and consolation of everyone.

The second case involved another local resident who owed four hundred ecus to someone else. He had made no effort to repay what he owed, either at the insistence of the law or by the sentence of excommunication passed against him. His creditor no longer had any hopes, but this debtor changed suddenly. Not only did he repay
the entire four hundred *ecus*, but they became and have remained friends ever since.

The third concerned a wealthy, avaricious man. He owed a poor working man one hundred *ecus*, but had failed to make any payment for such a long time that all hope of his ever doing so had been given up. Nevertheless, God so moved him that on his own, not pressed by anyone, he imitated Zacchaeus. He repaid three or four times what he owed and, even more, gave the poor man a house and part of a vineyard to enable him and his small family to live well.

Lastly, the fourth case was of a father who had a mortal hatred against a man who had attempted to kill his son and, though the attempt had failed, he had wounded him, leaving one of his arms useless. The father had spent a large sum in hopes of restoring its function. Despite his resentment, he did two things worthy of a true Christian: he pardoned from his heart the man who had attempted to kill his son, and he gave up all claim to the money he had already spent to heal the injury. Before the mission, several persons had failed to reconcile these two gentlemen.

These are but some of the fruits of this mission, whose effects we can truly say came from the all-powerful hand of God. The priest on the mission were themselves incapable of effecting the marvels reported here. This makes us say as was said of Moses when he worked his marvels in the presence of Pharaoh: *Digitus Dei est hic* ["The fmger of God is here"]). The hand of God works these marvels, and not human eloquence, learning, or power. Perhaps for this reason divine Providence did not allow our great prelate and eminent cardinal to attend our mission as we had hoped, for a wheel of his carriage fell off while on the way here. If he had given us the honor of his presence we might have attributed the marvels which occurred to his presence and his authority rather than to God alone, to whom the glory is due.

This same priest recounted the success of another mission given the following January.

In the mission we gave at Breda we noticed the faithfulness of the people in attending our sermons and catechism lessons. Their attitude was so good that everything they heard made a strong impression upon them. We noticed, after the instructions, that they continued to urge one another to practice the virtues we had recommended. The whole morning of the general communion passed in

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98. Exod 8:15.
reconciliations and in their embracing one another. This showed the power of God’s grace, for the most eminent men and women of the parish, disdaining all human respect, humbled themselves before everyone and asked pardon of all they might have offended.

When it came to the sermon immediately before communion, hearts were so moved that several persons fainted away. The preacher was obliged to interrupt his sermon twice, and stop talking altogether, to arrest the tears and sobs of these good people. After the sermon, a priest of the region came to the altar to prostrate himself. He asked pardon first of God and then of the people for the scandalous life he had led. The congregation was so touched at this example that they raised aloud the cry, “Mercy!”

The devil envied the success of the mission, and attempted to disrupt the good order and the good dispositions of the people in the procession held after vespers. This had to do with the question of precedence among several of the Confraternities of Penance established in the parish. God in his goodness prevented any disunity by reminding someone that the preacher had said that the penitents clothed in white were to have the preferred places. The great respect they had for his word made them give way without more discussion. When this was settled, the procession took place with much piety to the edification of everyone.

I also should not omit one more thing: after urging the people to buy a silver cross for the church, each one wanted to share in the purchase to such a degree that a hundred ecus were collected, more than enough for the project.100

As to the see of Palestrina, the report made of the missions given there in 1657 states that the first mission was given in a large town of twelve hundred souls. The town, filled with enmities, had a violent, even bloody, reputation, with frequent homicides committed there. In the previous three years there had been seventy. The people, though cruel and given to passion, responded to the word of God and faithfully attended the exercises of the mission, which lasted a full month. Almost everyone made a general confession and were reconciled to God and to their sworn enemies. Some had lived ten or fifteen years without speaking to their enemies, but now began to do so. A widow there, whose husband had been slain, had refused to forgive his murderers despite the request of Cardinal Colonna, lord of the region.101 She was so moved by one of the sermons that she called the pastor and a notary to announce joyfully her forgiveness to all.

100. CED V:528-29.
Another widow, who showed herself equally unforgiving toward a man who had killed her husband, was also moved to reconciliation on this same occasion. Afterward, she remarked that she had never in all her life experienced such consolation. When some of her relatives remonstrated with her that such prompt and complete forgiveness reflected a meager love for her departed husband, she replied that only by such forgiveness could her own soul be saved. She added that if it had to be done all over again, she would most willingly do so.

A young man who had lost his arm in an attack wanted to have nothing more to do with his assailant. Leaving a sermon one day, he met the man on the public square, threw himself on his knees before him, and embraced him with such affection and cordiality that his example and words served to motivate several others to forgive the injuries they had received.

The most important of all the reconciliations brought about during this mission which reflected most perfectly the grace of God was that between two of the chief families of the town. Members of the one family had killed a member of the other and seriously wounded his brother. This led the surviving brothers to swear to exterminate the family of the murderers. For three years, this feud had resulted in the slaying of ten innocent victims. It was most difficult to bring about this hoped-for reconciliation, for the offenses were recent and those who planned their revenge ranged the countryside during the day to avoid the authorities, returning home only during the night. It was difficult even to speak with them and they were so determined that there seemed no way their hearts could be swayed. One of them even used to say that he would never rest until he had killed everyone of the other family.

Despite all these difficulties, and after several attempts, it pleased God in his goodness to allow this effort to succeed. The preacher of the mission managed to meet these desperate men in a secluded place, and to speak to them for a short while. He begged them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, embraced them cordially, and urged them to pardon and restore peace. Suddenly, the leader among them, touched by these entreaties, lifted his cap and raised his tearful eyes to heaven, to say, 'I promise God and your reverence to make peace, and I shall do so.' Having said this, he withdrew to allow his tears greater freedom to fall. After this, the reconciliation was to be finished the next day, but unfortunately such new difficulties arose that it seemed impossible to resolve them. Someone suggested that they invoke the most holy Virgin, and thanks to her powerful intercession all obstacles were overcome. This peace was received with such blessings that most of the residents came to the church to celebrate. They all wept for joy and blessed God at the sight of the two families embracing each other with much
affection. An old man remarked to a younger man of the other family whom he had recently hated so fiercely, 'From now on, I will take you for my son.' The other replied, 'And I, I will take you for my father.'

It would take too long to recount all the accomplishments and reconciliations of this mission. Family feuds were almost universal in the region, for an offense of anyone against another was taken as an insult against the entire family. The enmity of one single person for another extended to the relatives of the other, so that they no longer talked or extended greetings. By the mercy of God, at the end of this mission not a single person remained at enmity with others. Each one had been truly and sincerely reconciled to everyone else.

Another group of Missionaries went to work in the parishes dependent upon the abbey of Subiaco. There they conducted four missions upon which God showered many blessings, mainly by effecting reconciliations, breaking up immoral liaisons, and tending to several public scandals. To avoid repetitions, we will report here only what occurred in one of the parishes. Three women there, public sinners, asked pardon in church before all the people for the scandal they had given in the past. Everyone resolved to avoid the unhappy sin of blasphemy, much in vogue in the area. Several parishioners agreed among themselves that if one of them should swear while gambling he would automatically lose their turn. Others agreed if they swore they would be fined a certain amount, which would later be given to the poor. Others took the resolution to give up gambling completely, a better and surer course.

Feast days caused problems for the people, for they seemed not to know what to do with themselves. They accepted willingly and gratefully the suggestion given by the missionaries to buy a psalter and antiphonary to use in singing vespers in the church on Sundays and feasts. They also recommended several books, such as the lives of the saints, the works of Granada, and other similar ones, so that on these days they could come together in the church for an hour of spiritual reading.

Another report sent by the superior of the priests of the Mission at Rome spoke of the missions given in some places that he did not specify. It mentioned that God blessed them with his usual blessings: scandals ceased, concubines sent off, public sinners converted, and frequent occasions of sin in the region removed. So many differences were settled, both in civil and criminal cases, that on a single one of the missions a notary was kept busy for a whole week drawing up the settlements. Certain other usurious contracts were abrogated, as were some alienations of Church property which had been unjustly arranged. Not only were vices and disorders rectified, but a love for virtue was planted in receptive hearts, and all sorts of good works
began, especially those in favor of the poor, of which we will give a few examples.

At the end of one of the missions, a physician, moved by charity, offered to take nothing for his services for three years, provided that the measure of grain which each house of the town was obliged to give him each year would instead be put in a common store to benefit the poor. The townspeople willingly agreed to this proposal.

In the same town, one of the officials saw that the children were poorly instructed for want of a good teacher. He offered to pay the salary of an instructor by contributing a good part of his own wages.

The local council of this same town elected two people to serve as Protectors of the Poor. Their job was to see that the poor tenants were not unjustly charged by their landlords for supposed damages. Also, a storehouse for furniture was set up to protect the property of those put in prison, for otherwise it was almost always lost.

This has been a short sketch of the excellent results of the missions which Monsieur Vincent established from Rome through the ministry of the priests of the Congregation. We have spoken of events in seven or eight of these. Yet, more than two hundred were given during the first twenty-two years that the missionaries worked in this capital city of all Christendom. We have judged the few we have spoken of to show sufficiently the abundant grace God was pleased to shower upon the enterprises of his faithful servant, and upon those whom God called to labor under his direction. We will end this chapter by citing a letter written to Monsieur Vincent by Cardinal Spada from Rome in 1651.

The institute of the Congregation of the Mission, of which you are the founder and superior, each day merits more and more esteemed reputation in this locality. I have seen its extraordinary effects among the people in my city, and in the whole diocese of Albano. Your good priests have worked for them with such care, charity, selflessness, and prudence, that all have been most edified. It remains for me to thank you, which I do. I assure you that I have a special regard for your community. I shall not fail to proclaim the merits and benefits of this holy institute on any occasion that shall present itself.

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103. CED IV:170-71.
SECTION FOUR

Missions Given in the State of Genoa

We know of no better way to introduce the topic of the missions in Genoa than to cite the letter written by the worthy archbishop of Genoa, Cardinal Durazzo, to Monsieur Vincent, in August 1645:104

This past month, Monsieur N. [Bernard Codoing] passed through here. I learned he was a member of the Congregation of the Mission. I prevailed upon him to exercise his ministry in several parts of my diocese. He did so with much success and blessings for the service of God, the salvation of souls, and to my personal satisfaction. When he told me he was obliged to return to Paris by orders of his superior, I agreed, since you have sent other priests to continue the work he so happily began.105 We hope to establish a similar institute here, for the greater glory of his divine majesty. I wanted you to know how encouraged we have been in this regard.106

To appreciate the effects of grace on these missions, we will cite several of the letters written by the missionaries sent by Monsieur Vincent.

A priest of the Mission of Genoa wrote to his superior to tell him what had happened on the mission:

God blessed our mission, particularly the last one at a place called Chiavari, for besides the reconciliations of many individuals, three entire parishes which previously had been divided against each other came together in peace.

The superior of the Mission of Genoa reported the success of another mission he did not name, in a letter to Monsieur Vincent in July 1646.

We had up to eighteen confessors, and more than three thousand general confessions, and a large number of reconciliations of major importance. These ended animosities which had caused twenty-four or twenty-five murders. Most of those involved, having obtained in writing the pardon of those offended, were able to secure a favorable verdict from the prince and have since returned to full favor in the town.107

104. Stefano Durazzo belonged to an illustrious Venetian family which had provided many doges to Venice and prelates to the Church. He was closely associated with the work of the missionaries, and followed their rule in his own personal life. He was a holy and energetic bishop for whom Vincent had a profound veneration. He died in 1667.

105. Four priests and a brother. Etienne Blatiron was superior of this mission.

106. CED II:544.

107. CED II:609.
CHAPTER ONE, SECTION FOUR

The same superior, in another letter to Monsieur Vincent written around the same time, mentions a detail which deserves attention:

When I last wrote about our mission, I forgot to tell you what we do to instruct the people and help the confessors. We have two young priests who, other than during the catechism time, go over the principal mysteries of religion for those who wish to go to confession. When they are sufficiently instructed, they are given a note which they present to their confessor. This paper assures him that the penitent knows enough necessary Christian doctrine, and thus does not have to be questioned. This allows the confessors to move more quickly, so those waiting to go to confession do not have to wait so long. 108

In a letter dated May 6, 1647, this same superior wrote again.

We have just returned from the mission at N., involving five parishes besides the rest of the area. We were able to bring about a large number of conversions and general confessions despite the obstinacy of the people. They are so hard to influence that we almost lost courage at the beginning of the mission. But our Lord consoled us at the end by letting us see hardened hearts moved, and poured his grace upon these people to such an extent that those who did not even want to listen to us came around to not wanting to see us go. On the day of our leaving, we went to the church to receive the pastor’s blessing. All the people gathered, weeping and pleading, as though in leaving we were taking away their very lives. We had great difficulty in getting away.

Many of the nobility came here from Genoa to attend the mission, at which they were most edified. The archbishop of Genoa came to give the sacrament of confirmation. Afterward, at a reception for him and some gentlemen who had accompanied him, he presented a gift from a noble of the region, but this was declined when he learned that the missionaries never take anything for their services. 109

In a letter of December 16, 1647, this same superior wrote of another mission in which seven brigands had been converted. Also, a Turkish servant of one of the gentlemen of the region had asked for baptism. This was granted only after he was well instructed and had his faith carefully examined. 110

In a later mission several other brigands likewise were converted after being pardoned by the relatives of those they had killed. Several of these bandits threw themselves at the feet of those they had harmed, only to be accepted with

108. CED II:609-10.
110. CED III:257.
great charity and emotion from both parties. This mission took place in the town of Sestri. After they had attended the mission with such care and diligence, the people did not want to see them leave. Hearing they were about to depart, they surrounded their house in a sort of siege for two or three days, forcing these good missionaries to slip away under cover of darkness.

By a letter of December 10, 1648, he reported on a mission in Lavagna at which several brigands were converted, being restored to grace and forgiveness.111

In another mission given in January 1650, although the people were very poor, they willingly accepted the suggestion of establishing a Confraternity of Charity for the sick poor in their parish. They made such sacrifices to contribute to this enterprise that five hundred livres in cash was collected, not to mention seven hundred additional livres in pledges.

Another confraternity or company for men was set up, called the Company for Christian Doctrine. Its aim was to teach the Our Father and Hail Mary and the principal mysteries of the faith to those needing this instruction. Another task was to round up children to attend the catechism lessons given in the town.

On a trip from Paris to Italy in December 1650, one of the older priests of the Congregation stopped at a mission being given at Castiglione. He wrote to Monsieur Vincent about his experiences.

I have seen the exercises of the mission given in this parish, and in eight or nine others in the vicinity. The people are careful to attend the sermon and catechism lessons, and keep the confessors busy. I must say the people here are in no way inferior to those of other regions, and even surpass them in some respects. Two persons living in adultery publicly admitted their sin in church during the sermon, in the presence of a large congregation. Several usurers agreed in writing before notaries to restore what they had unjustly exacted from some poor people who had borrowed money from them. The Confraternity of Charity has been set up in this parish and the others mentioned above. The superior of the mission gives a conference each Monday to ten or twelve of the local pastors. I attended one of these, and all went well, giving hope that much benefit will come to these priests and to their people.112

In a letter which the superior of the Mission at Genoa wrote to Monsieur Vincent on February 6, 1659, he said:

We have just finished two small missions which God has blessed, especially the last. The parish has but two hundred forty

111. CED III:393.
112. CED IV:117-18.
members in a remote location, and nevertheless at the general communion there were more than seven hundred here, who had come from all the surrounding area.

Among the reconciliations effected here, a notable one concerned a father whose eldest son had been killed accidentally in his sleep just a short time before. Several important people of the area tried to persuade the father to forgive the murderers, and the day before he had refused me when I had made this same request to him. In fact, he asked me never to speak of it to him again. But God by his grace did what man could not do by his recriminations and exhortations. The following day I took the chance of again urging him, with prayers and tears, to bestow his pardon and peace on these murderers, for the love of our Lord. All at once he changed and granted what I asked, with such Christian sentiments it drew tears from all those present. 113

In another mission in the same year, a man was reconciled whose seventy-year-old father had been murdered. During the mission he could not overcome the violent feelings of revenge he felt, to forgive the one responsible for the murder. After the mission and the departure of the priests, however, the seed of the word of God sown in his heart during the sermons and exhortations took effect, and finally produced their fruit. Although this came a little late, it was soon enough to show the magnitude of God's mercy toward him.

SECTION FIVE

The Missions Given on the Island of Corsica

This island lies in the Mediterranean, as a dependency of the republic of Genoa. 114 In 1652 Monsieur Vincent was asked for some priests of his Congregation to give missions in the area. Seven priests were sent to work in various places on the island, aided by four other ecclesiastics, and by four religious supplied by Cardinal Durazzo, archbishop of Genoa. 115

The first mission was given at Campo Lauro, the usual residence of the

113. CED VII:450-51.
114. It belonged to France after 1768.
115. Etienne Blatiron was superior.
bishops of Aleria. At the time, however, the see was vacant. Two vicars general were governing it, one named by the Congregation De propaganda fide, and the other elected by the cathedral chapter. These two vicars had difficulty getting along, and often found themselves on opposite sides of every question, so much so that what one did the other undid. For example, when the one would pronounce a sentence of excommunication, the other would absolve from the censure. This resulted in the clergy and people being in a most troubled and divided state, and caused many disorders throughout the country.

The second mission was given in a place called Il Cotone, the third at Corte, in the center of the island, and the fourth and last at Niolo.

To understand fully the outcome of these missions, we must realize that lack of instruction was widespread among the people. It caused the vices of impiety, concubinage, incest, stealing, lying, and above all else revenge, which was almost universal. They often treated one another barbarically, never pardoning or even wanting to discuss reaching an accord, until they had satisfied their thirst for vengeance. Not only did they treat the one who had done them the injury in this fashion, but also their entire family, down to the third degree of kinship. It was therefore necessary that everyone remain on guard since, because of something that one of their relatives had done, they would automatically be considered as accomplices. This happened even though they themselves were innocent and even unaware of their relative’s act. As a result, everyone went about armed. At the least word their honor was threatened and would have to be avenged by a killing. As a consequence, although this kingdom of Corsica is a beautiful and fertile land, it is sparsely settled.

By the grace of God, the missions were quite successful. This came about, first, by the conferences and spiritual exercises which the Missionaries gave each day in the church to the canons, pastors, and other priests after the other people had been dismissed. The superior of the Mission presented a series of exhortations on the obligations and duties of priests, and suggested subjects for meditation. He prepared them for making their general confessions, and by this means rectified several past scandals. Good resolutions were taken to fulfill their obligations toward God and their neighbor. Some among the clergy were so moved with regret for past failings they publicly asked pardon for the bad example they had given. There were several pastors who thus publicly confessed their faults, as did an entire chapter through the voice of one of the canons, speaking in the name of all.

The missions were successful in resolving many conflicts and effecting many reconciliations. One person pardoned the death of his brother, another of his father, his child, his wife, a parent, etc. Others forgave those who had falsely accused them, or testified falsely against them in lawsuits, overlook-
ing all that might be due their honor or their interest. They embraced their
former enemies cordially, those who shortly before sought to take away their
honor or even their very lives. What is even more remarkable, these impor-
tant reconciliations were numbered not by twos or threes, but by fifties and
hundreds everywhere.

A third area of blessings was the cessation and correction of many
concubinages, a frequent occurrence on the island, and the large number of
loose women who publicly asked pardon for their disorderly conduct. Their
repentance moved many others. Remorseful at giving such scandal by their
sins, they rose from their places in the crowd and cried aloud to God for his
mercy and pardon from the people. Their words were accompanied by such
signs of true repentance for their sins that it moved the entire assembly to
tears.

Lastly, the establishment of the Confraternity of Charity not only pro-
vided help for the sick poor, but gave an outlet for other good works for
members of the Confraternity. All these added to the edification of their
families and to others who witnessed their good example.

To appreciate better the extent and importance of the outcome of these
missions, on which God poured out grace abundantly on Monsieur Vincent,
we will give here a somewhat lengthier account of the last of these missions.
It follows the report sent by the superior of the Mission to Monsieur Vincent.

Niolo is a valley about three leagues long, by a half league wide,
surrounded by mountains, with access and roads as limited as any
place I have seen elsewhere, even including the Pyrenees or those
in Savoy. This results in the region being infested with bandits and
riffraff of the island, who commit their robberies and murders with
no fear of the hand of the law. There are several small villages in
the valley, and about two thousand inhabitants, all told, in the
surrounding regions. In all Christendom I do not know of any
people more neglected. There are hardly any vestiges of the faith,
except some few who say they were baptized. There are a few
churches, but these are in bad repair. They are in such ignorance of
matters concerning their own salvation that only with great diffi-
culty could you find a hundred persons who would know the
commandments of God or the Apostles' Creed. To ask them if there
is one God or many, or which of the three Persons became man for
us, is to speak Arabic to them.

Revenge is the vice which passes here for virtue. Children learn
it before they learn to walk or talk. For the least offense, vengeance
is the proper response, and no one will tell them anything else. This
is the traditional lesson learned from their own parents, and this vice
has taken such roots in their hearts they are not able to conceive anything to the contrary.

There are some here who have not been to mass in seven or eight months. They have gone three, four, eight, or ten years without going to confession. There are some young people of fifteen or sixteen who have never confessed, and with that, some vices are prevalent among these poor people. They are given to stealing, and have no scruple about eating meat during Lent or other forbidden times.

They treat one another like barbarians. If there is question of an enemy, they do not hesitate to accuse him falsely before the courts of great crimes, with as many false witnesses as you care to see. On the other hand, the one accused, whether guilty or not, produces as many “witnesses” as he needs to support his innocence. Thus it comes about that justice is a commodity no one expects. It is left up to each to defend himself, which they do, often killing one another in the process.

Besides this, another source of difficulty concerns the sacrament of marriage. They seldom receive it unless the parties have previously lived together. Ordinarily, when the couple are engaged, the girl moves in with the future husband, and remains in this state of concubinage for two or three months, and sometimes two or three years, before getting around to marriage. Even worse, many of these marriages take place between close relatives, with no thought of dispensation from the impediment of consanguinity. They continue to live in this state eight or ten years or even fifteen years or more. If they have children, and the husband dies, they are abandoned as bastards, with the woman marrying another, often enough one of her own relatives. We have seen cases of a woman with three husbands with whom she has lived in concubinage and incest. Sometimes, after living together for a while, some come to lose their mutual affection, even when children are involved, and leave each other to seek new partners.

There is another great abuse here, in that most parents cause their children to be married long before the proper age. Some are married at age four or five, and there is even a case of a one-year-old girl being married to another child, five years old. Another disorder comes from this, that these children often have no affection for one another, cannot get along together, and not only get a divorce, but often develop hatreds. This leads to attacks and even murders against the other party.

In this single valley we discovered one hundred and twenty
concubinages, of which about ninety were incestuous as well. Among these were about forty who had been denounced and excommunicated because of it, but this did not prevent their neighbors from dealing and conversing with them as freely as if the Church had not censured them. Most of the people of the region had become involved in this, one way or the other, either by the original excommunication or by incurring this same punishment themselves for continuing to associate with those who had been denounced.

This is the deplorable state in which these poor people lived when the priests were sent here to give the missions. Here is how we began to bring some remedy to these disorders:

In the first place, we used all our energy to instruct the people in what was required for their own salvation. This took us about three weeks.

(2) We then separated the concubines, at least those we knew about and who lived in the area. Then on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, patrons of the local church, all the concubines, convinced of the evil state in which they were living and moved by a true spirit of penance, fell on their knees at the close of our sermon. They publicly asked pardon for their scandal, and promised on oath to separate. Those who had really left each other’s company approached the tribunal of the confessional.

(3) The excommunicated who showed signs of a truly humble and contrite heart were gathered together at the door of the church to be absolved from their sentence. They were told the seriousness of the offense, and were obliged, one after the other, by a public oath, to promise to remain separated, and never to enter the house of the other party for any cause or reason whatsoever. Then they were absolved. They were then received in confession, and later given communion. Even some priests in the region had contributed to these disorders by their own bad example, and had committed incest with nieces or close relatives. It pleased the mercy of God to touch their hearts, too, either by the charitable warnings made to them, or by the spiritual conferences which they had attended. All these made their general confession with all signs of true repentance, adding thereto public reparation for the scandal they had given.

The most difficult part of our work was our efforts for effecting reconciliations, and I could rightly say *hoc opus, hic labor,* [“this is the task, this is the toil’’]\textsuperscript{116} because the greater part of the people

\textsuperscript{116} Virgil, Aeneid, 6,129.
lived in enmity. We were fifteen days with no signs of progress, except for a young man who forgave an assailant who had shot him in the head. All the others remained adamant, unmoved by all we could say. Even so, this did not prevent a crowd of people at our sermons, given both in the morning and evening.

The men come to the sermons fully armed, a sword at their side and a firearm at their shoulder, their customary attire. The bandits and criminals, besides these arms, had in addition two pistols and several daggers in their belt. These people were so occupied with thoughts of hatred and vengeance there was nothing we could say to cure them of this strange disease, or to make any impression upon their troubled minds. When we spoke of the forgiveness of enemies, several left the sermon. We all were perplexed about how to proceed, especially myself more than the others, since I was chiefly responsible for resolving these difficulties.

Lastly, the eve of the day for general communion, as I finished my sermon, I once more exhorted the people to pardon one another. God inspired me to take my crucifix, and invite anyone who wished to pardon his enemies to come and kiss it. I spoke of our Lord holding out his arms to them, saying that those who would come and kiss the crucifix would give a sign that they were willing to pardon and were prepared to be reconciled to their enemies. At these words they began to look at one another, but no one stirred from his place. As I prepared to leave, I covered up the crucifix, conscious of their hard hearts. I told the congregation they were not worthy to receive the grace and blessings our Lord was offering them.

At this, a Franciscan stood up, and began to shout: "O Niolo! O Niolo! Do you wish to be cursed by God? Do you not want to receive the grace he is sending you through these missionaries, who have come from so far away for your salvation?" While this good religious was speaking these words, a local pastor whose nephew had been killed, with the murderer in the church listening to the sermon, came forward and asked to kiss the crucifix. At the same time he said in a loud voice, "Let him, the murderer, come forward, and I shall embrace him." After this, another priest did the same in regard to his enemies who were also present, and many others followed. For an hour and a half the church witnessed a whole series of reconciliations and embraces. As a precaution, the major settlements were put in writing for the town notary to legalize.

The next day was the general communion day. We arranged a day of general reconciliation, in which the people asked pardon of
God and then of their pastors, and in turn the pastors asked the same of the congregation. All this happened with much edification. I then asked if anyone at all still was not reconciled with his enemies. At once one of the pastors called out several by name. They came before the exposed blessed sacrament, and with no hesitation offered their hand to their former enemies. O Lord, what happiness on earth and what joy in heaven to see fathers and mothers pardoning out of the love of God those who had killed their son or daughter, women whose husbands had been slain, children their parents, brothers and close relatives their own family members, in a word, all reconciled to one another. In some other countries it is not unusual to see penitents weep at the feet of their confessors, but it is a small miracle to see this in Corsica.

The day following the general communion we received instructions to go to Bastia, where a galley sent by the senate of Genoa awaited us. However, we still delayed two days, which we used profitably in tying up some loose ends. On Tuesday we gave a sermon on perseverance, at which so many people attended we had to hold the service outside the church. Promises and resolutions were repeated, together with commitments to lead truly Christian lives and to persevere until death. The pastors promised to be faithful to teaching catechism, and to carrying out their other duties as well.

The rain that began at the end of the sermon prevented our leaving that day. In the evening I went to a remote place to speak to two people who had not attended the mission for fear of being moved to forgive their enemies, who had murdered their brother. The pastor had persuaded them to agree not to retaliate for this killing, at least until after they had spoken with us. They agreed to this, and by the grace of God their hearts were moved to pardon the murderers. On Wednesday morning we heard their confessions and gave them communion, and then we left together with several priests and other leading citizens. As a sign of their happiness and as a token of thanks to us for the little services we had rendered, they fired their guns and pistols as a salute as we were boarding the galley for Genoa.117

117. CED IV:411-16.
SECTION SIX

The Missions Given in Piedmont

A mission was given in April 1656, in a large town called Scalenghe, near Pinerolo. The superior of the Mission of Turin described it to Monsieur Vincent:118

Four or five thousand people attended. What edified me the most is the universal affection displayed for the word of God. Ordinarily fifty or so priests would help us at all the exercises of the mission. All the nobility of the region have taken part with extraordinary devotion. The common people showed such eagerness during the whole mission, which lasted about six weeks, that there is no doubt they wanted to profit from it. A number brought little with them, but remained eight whole days and nights in the church or nearby, to assure their having an opportunity to go to confession. All this shows the good disposition of these people, and the great good to be expected, even though we are so few, so poor, and so wretched, since God's goodness uses us to effect so much good. I say poor and wretched for I never cease to marvel how these good people put up with me, seeing I am more capable of repelling than attracting them. God alone works purely by his goodness, and would do even more if I did not put obstacles in the way by my lack of learning, my lack of spirit, and my other deficiencies.119

In another letter, of June 24 following, he said:

We have just finished a mission near Luserna, where there were eight or nine thousand people at the general communion. We had to preach in the open air, in the public square. An accident occurred there which shows the effect of the word of God and the power of his grace. One of the guards, armed like most people of the region with three or four pistols and several daggers besides his sword,

118. Jean Martin was superior of the house at Turin from 1655 to 1665. He was born in Paris in 1620. He was received into the Congregation in 1638 and was sent with another student to take part in the celebrated mission given to the court at Saint Germain en Laye at the request of Louis XIII. His catechetical teaching so impressed the queen that she asked him to teach catechism to the dauphin, the future Louis XIV, who was still an infant. In 1642 he went to Rome to work on the missions there. He came to speak Italian fluently. In 1645, Vincent sent him to Genoa, where he worked for several years. He accompanied Cardinal Durazzo on his pastoral visitations. In 1652 he was one of the seven missionaries sent to Corsica. In 1655 he was named superior of the Turin house. He died February 17, 1694 in Rome, where he was also superior.

119. CED V:586.
was listening attentively to the sermon while leaning against a wall. A stone, dislodged from the wall, fell on his head, and caused a deep gash and much blood. The only words out of his mouth were, "O just God, what a time for this to happen!" To those who expressed surprise at his patience he remarked that his sins deserved this and more. Then, with his head bandaged, he returned for the rest of the sermon as though nothing had happened. This is extraordinary for someone of this region, for the people are lively, quick to anger, and much inclined to violence.

At the end of our mission here, they earnestly requested us to go to a nearby town about a league and a half from here. It had been deeply divided for the past ten or twelve years, and had experienced the murders of more than thirty people during that time. The town had become an armed camp, one faction against the other, so that they were in danger of exterminating each other. I feared our visit there would not be successful, for we had no possibility of giving a complete mission. We were so strongly urged to go we felt we must, leaving the outcome completely in the hands of divine Providence.

We stayed two days in the town. During that time it pleased God so to move hearts that after our sermons, and particularly on the feast of Corpus Christi before the blessed sacrament exposed, a general reconciliation of great solemnity took place. The leading parties on either side came to the altar, and on the Gospels swore they pardoned their adversaries. As a sign of this conversion they offered the greeting of peace before all the people, and signed a formal peace treaty drawn up by the public notary. Afterward, we sang the Te Deum in thanksgiving. All this greatly consoled the people, who for many years had seen the murders and blood of so many of their relatives in this undeclared war. 120

In another letter, of February 3, 1657, this same priest wrote of the success of an important mission:

By the mercy of God we have completed the mission of Racconigi. It pleased his goodness to allow us to finish six weeks of continuous effort there, despite our being completely worn out by another mission immediately before. We would never have dared undertake the second of these missions in the most populated part of Piedmont were it not that the archbishop of Turin had requested it at the earnest solicitation of his clergy and people. Even though we were helped by four good priests of the city and by several religious who worked with us, we could not totally respond to the

120. CED V:641-42.
devotion of these people whose demands left us not a moment of
rest. The press of people at the sermons and catechism lessons
continued, and their desire for confession was so great that they
came at midnight to awaken us for this service. Some remained in
church several days and nights even in this severe time of winter to
have an opportunity to go to confession. The good effects and the
fruits of the mission correspond, by the grace of God, to their good
dispositions, as we may judge from their good resolutions and
reconciliations they made. The clergy themselves, consisting of
around forty priests and clerics, gave the example to the people. We
gave a special conference to them every week, a practice they
decided to continue for themselves. We established a Confraternity
of Charity for the sick poor. Those who joined have already begun
to carry out their ministry with great devotion. 121

In June of the same year, while on the mission at Savigliano, he wrote:

"We are now busy on this mission, which is one of the most difficult
we have yet experienced in this country. God has given it his special
blessing, despite the poverty and fewness of its preachers. We are
charged with a large region where the inhabitants are taken up with
penance and conversion. What is even more astounding to me is that
the religious of five or six monasteries come to the sermons, and all
the priests have made their general confessions. The many nobility
think of nothing else but acquiring a true spirit of penance. We have
been obliged to ask the religious of the locality to help us in the
confessional. We even had to call on those from Turin to help out.

The Providence of God has brought us here when the soldiers,
quartered here for the winter, are returning to the army. We have
had the opportunity before their leaving, particularly for several
captains and French soldiers, to have them at our sermons and
catechism lessons for an entire week. A number made their general
confession with great devotion, seeing they are off to the dangers
of the war. I must say I cannot remember ever having received such
consolation in my life as I have had in seeing men of their profes-
sion, away from the sacraments for years, dissolve in tears at the
feet of their confessor, and take truly Christian resolutions for their
lives. For soldiers, they are extraordinary. This is surely the effect
of the mercy of God, whom I pray you to have the goodness to join
us in thanking. 122"

At the conclusion of this mission, this same priest wrote:

121. CED VI:174.
I told you earlier how at the beginning of our mission God had moved the hearts of many soldiers. Since then we have continued our sermons, catechism lessons, and other usual exercises at which we have had such a great crowd the church could barely hold them all, even though it is so large. This was true even during times which custom dictated were to be given over to domestic chores. By order of the authorities the stores closed at the hour of the sermons and the longer catechism instructions. On market days, all trading was suspended during these same hours to give everyone an opportunity to hear the word of God. Both religious and priests attended the mission in large numbers, and most of them have made their general confession, even though they had to confess to one another. They have made restitutions and reconciliations as elsewhere. The conclusion of the mission was held on the public square before twelve thousand persons. Also, during the whole mission, we gave spiritual conferences to the clergy. About a hundred of them attended each session.

One of the priests, a very good ecclesiastic whom we had invited from Turin to help us, worked several days in the confessional. He then fell sick, and finally died, with extraordinarily pious sentiments. His refrain, in dying, was, “humility, humility, without humility I am lost.” Hardly had he breathed his last when crowds of people came to offer their condolences, and to show their affection and thanks. They wanted to celebrate the funeral solemnly, with torches and candles. All the religious were there and the burial was among the most honorable ever held in this place.

When they saw what good we had been able to do for them, the people wanted to have the priests of our Congregation stay here permanently. For this purpose they made as generous a proposal as could be hoped for. When we excused ourselves because of our small numbers, the people proposed establishing a foundation to support four or five priests, and further, they sought the intervention of the marquis of Pianezza. They argued their case so persuasively that on our return he strongly urged us to accept this foundation. We had to tell him, with all due respect, that we would not be able to do so.

Toward the end of that same year a mission was given in Bra which God greatly blessed. We know no better way to convey this than by citing extracts

123. Philippe de Simiane, the prime minister of Piedmont, became a correspondent of Monsieur Vincent, and founded a community house in Turin where he lived in his retirement.

124. CED VI:395-96.
of three letters this same superior sent to Monsieur Vincent. They tell of conditions before the mission, and its effects produced through the grace of God.

In the first of these, dated October 27, 1657, he wrote:

I believe it will be necessary to put off to another time the mission which the Madame Royale has asked us to give in Bra, a town which depends upon her, because of the divisions which exist there.\footnote{Christine of France, sister of Louis XIII, duchess of Savoy. She governed Savoy during the minority of her son, Charles Emmanuel II.} They have developed to such a degree that the streets are barricaded, and soldiers and other armed men fill the houses. They attack each other even in the church, and are so embittered they even attack others’ homes to enter by force. Each one fortifies his home as though resisting a siege. It is worth their life to leave the house.

It was hoped a sort of armistice could be worked out for the time of the mission, and that by the sermons, exhortations, and remonstrances, some relief could be brought to the tense situation, and even some reconciliations effected. The people were so severely divided that not even the leading ministers of the state, sent by the Madame Royale, could bring this about. It seemed to us that not only was it useless to have a mission in a place where no one could come to the services, but it would be dangerous for those few who would dare to attend. We have enough other places where we can give our services.\footnote{CED VI:568.}

Despite this, the superior wrote another letter from the same place on February 6, 1658:

It has been a month since we began working in Bra, where it has pleased God to inspire the people to become reconciled with each other. This came about mainly by His Highness expressing his displeasure at their animosity, and then by the mission which sought to change their attitudes. Persons from both camps came to our sermons and other exercises of the mission in the same church, which at first seemed difficult to achieve, if not hazardous. As soon as the people gathered in church, they were persuaded to lay aside their arms, which they always carried with them everywhere. Their faithfulness to the sermons and catechism lessons, coupled with the good sentiments inspired in them by the grace of God, brought about their complete reunion. They even exchanged greetings of peace in the presence of the blessed sacrament, while mutually asking pardon. Some of the leading persons of the town were
publicly reconciled in the main square. They showed such happiness at this turn of events that it gives great hope this reunion of hearts will endure.

The people are consoled at seeing former enemies, who shortly before were seeking ways to kill each other, now walking and talking together as if there had never been trouble between them. Before, the streets were filled with armed men, but now we see none. All seem preoccupied in how best to be reconciled to the majesty of God by a worthy spirit of penance. When the Madame Royale heard the good news of these events, she deigned to write to us of her satisfaction. The marquis of Pianezza also wrote to tell us of his enormous consolation at the way things have turned out. We are busy now with confessions. Although we have asked all the priests and religious of the area to help us, the crowd of penitents is so great I do not know when we will finish.\textsuperscript{127}

Lastly, in his third letter, dated March 9 of the same year, he wrote:

We have finished our mission at Bra where God showered his graces in great abundance upon the poor souls there, who for such a long time lived in the deplorable state I described in my earlier letters to you. We spent seven weeks there during the time when the carnival is usually celebrated, but for the inhabitants of Bra it was time for penance, a time of one continuous feastday, celebrated with great devotion. There were around nine or ten thousand general confessions with such evident fervor in the people that several spent the entire day and a good part of the night in the church, despite the cold of this time of the year, to be sure to have an opportunity to get to confession. It pleased God to diffuse peace and charity in their hearts so abundantly that the residents there were astonished to see such complete reconciliations. They cannot recall seeing such union and cordiality. They reported all this to the Madame Royale, to whom I went yesterday to report on all that had occurred, and on the hope I had for total perseverance among the people. She was so happy and consoled, and her heart so moved, I noticed tears in her eyes. To crown all this good news and to erase all memory of the unhappy past, she issued a general pardon for all wrongs of the past, and for all excesses committed during the time of contention.

As one act of mercy and favor usually draws down still another coming from God’s goodness, it pleased him to extend the same blessings he had given the people of Bra to another nearby town. For the past forty years or so, discord and division had made such

\textsuperscript{127} CED VII:73-74.
a mark there that the place was nearly destroyed. Many persons of both parties had been killed, some houses destroyed or damaged, and many had to go elsewhere to live. The senate of Piedmont had several times sought to end the disputes, but without success, and all other efforts to heal the divisions had ended the same way.

Lastly, when the lord of the place, one of the leading men of Piedmont and a most wise and virtuous person, had considered the mission held at Bra at which some of his people had attended, he thought it proper to summon all parties to a meeting. He wanted to see if some way might not exist to bring peace to his town, as had been accomplished with their neighbors. For just three or four days we gave some of the sermons and exercises of our mission. It pleased God so to move hearts that in the presence of the blessed sacrament a large number of people of the region offered a gesture of peace to one another. They pardoned each other, and swore on the holy Gospels they would live in eternal peace. As a sign of this union, they invited one another to join in a meal, at which they showed such union and charity as befitted brothers. Her Highness had the goodness to grant the same grace and absolution as she had done for Bra, so all could return to their homes, and cultivate their lands in peace.¹²⁸

On the following March 26, another mission was given in Cavallermaggiore, a village of four or five thousand inhabitants. Although there were not the same serious disorders as in the previous places the missions had been given, several disagreements and resulting lawsuits left us not a minute of peace. The divinely inspired confidence these people had in us led them to put all disputes, whether civil or criminal, into our hands for settlement. We have hopes of bringing them all to an end during Lent.¹²⁹

In still another letter, dated July 6, he wrote:

We are leaving Fossano, a small but densely populated town, where we have just finished a mission. It pleased God to bestow many blessings on this work, in keeping with the needs we discovered there. The crowds at the exercises were so large that the church, large as it is, could not hold all the people who came to the sermons and other services. Not only were the lay people in attendance, but the clergy and religious were also present.

Besides the usual blessings of the missions, in which evil practices are ended and hatreds resolved, we were able to introduce

¹²⁸. CED VII:100-02.
several practices for the future: (1) the evening prayers we began will be continued in the church of the fathers of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri, which many people attend each evening; (2) the canons have agreed to hold a general communion every three months, to help preserve the present sentiments of piety in the people; (3) these same canons and all the clergy are to continue the spiritual conferences we began for ecclesiastics. We hope, with God’s blessing, that these will be most helpful in re-establishing and preserving among them a true priestly spirit, to which several among them seem much inclined. This region now seems to be totally renewed in its Christian life, which we trust will be continued through the ongoing growth of the grace of God.130

In a letter of March 12, 1659, he spoke of several missions given near the city of Mondovi of which the main result was the cessation of many murders and homicides. In just one of these small places, forty bandits repented their crimes like the others. In the presence of the blessed sacrament they gave abundant signs of their conversion of heart immediately before receiving holy communion.131

Lastly, in a letter of July 12 of the same year, 1659, he wrote:

We have come back from our mission at Cherasco, which lasted a bit longer than the others because of the crowds which come from surrounding regions. To satisfy the people completely we would have needed twenty priests, and they would have been kept busy for two whole months or more. It pleased God to bestow as many blessings as anyone could hope for. Many quarrels and differences have been resolved. Among the blessings I must mention is a large neighboring village where the people were so divided one against the other that, on the eve of the very day we arrived, four people had been killed. Nevertheless, by God’s mercy, peace has been reestablished. This did not take place without difficulty, however, for it took forty days of preaching and negotiations. At the end all worked out for the consolation of the people and with much edification, in the presence of the blessed sacrament which had been exposed expressly for this purpose. Most importantly, after their reconciliation these people came to confession with excellent disposition.132

These are the extracts of letters written to Monsieur Vincent. If we were to report in detail all the similar results of missions in Piedmont, bestowed

by God's grace, we would need another whole book, and we would be forced to repeat ourselves many times. We have given enough to allow the readers to judge the rest for themselves, and to suggest a reason for thanking God for all the graces he gave these people. We should remark that in this service of his divine majesty, in the conversion of so many, in the reconciliations and other great and admirable works, we are speaking of only four priests of the Congregation of the Mission, for Monsieur Vincent could not send more for the missions in this country. God showed his power in that the instruments he used seemed so inadequate to the task before them. He pitted a group of men, small and weak in the eyes of hell, to oppose the prince of darkness and to vanquish him in the lives of so many where sin had long reigned, and to establish the empire of his Son, Jesus Christ, to whom alone forever be the praise and blessing.

**SECTION SEVEN**

*The More Remarkable Events in the Missions of the Barbary States*

Although the missions authorized by Monsieur Vincent in France, Italy, and surrounding areas were greatly blessed, as we have seen in the preceding sections, we must affirm that the ones given in more distant regions have also borne their fruit. These successes may not have been as great as the ones on European soil, but they were equally appreciated and valued. These strange and savage lands were made fertile by the labors, but even more so by the blood of the missionaries. Several of them gave their lives by their untiring labors in the service of Jesus Christ. It was one of the most ardent desires of the worthy father of the missionaries to go himself to preach Jesus Christ among the infidels, and to risk martyrdom in confessing his holy name.

Other obligations imposed on him by divine Providence, however, made this impossible. He was heard to say, "Ah, miserable man that I am. My sins have made me unworthy to preach the word of God to peoples who do not know him." Speaking to his confreres, he said, "How happy is the Mission-ary who has no limit in this world on where he can go to preach the Gospel. Why then do we hesitate and set limits, since God has given us the whole world to satisfy our zeal?"

He showed a special veneration for Saint Francis Xavier, who had carried
the Gospel all the way to the Indies with such courage and blessings. He appreciated the religious of his order, and all others who worked on the foreign missions. When any of them returned and had occasion to visit Saint Lazare, he would assemble the entire household to hear of their work, with the hope of inspiring his own Missionaries to imitate their zeal. He would have their printed accounts read in the refectory, and did what he could to help their missions in foreign lands, as we shall see in the following pages.

He recognized, in keeping with the words of Jesus Christ in the Gospel, that the harvest of souls was great in foreign and barbarous lands, yet the workers were few. Thus he offered his confreres to Jesus Christ for the instruction of the poor and most abandoned, not only in Christian nations but also among the infidels and barbarians.

He inspired this same zeal and dispositions among the members of the Company. When someone would volunteer to go on the foreign missions he would rejoice with him because of the grace of the courage that God had bestowed upon him. Despite this, he never sent his men out haphazardly. His great maxim was never to push himself or his own ideas, but to wait simply and patiently for the manifestation of the will of divine Providence.

In beginning to speak of the missions given in foreign lands under the direction of Monsieur Vincent, among the infidels, heretics, or other enemies of our religion, we will begin in this section with those in the Barbary States. We will see how the missionaries worked and suffered to serve Jesus Christ in the persons of the poor Christian slaves. In later sections we will speak of the more remarkable events that took place in the other foreign missions.

PART ONE
The Beginning of the Missions in Tunis and Algiers, in the Barbary States

The experience of slavery that God allowed Monsieur Vincent to endure in 1605, as recounted in Book One, gave him a first-hand opportunity to realize the evils which these slaves endured in their bodies and the danger they ran of losing their souls. These experiences engendered a great compassion in his heart. He saw in this slavery an image of the human misery which had led the Son of God to come to earth to ransom those enslaved to sin and Satan. In this he saw an opportunity to imitate the Savior, by visiting, consoling, and helping these poor abandoned captives. He was so inflamed with the love of God that he was anxious to help, but he remained steadfast in his usual practice of awaiting the orders of divine Providence before
embarking on this work. He prayed to know God's will, and for the grace and means to carry it out in a way most pleasing to him.

This prayer was not in vain, for around 1642, God inspired the late king, Louis XIII, of glorious memory, with the desire of helping these poor slaves.\textsuperscript{134} His eyes fell upon Monsieur Vincent, whom he judged was most able to carry out this task. The king asked him to send some of his missionaries to Barbary for the corporal and spiritual relief of these poor captives. He supported this request with a sum of nine or ten thousand livres. God alone can say with what joy this charitable priest received this commission, since he had prayed for so long that something would be done for these poor afflicted slaves.

He gave some thought to the best way to carry out this complicated enterprise, for the Moslems were not anxious to have priests among them, unless they happened to be slaves themselves. He recalled that a treaty had been worked out between France and the sultan to develop commerce between the two regions. The king was to be permitted to send consuls to the seaport cities, to look after French commercial interests and the conditions of the Christian slaves. The consuls, in turn, were to be allowed to have a priest as chaplain in their homes. In 1645, this permitted Monsieur Martin, then consul in Tunis, to invite a priest of the Congregation of the Mission to this office. Father Julien Guerin and a brother named Francois Francillon were sent.\textsuperscript{135}

After working zealously for two years, and seeing that the harvest was beyond his own unaided efforts, Monsieur Guerin resolved to see the dey, a sort of king in the country, to ask if another priest might be allowed to come to help him in his work. God touched the heart of the dey, for he replied that this would be agreeable, and that if one additional priest were insufficient, he might then invite two or three. He promised that he would serve as his protector, and would grant him anything he asked, for he appreciated his example of doing nothing but good for everyone he met.

In reply to this request for an additional priest Monsieur Vincent sent Jean

\textsuperscript{134} It has been estimated that there were 20,000 in Algeria and another 6000 in Tunis.

\textsuperscript{135} Julien Guerin was born in 1605 at Selles, in the diocese of Bayeux. He entered the Congregation of the Mission, January 30, 1640. In his youth he had been a soldier. This experience made him fearless. While he was stationed at Saintes, some travelers stopped him on his journey and pointing a pistol, asked him: "Who goes there?" Without any concern, he presented his crucifix and said, "It is he who goes there." The thieves, taken aback by his answer, allowed him to pass. When he learned that he would be going to Tunis, he was filled with joy as if he was going to a victory rather than to a place where he would be in imminent danger of death. Brother Francois Francillon, born at Ceaux in the diocese of Poitiers, entered the Congregation of the Mission at Paris in April 1645. After serving the slaves in Tunis for many years, he was martyred. When the fleet of Louis XIV was bombarding Algiers in 1688, Brother Francois refused to renounce his faith to save his life. On July 6, he was executed by being tied to the mouth of a cannon. The day before, Michel Montmasson, a priest of the Congregation and vicar apostolic at Algiers, met the same fate.
Le Vacher.\textsuperscript{136} He arrived in Tunis in the beginning of 1648 at a most opportune time, for the plague had broken out, and it affected a large number of the Moslem natives and slaves alike. Both priests worked strenuously in this critical situation, but unfortunately Monsieur Le Vacher himself was stricken in May of the same year and was soon near death. It pleased God, however, to deliver him from the danger to enable him to give life to the many souls whom he served, and to continue to minister in that country.

Monsieur Guerin wrote to Monsieur Vincent about the plague:

It is impossible to express the depth of the sufferings and tears of the poor slaves, merchants, and even the consul, and what consolation we received from everyone here. The Moslems themselves come to visit us in our distress, and the leading people of Tunis have offered their help and service. I am convinced, Monsieur, that we must serve God faithfully, for in this tribulation he even inspires our enemies to help his unworthy servants. We are scourged by war, the plague, and famine, and have no funds, but despite how severely we are tried our courage has not faltered. We treat the plague as though it did not exist. The joy that our brother and I experienced at the recovery of Monsieur Le Vacher has made us as strong as mountain lions.\textsuperscript{137}

Soon after Monsieur Le Vacher recovered and returned to work, Monsieur Guerin, that man of God, himself fell victim to this dread disease. His zeal had made him disregard the dangers of death all around him, and forgetting himself, worked for the relief and salvation of those stricken by the plague. He was not taken by surprise, and prepared for death not simply with patient endurance but with an entire conformity to the good pleasure of God. He accepted death as the crown of his labors, and the beginning of the life of glory he hoped for from the mercy of God.\textsuperscript{138} We cannot adequately describe the sorrow of the Christians for whom he had given his life, nor the sorrow of Monsieur Vincent who lost in this good missionary one of his dearest and most worthy sons. The consul died soon after, leading the dey to order Monsieur Le Vacher to fulfill the office of consul until the king of France should send another to take his place.

While thus occupied with the spiritual care of the five or six thousand slaves in Tunis, and sometimes with their temporal relief as well, as we shall see later, his attention turned to the needs of the slaves at Algiers, a much larger city. There were usually more than twenty thousand enslaved Christians there. They were very poorly treated by their masters in comparison with those of Tunis.

\textsuperscript{136} Jean Le Vacher was born at Ecouen, in the diocese of Paris, March 19, 1619. He was received into the Congregation, October 5, 1643.

\textsuperscript{137} CED III:300.

\textsuperscript{138} May 13, 1648.
It was impossible for the priests to do much unless they had the full cooperation of the consuls. If the consuls paid more attention to their own interests and convenience and failed to help in the salvation and relief of the poor captives, the goals of Monsieur Vincent could hardly be attained.

Aided by the duchess of Aiguillon, who indemnified the consul of Algiers, it was arranged that in 1646 he would be replaced by the king's appointment of Monsieur Jean Barreau. A native of Paris, he was zealous for the service of God and of the poor slaves. He had no greater ambition than to cooperate with the designs of Monsieur Vincent, as he did during several years of service.

Before the consul left for his post, Monsieur Vincent gave him the following advice:

At the heart of your activity must be the intention of promoting the greater glory of God. Remain in a constant state of interior humiliation at not being able to accomplish much in the circumstances in which you work. Practice submission to the judgment and will of the priest of the Mission given you as your counselor. Do nothing without informing him, unless obliged to answer some matter on the spot. Jesus Christ was the sovereign Lord, and yet during the time he lived with Mary and Joseph he did nothing without their advice. I would ask you to honor this mystery by acting accordingly, so that God will lead you and aid you in this position, to which his Providence has called you.

Later Monsieur Vincent sent three good priests, veteran missionaries, to the city of Algiers, Messieurs [Boniface] Nouelly, [Jacques] Le Sage, and [Jean] Dieppe. All three gave their lives in courageously devoting themselves day and night to those stricken by the plague which gripped the city in 1647 and 1648. They served the poor Christian slaves who had fallen ill, who, had it not been for them, would have been abandoned like wild animals. These good priests showed at the approach of their own deaths the spirit which had dominated their lives, and the charity for their neighbor which animated them.

Monsieur Dieppe died with a crucifix in his hand, with his eyes fixed upon it, repeating during the half hour of his agony these words: Majorem charitatem nemo habet, quam ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis ["There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends"].

These three priests were followed by Monsieur Philippe Le Vacher, the brother of Monsieur Le Vacher who was at Tunis. Like his

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139. Jean Barreau was received into the Congregation, May 14, 1645. Vincent believed that Barreau would be more effective as consul in Algiers if he were not a priest. Barreau agreed to delay his ordination, and left for his new post in 1646.

140. CED III:42-43. Abelly's text differs in many respects from the original letter.

brother, he served God for many years in the persons of the poor slaves in this city whose inhabitants, with the demons of hell, seemed to have no other preoccupation than to persecute the Christians.

Monsieur Le Vacher, at Tunis, continued to hold the office of consul, and this prevented him from the usual duties of the missionaries of Monsieur Vincent. It came about that a Monsieur Huguier, in charge of the temporalities at the Chatelet in Paris, was appointed to this post. He put himself under the direction of Monsieur Vincent, to give himself completely to the service of God and to the glory of his name. When he arrived in Tunis he proved unacceptable to the Moslems, who refused to allow him to serve as consul. He stayed for some time in the city, however, helping Monsieur Le Vacher in the position. He later returned to France, where he received holy orders, following the advice of Monsieur Vincent. He was sent later to Algiers, not only as a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, but as missionary apostolic. He worked earnestly for the poor slaves until the month of April of 1663, when he succumbed to the plague in very saintly dispositions of soul.

Monsieur Vincent was unhappy to see Monsieur Le Vacher in Tunis burdened with the office of consul. It prevented him from carrying out his ordinary missionary duties. Also, he did not like to see him hold a secular office, even though it provided him opportunities to help the Christian slaves. He arranged that a lawyer of the Parlement, Monsieur Husson, a native of Paris, be appointed by the king as consul at Tunis. He was a person of high virtue. Monsieur Vincent wrote about him in a letter at that time:

He is wise, impartial, pious, prudent, and as able as any man I know of his age. He acts solely for the service of God and the slaves, and despite the tears and arguments of his dear parents, finally won their blessing on his ministry. He acts together with Monsieur Le Vacher as though he were a member of our Congregation, although he is not. 142

He left for Barbary in 1653, and has remained there serving very successfully as consul for several years.

PART TWO

The Main Work of the Missionaries in Barbary

Monsieur Vincent first used his influence to have consuls appointed in the two cities, Tunis and Algiers. They were to cooperate with the priests of the Mission in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy serving the Christians there, both slaves and others. It only remained for each to carry out these good intentions.

142. CED IV:625.
To understand better the great good that Monsieur Vincent hoped the priests in Barbary would accomplish, we must realize that in these cities not only French citizens whether slave or free lived there under the protection of the king of France, but also citizens of other nations, except the English. They all turned to the French consul for protection and help against the insults of the barbarians. These other nationalities included Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Maltese, Greeks, Germans, Flemish, and Swedes. The boats and crews engaged in trade obtained their passports through him. When the pirates captured a ship and its merchandise, it was up to the consul to try to seek its release. He would complain to the dey or to the pasha, and to the customs officer, of the injustice of these seizures, or of the bad treatment of the sailors. He negotiated the release of the slaves, and as often as he could had them returned to their own country. He attempted to settle the disputes which arose between the merchants of all these nations, and those among the slaves themselves. He attempted to make sure no Christian merchant carried any contraband material banned by the church or the king, to the Moslems. These banned items included sails, rope, iron, lead, and weapons, since they could be used by the Moslems in their wars against the Christians.

The priests of the Mission were as much taken up with their spiritual ministrations as the consuls were in temporal matters. They were apostolic missionaries, under the authority of the sovereign pontiff, who gave them all the faculties and powers they needed for their work. They were vicars of the archdiocese of Carthage, upon which these two cities of Tunis and Algiers depended. With these powers, they had jurisdiction over all enslaved priests and religious, who sometimes were very numerous. They were the pastors of both the merchants and slaves, who together numbered twenty-five or thirty thousand, with more coming in all the time.

These missionary priests worked primarily to maintain the Catholic religion and to practice it publicly and privately in those very places where it was oppressed and persecuted. They did so in imitation of Jesus Christ who had said to the Jews that he honored his Father while it was they who dishonored him. In the same way these sons of Monsieur Vincent sought to honor this same Savior, and have him honored and served in the midst of an infidel land where he was dishonored by the most cruel enemies of his holy name.

Besides, they sought to confirm and strengthen the faithful in their beliefs. They supported the weak, and prevented them from being lost. They brought back those who had strayed. They administered the sacraments to the sick.

143. The dey was the ruling official. He and the pasha were accountable to the sultan in Constantinople, the head of the Ottoman empire.
and healthy both in the cities and in the fields. They consoled the poor slaves in their pains and afflictions. They preached, instructed, worked, endured, and finally gave their lives for this poor suffering Church, just as our Lord did for the entire Church at its beginnings.

These were the main occupations of the priests and consuls in Barbary to which they completely devoted themselves. They worked closely together, hoping to succeed in the work of the salvation of souls and the greater glory of God, their one shared goal. Monsieur Vincent strongly recommended that they often consult together, sharing advice and other forms of aid. This is what he said in a letter he wrote at this time:

I have learned of the bonds of charity that exist among you. I bless God every time the thought comes to me, so much am I moved to thanksgiving for such a great blessing which surely comes directly from the heart of God. From this union among you will come all sorts of good things for his greater glory and for the salvation of a great number of souls. In the name of God, Monsieur, do all in your power to strengthen these bonds in every way. Recall the words of the epistle to the Romans which remind us that by union and prudence all things will work out well. Yes, union among you will bring the work of God to a happy end, and nothing except disunion can stand in its way. This work is an exercise of charity such as is not seen anywhere else in the whole world, although it is not well known.

O God, Monsieur, what vision we need to see the full excellence of apostolic work. How happy we should be to be called to it, and how we should respond to the demands of this ministry. Ten or twelve missionaries with this insight could bring about incredible fruit in the Church. I have heard of the battles which have cost you flesh and blood, but this must happen, for the evil spirit will not let you continue without a fight. Blessed be God that you have stood firm against all attacks. Heaven and earth rejoice at your happy task, to honor in your work the incomprehensible charity of our Lord who descended from heaven to rescue us from our slavery. I imagine that there is not an angel or saint in heaven who does not envy you this happiness, if indeed their glorious state allows them to feel the pangs of envy. Even though I am the most miserable of sinners, I must say that if it were allowed, I too would envy you.

Humble yourself, and prepare to suffer at the hands of the Moslems, or the Jews, or from false brothers. They may do you harm, but do not be surprised. They will not do you any ill other than what our Lord allows. What he sends will be solely to prepare
you for some special favors which he has in store for you. You are well aware that the grace of our redemption must be attributed to the merits of the Passion. The more the works of God are resisted, the happier are the results, if only our resignation and confidence do not falter. Rarely is any good done without suffering. The devil is too subtle and the world too corrupt not to attempt to stamp out a good work at its very beginning. Courage, then, Monsieur. God himself has called you to the place and the work you are now doing. If you have God's glory as your only end, what is there for you to fear, or better, what should you not hope for?144

PART THREE
Persecutions Suffered by the Consul at Algiers

With good reason Monsieur Vincent prepared his confreres for sufferings and exhorted them to constancy. Living as they did among these barbarians and working for Jesus Christ they were sure to suffer persecution and feel the effects of their rage and cruelty. In fact they were threatened with fire and the rope, and other tortures. They felt that the attacks, of which we give here only one example, show that those who strive to serve Jesus Christ among the infidels are continually exposed to harassments and bad treatment, and will have to have a most ardent charity to support them in their efforts to evangelize.

Monsieur Barreau, the consul in Algiers, felt the cruelty of these barbarians, since he had been tyrannized and persecuted because he had refused to give them money. One of their practices is that when they have suffered a financial loss they look for some way to make it up, always from the most innocent, and particularly from Christians. They use forgeries and false witnesses, and employ violence and injustice beyond all reason. They call this procedure the “affront,” and should someone seek justice or the protection of the more powerful, it must be bought by expensive presents, equal almost to what was demanded in the first place. The ones who act this way do not work themselves, but live on what they extort from others, especially from Christians. They are never satisfied with what they have, for many of them are rich enough, but they always seek to have more.

The consul was imprisoned in 1647 solely because he refused to pay the money unjustly demanded of him. Shortly afterward, Monsieur Nouelly, priest of the Congregation of the Mission fell victim to the plague. The consul decided to pay his ransom to be able to help the priest in his illness.

144. CED IV, 364-66.
The priest died, however, leaving the consul in danger of being returned to prison. He alerted Monsieur Vincent to these two situations, and he replied in a letter, as follows:

I received yesterday the sad but happy news of the passing of Monsieur Nouelly. I shed many tears of regret, but also of thanksgiving for the goodness of God toward our Company for giving us one who loved our Lord so completely and who died such a holy death. How happy you must be that God has chosen you, in preference to so many other persons, for your saintly role. You have become a prisoner of charity, or to say it better, of Jesus Christ. What happiness to suffer for this great monarch, and what a crown awaits you if you persevere until the end.145

In 1650 this same Monsieur Barreau was again imprisoned. This led to the following letter and many other similar ones, which show how Monsieur Vincent looked upon all things in the light of our Lord. He expressed his happiness at seeing how others strove and suffered in imitation of the Lord, for the glory of God and the service of the poor.

I learned with great sorrow the sad state in which you find yourself, and the entire Company shares my sorrow. I am sure this is a source of great merit in the sight of God, since you suffer innocently. I was consoled beyond measure to see with what sentiments you have received this new trial, and the good use you are making of your imprisonment. I thank God, with my heart full of gratitude.

Our Lord came from heaven to earth for the redemption of men, and was imprisoned for them. What happiness for you, Monsieur, to be treated in the same way! You left France, a place of joy and rest, to go help and console the poor slaves of Algiers. And now it has come to pass that you have become like one of them, with some differences, to be sure. The more our conduct reflects what Jesus Christ did in this life, and the more our sufferings resemble his, the more pleasing we are to God. Just as your imprisonment honors heaven, I pray that he will reward your patience, too.

I assure you that your letter has touched me deeply, and I shall use it to inspire the entire community. I have already told them of the persecution you suffer, and the resignation you display, to urge them to pray to God for your quick release from prison, and to thank his divine goodness for the grace of your indomitable spirit.

Continue, Monsieur, to preserve your holy submission to the good pleasure of God. In this way you will see accomplished in

145. CED III:240.
yourself the promise of our Lord that not a hair of your head will be lost, and that by your patience you will possess your soul. Have great confidence in him, and remember what he endured for you in his life and in his death. He said that the servant is not greater than his master, and that if they have persecuted him they will also persecute you. Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice’s sake, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Rejoice then, Monsieur, in him who will be glorified in you, and who shall be your strength, in the degree to which you shall be faithful. This is what I pray for so earnestly.

I beseech you, by the love you have for our Company, to ask of God for us the grace of bearing the cross in all things, great and small, so that we might become worthy children of the cross of his Son, who displayed such love for us on it, and by which we hope to gain eternal happiness. Amen.146

Another letter from this father of missionaries, dated January 15, 1651, predicted the early release of the consul.

Your last letter of the month of October has given us much joy and consolation. It tells us of your unfailing patience, and your acceptance of your present sufferings and of all that God will be pleased to allow in the future. We have already thanked him for giving you such a great grace, and we shall continue to pray fervently for your deliverance. The king has been away from Paris for six or seven months, and since his return we have taken steps to obtain his help.

It was finally decided that he would write to Constantinople to complain of your imprisonment. He will insist that the articles of peace and alliance signed by Henry IV with the sultan in 1604 be observed. This treaty called for the end of raids upon French shipping, and for the release of the slaves. Should this not be done, the king will then threaten reprisals. We will follow this initiative, God willing. It is up to Providence to do the rest, but I hope all will go well if we abandon ourselves to him with confidence and submission, which you do so well, by the help of his grace. Perhaps God will be so good to us as to deliver you from prison quicker than through our contacting Constantinople. Maybe the pasha will relent, or some other change will come about that will produce this happy outcome.147

It seems that God gave Monsieur Vincent a presentiment of what was

146. CED IV:81-82.
147. CED IV:140-41.
going to happen, by what he referred to in the last sentence of his letter, for
the pasha, Murad, learned he was to be succeeded by another named
Mohammed. He preferred to tell the consul that he could buy his way out of
prison, rather than wait to allow his successor to gain the revenue. At the
end of seven months he accepted 350 piastres, which was much less than he
had first demanded.

The letter Monsieur Vincent wrote to him after his release from prison
allows us to gauge his sentiments on the question of suffering and persecu-
tion.

God alone, who knows the depths of the heart, can make you
aware of the joy we felt at the long-awaited news of your deliver-
ance. We have thanked him for this, and for all the other good we
have received from his bounty for such a long time. I gave the news
to your father, who was greatly consoled. I told him, too, of the good
use you had made of your days of captivity. I never think of this
without remembering your meekness, your submission to God, and
your patience in suffering, as most beautiful and admirable. I cannot
tell you, Monsieur, how fortunate you are to have suffered for our
Lord Jesus Christ, who called us to Algiers. In fifteen or twenty
years you will understand better the value of what you have con-
tributed, and you will understand even more when God shall call
you to your reward in heaven. You have reason to appreciate the
time you so religiously spent in prison. As for myself, I look upon
it as an infallible sign that God wishes to lead you to himself, since
he has allowed you to walk in the footsteps of his only Son. May
he be forever blessed, and lead you further in the school of solid
virtue to which sufferings contribute so much, without which even
good servants of God have reason to fear.

I beg his divine bounty, in the lull you now enjoy, to flood your
soul with peace. The storm did not overwhelm you, and I now pray
that the calm may endure for as long as it allows you to fulfill
perfectly God’s designs upon you. In borrowing the one thousand
livres you did nothing that I would disapprove of. I regard this sum
as insignificant when compared with the value of your liberty,
which is more precious to me than anything else.148

The saddest and cruelest of all the persecutions suffered by Monsieur
Barreau happened in 1657, when a merchant of Marseilles went into bank-
ruptcy in Algiers. His creditors complained to the pasha, who contrary to all
reason and justice, obliged the consul to pay the debts of the merchant. He
refused to do so, saying that he had no responsibility to do so, and that, even

if he wanted to, he did not have the means to pay. This inhuman and barbarous tyrant, in violation of the rights of the innocent, decided to try to force his compliance by torments and curses. He forced him to lie on the ground. Then, in keeping with the cruel custom of the country, he had him beaten on the soles of his feet so violently that he fell unconscious. When the pasha saw this he feared the consul would die, so he ordered a stop to the beating. His avarice and barbarity were so great that he threatened him with another torture, placing long needles under his finger nails. The consul, half dead, believing he had the obligation of preserving his life for the service of the poor Christian slaves, finally agreed to pay the full sum demanded of him.

Monsieur Vincent wrote to him after he learned of this latest suffering:

God’s holy name be blessed. He has found you worthy of suffering, and suffering for justice, since, thanks be to God, you had never given any cause for this evil treatment. It is a sign that our Lord wishes to give you a larger share in his passion, since he puts on you the burden of the faults of others. I have no doubt, Monsieur, that in this incident you see the paternal hand of God, wishing to submit to his honor and good pleasure, rather than to the evil will of men, who know not what they do. Thus I hope that this trial will serve to your sanctification. Nothing like this has yet happened to any one of the Company. My hope is that it will attract new graces for the salvation of the neighbor. 149

The consul had committed himself to pay twelve thousand livres to the pasha, but was confined to his house recovering from his torments when four soldiers of the ruler came with the demand for either immediate payment or death. If he did not pay, he was to be brought, directly from his bed, to the presence of the pasha, where he would be killed. This poor man had merely a hundred ecus, much less that what he was being asked to deliver. Not knowing what to do or what to say, he abandoned himself into the hands of God for whatever would be his will, even death itself.

The poor Christian slaves learned of the violence done him, and of the extreme danger that the consul was in of being put to death. They were so moved at it that they did what little was in their power, and brought twenty, thirty, a hundred, or two hundred ecus, to help him pay this unjust ransom, and thus save his life. They had saved these small sums to help them regain their own liberty, should the occasion present itself, but nevertheless, in thanksgiving and in charity they gave freely to help him who had done so much to aid them regain their liberty.

It seemed that God, having seen the affection of these poor slaves in this

149. CED VI:322.
instance, had revived in them the spirit of the first Christians. They had brought their goods with such devotion to the feet of the apostles to feed and help the poor. They collected so much that the consul was set free. When Monsieur Vincent heard of this, and realized that the money they had offered so willingly had been saved for their own ransom, he sought alms and gifts from friends to send back to Algiers to be given to the slaves, who themselves were ransomed later.

God blessed the charity of those who had preferred the deliverance of the consul to their own liberty. They later returned happily to France in 1661, accompanied by Monsieur Barreau, because at the request of the successor to Monsieur Vincent as superior general of the Congregation, the king had sent a replacement as consul to Algiers. Monsieur Barreau brought back seventy slaves with him, who had been ransomed by alms collected by Monsieur Le Vacher and himself for this purpose.

PART FOUR

Other Vexations of the Missionaries in Tunis

Although the missionaries at Tunis were not treated so inhumanly as those in Algiers, they also had to drink from the chalice of Jesus Christ and carry some small portion of his cross. In 1655 a false report reached the dey. He summoned Monsieur Le Vacher to complain that he was preventing Christians from embracing the law of Mohammed and becoming Moslems. For this he was to be banished from the city, and prohibited from returning. Obedient to this order, the good priest left to go to Bizerte. It seemed that God's providence had directed him there, for on his arrival he found two ships crowded with Christian slaves, whom he prepared for the sacrament of penance. The captain of the ships allowed these slaves to be unchained, at least for a while, during these functions.

When Monsieur Vincent reported this to his community, he made this reflection: "Who knows, gentlemen, if this was not in the designs of God to allow this disgrace to befall Monsieur Le Vacher, to give him the opportunity to serve these poor Christian slaves, and restore them to grace?" He added that Monsieur Husson, the consul, remonstrated with the dey, pointing out that the missionary served only the Christian slaves, and that he never interfered with the Moslem religion. He requested that the priest be recalled, and this was granted. The dey ordered the governor of Bizerte to send him back to Tunis in a month's time, knowing well he would be thought of as fickle for having exiled a person for such a charge if he were to come back sooner.

150. CED XI:306.
But neither this good missionary nor the consul were to enjoy peace for long. Another storm soon broke that involved both of them. This is the way Monsieur Vincent reported it to his community:

I have already told you how the dey of Tunis wanted the consul to go to the sail makers of France to obtain some sailcloth. The consul excused himself from this commission. It not only was against the laws of the kingdom, but it had been expressly forbidden by bulls of the Apostolic See, under pain of excommunication, to export to the Moslems any war material that might be used against the Christians. Seeing himself thwarted, the dey had recourse to a merchant from Marseilles, based in Barbary, who agreed, despite the protests of the consul. He pointed out the disservice to God and to the Christians, as well as the harm to himself, not to mention the punishment he would merit if the king of France ever got word of his actions. Since these warnings had no effect, the consul drew up an account of the affair, and sent it here to France. The king gave orders to officials of all the ports of Provence and Languedoc to be especially careful of any contraband destined for Barbary. This action came to the attention of the dey, who once more became exasperated with the consul and with the missionary.

He decided to use the “affront” against them, a technique for demanding money in a sort of extortion. He summoned Monsieur Le Vacher, and said to him, “I want you to pay me the 275 piastres owed me by the Chevalier de la Ferriere. You belong to a religion where things both good and bad are held in common, so I come to you for payment.” Monsieur Le Vacher explained that Christians are not responsible for the debts of others, and he should not and could not be expected to pay the debts of a Knight of Malta and a merchant captain, such as this gentleman, de la Ferriere. He explained that he had scarcely enough to live on. He was a marabout of the Christians (that is, a simple priest, in their way of speaking) who had come to Tunis expressly to help the poor slaves. “Say what you will,” the dey said, “I will be paid.” With that he used various measures against him to compel him to pay this money. This was only the beginning of the story, for if God did not change the heart of the dey he would surely have resorted to harsher treatment very shortly. We may say that the consul and the priest now began to be more truly Christians, as they began to share in the sufferings of Christ, as was remarked by the martyr Saint Ignatius of Antioch, when threatened with martyrdom.

And we, my brothers, we will become disciples of Jesus Christ
when we have the grace to endure persecution or some wrong for
the sake of his name. The world will rejoice, the Gospel for today
says. Yes, the people of this world will seek their own pleasures,
and strive to avoid anything that contradicts their natural impulses.
God grant that I, miserable man that I am, will not do the same, and
will not be among those who seek sweetness and consolations in
the service of Jesus Christ, rather than accepting tribulations and
the cross. If it comes to that, I surely will not be a Christian. To
become one, God will provide the opportunity for suffering, and
will send it to me when he wills. We must all have this disposition
if we wish to be true servants of Jesus Christ.\footnote{151}

Some time after this, the dey, who had always retained resentment in his
heart for the refusal of the consul, Monsieur Husson, to obtain sailcloth from
France, found a new pretext to persecute him. In 1657 thirteen Moslems had
been captured at sea by ships of the grand duke of Florence, and had been
taken to Livorno.\footnote{152} When the dey heard of this, he called Monsieur Husson,
and demanded the return of the prisoners. When he replied that such a request
was beyond his power, since the Moslems were in the hands of an inde­
pendent prince with no connection with the consul, the dey was overcome
with rage. Refusing to listen to reason, the dey banished him from the city
of Tunis. It seemed that the same treatment would be given to the mission­
aries, but it pleased God to move his heart to allow them to stay, to continue
their ministry of charity and religion. Some time later the dey even allowed
Monsieur Le Vacher to become consul once again, because of what he had
done for the poor slaves.

**PART FIVE**

*An Account Given by Monsieur Vincent to His Community of the*
*Martyrdom of a Young Christian Burned to Death in Algiers for His*
*Faith in Jesus Christ.*

All the acts of virtue and piety practiced by the Christian slaves might
well be considered as fruits of the missions given for them under the direction
of Monsieur Vincent. They were the effect of the instructions, preaching,
and other works of charity of the missionaries. The word of God announced
among them was a seed sown in their hearts, awaiting the hour of grace,
when it would bear fruit worthy of eternal life.

Among all the various activities undertaken for the slaves, one stands out
as heroic. One day, Monsieur Vincent recounted it to his community at Saint

\footnote{151. CED XI:333-35.}
\footnote{152. CED VI:340.}
Lazare in few words, but in a way that showed the zeal that ever burned in his heart.

I cannot begin to tell you how touched I was by the accounts of the death of this young man, who, as I told you before, was put to death in the city of Algiers. His name was Pedro Bourgoin. He was born on the island of Majorca, and was twenty or twenty-one years old. His master planned to sell him into service on the galleys of Constantinople, from which there was little hope of ever getting out alive. In his fear he went to the pasha to ask him to have pity on him, and not allow him to be sent to the galleys. The pasha agreed, but on condition that he accept the turban as a sign of his accepting Islam. He used all possible persuasions, adding threats to promises, until he finally persuaded the young man to become a renegade.

This poor boy nevertheless preserved in his heart sentiments of love and respect for his religion, but fell into his apostasy by fear of the cruel slavery that awaited him if he did not defect. He let it be known to some of the Christian slaves who reproached him, that although he outwardly appeared to be a Moslem, he inwardly remained a Christian. Little by little, as he reflected on the great sin he had committed by renouncing his religion, he was touched by a spirit of repentance. Since he could not expiate it except by his death, he chose to die rather than enjoy a long life as an infidel. After he spoke of his intentions to some of his intimate friends, he began to speak openly before many Christians and some Moslems of his preference for the Christian religion and his disregard for Islam. He lived in fear of the cruelty of these barbarians, and trembled at the thought of what he might have to endure for his faith. "All the same", he said, "my hope is that the Lord will help me. He died for me, and it is only just I should die for him."

Moved by remorse, and with the hope of repairing the scandal he had given, he sought out the pasha to say to him: "You seduced me in making me give up my religion, which is the one and only true one, to join yours, which is false. I now declare to you that I am a Christian, and as a sign of my belief I reject the turban you gave me, and I throw it to the ground." He added, "I know you can put me to death, but that does not bother me. I am prepared to suffer torments for Jesus Christ my savior."

The pasha was so angry at these words that he immediately condemned him to be burned alive. He was stripped, and then with a chain around his neck he was laden with a large stake, to go to the

153. Also known as Borguni, or, more properly, Bouruny.
place of execution. As he left the pasha's house he saw it surrounded by Moslems, renegades, and even some Christians. He raised his voice and said, "Long live Jesus Christ, and the Catholic, apostolic, and Roman faith. There is no other in which we can be saved!" As he said this, he went courageously to the fire to die for the faith of Jesus Christ.

What moved me most is what this brave young man said to his friends. "As much as I fear death, I feel something here (putting his hand to his forehead) that tells me that God will give me the grace to endure the torments prepared for me. Our Lord himself dreaded death, and yet he voluntarily accepted the greatest sufferings. My hope is in his strength and goodness." He was bound to the stake, the fire was lit, and he gave his soul to God like gold refined in the crucible. Monsieur Le Vacher was present, though at a distance. He lifted the excommunication that the former renegade had incurred, and gave him absolution at an agreed-upon sign, in the midst of his sufferings.

Here, gentlemen, is the way a Christian is made. Here is the courage we must have to suffer, and even die if necessary for Jesus Christ. Ask this grace of God, and pray to this young man to intercede for us. He was such an apt pupil of so courageous a teacher, that in three short hours he became his true disciple and perfect imitator by dying for him.

Courage, gentlemen and my brothers. We hope that our Lord will strengthen us to bear whatever crosses he sends us, if he sees that we accept them with love and confidence in him. We say to whatever ills that should come, to interior or exterior pains, temptations, and to death itself, Welcome heavenly favors, graces of God and holy trials, that come from a paternal and loving hand! I receive you with respect, submission, and confidence in him who sent you. I accept what you bring, for love of him. Gentlemen and my brothers, enter into these sentiments, trusting as this new martyr did, in the help of our Lord. We ask you to recommend to him, please, these good missionaries of Algiers and Tunis.

This conference of Monsieur Vincent reveals well his guiding spirit, and how much he wanted to instill this same mind in his confreres, this spirit which is none other than the spirit of martyrdom. He wanted to fortify them from the attacks of the world and of hell, and even against the movements of their own nature, to make them worthy of the self-renunciation of carrying their own cross, walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

154. Philippe Le Vacher, brother of Jean Le Vacher. He was vicar apostolic of Algiers, 1651-1662.
After the fire had burned itself out, Monsieur Le Vacher went in full daylight to retrieve the body of the young man, to give it a decent burial. He wrote an account of the martyrdom, and had a painting made of it. He brought the painting to Monsieur Vincent on his return to Paris in 1657. He brought with him the remains of the martyr, burned to death for the faith, as one of the most excellent fruits that the grace of God began to produce in these barbarous and infidel lands.

PART SIX

Various Directives Given by Monsieur Vincent to the Missionaries of Barbary Regarding Their Personal Behavior and Their Way of Acting Among the Infidels.

The mortal hatred which the Moslems bore the Christians was so strong that they believed it was enough that they should kill a Christian to gain an assured place in paradise. All the same, our Lord had permitted almost eighteen years of service by the priests of the Congregation of the Mission in Algiers and Tunis without the loss of a single one. This happened despite their frequent failure to observe the law that forbade anyone, under pain of death, to speak against their religion, or to aid those who wanted to abandon it in any way. They did not feel obliged to heed this unjust prohibition when it was a question of serving Jesus Christ and obtaining the salvation of souls redeemed by his blood.

It is true that they lived in such modesty, prudence, and charity, following the directives of Monsieur Vincent, that not only did the Moslems spare their lives, but several among them willingly witnessed to their virtuous lives. For example, the local ruler of Tunis one day met a missionary whom he often saw coming and going in the city and surrounding areas, on his rounds aiding and helping the poor Christian slaves. He turned to his entourage to remark, pointing to the priest, "There goes a true papa." On another occasion when this same priest sought permission to leave the city to visit and help some poor Christians, he was given leave to go wherever he pleased. On still another occasion the ruler provided one of his officers to accompany him to a distant place where it was dangerous to travel alone.

Monsieur Vincent also recommended that they act always with great moderation and discretion, not exposing themselves needlessly to danger for fear lest in seeking an apparent good they would lose the opportunity for real ones. This is what he wrote on this matter to one of his priests in Barbary, whose zeal was ardent but who needed a rein more than a spur.\textsuperscript{156} This letter

\textsuperscript{156} Philippe Le Vacher.
contained several important pieces of advice, and served as a model for others he later wrote.

I praise God for the appropriate way you have acted in having yourself recognized as the apostolic missionary\footnote{A formal title formerly given to missionary priests by the Holy See, granting them special authority in mission areas.} and vicar general of the archdiocese of Carthage. If you have acted wisely in this, you must now carry out this task even more prudently. You must be careful not to lash out against certain abuses, if you can foresee that this will lead to still greater ones. Seek to attain your goals with the priests and enslaved religious, merchants and other captives, by mild measures. Never use severity except in cases of extreme necessity, for fear that all they already suffer in their captivity, joined to the rigor you might show because of your authority, will lead them to despair. You are not responsible for their salvation, as you may think. You were sent to Algiers to console afflicted souls, to encourage them in their sufferings, and to help them in persevering in our holy religion. That work is your chief duty, and not your office as vicar general, which you accepted only as a means to take care of those primary obligations.

You cannot be rigorous in exercising your office without increasing the suffering of these poor slaves, and without making them lose patience, not to mention that you yourself will also lose patience. Above all, you must not attempt to reform things long established among them, even if they are evil.

Recently, someone showed me a beautiful passage from Saint Augustine. In it he says we must be careful about opposing a deeply rooted vice in a certain place, because not only will you not be able to drive it out, but you will shock the minds of the people in whom the evil is found. As a result, you will make it impossible for yourself to do any further good for them. You should be able to accomplish something, if you were to attack the problem from another angle. I would ask you, therefore, to consider as much as you can the weakness of human nature. You will gain more from the ecclesiastical slaves by compassion than you ever would by rebuke and correction. They do not lack understanding. They are weak, and you will remedy their weakness by kind words and good example.

I do not say that you ought to authorize or permit disorders, but I do say that your remedies must be mild and kind in whatever condition you find yourself. These remedies must be applied with
great prudence because of the site and conditions of your ministry, and because of the harm they might do if they are unhappy with you. They could also harm the consul, and God’s work, as well, by complaining to the Moslems, who would never want to hear from you again.

You must avoid another pitfall among the Moslems and renegades. In the name of our Lord, have nothing to do with these people. Do not expose yourself to the dangers that might ensue, for in exposing yourself to these dangers you risk everything. You would do great harm to the Christian slaves if you acted so as to take away all possibility of helping them. You might slam the door for the future on the liberty we now have of doing some good for them in Algiers and elsewhere. Look at the evil that you might cause in seeking an apparent good. It is far easier and more important to prevent the loss of many slaves than to convert a single renegade. A doctor who protects the health of a group deserves more praise than the one who cures a single sick person. You are not responsible for the souls of the Moslems and the renegades, and your mission is not to them, but to the poor Christian captives. If for some good reason you find it necessary to deal with the people of the country, do not do so, I beg of you, except in concert with the consul, whose advice I ask you to follow, as closely as you can.

We have much reason to thank God for the zeal you have for the salvation of these poor slaves, but zeal is not good if it is not tactful. It seems that you have attempted too many new projects, such as giving a mission at the penal colonies, or wanting to move there, or introducing new devotional practices among these poor people. That is why I ask you to follow the customs of our deceased priests who preceded you.

It often happens that we spoil our good works by proceeding too quickly. When we act according to our inclinations, these hinder our mind and spirit because they rely on human reason. Things don’t work this way, and this becomes obvious when in the end such haste does not succeed. The good that comes from God comes almost of itself, without our even thinking of it. Remember how our Congregation came into being, how the missions, the clergy conferences and the ordination retreats began. Remember how the Ladies and Daughters of Charity were founded for the help of the poor in the hospitals of Paris for the relief of the sick in the parishes, for the relief of the abandoned children, and all the other works we are responsible for. All these things came into being, and not one
was planned by us. God, who willed these things, imperceptibly led us to follow his inspirations. This is why we must always follow, never pushing ahead any more than we did when we began these enterprises. O God, Monsieur, how much do I wish that you would moderate your enthusiasm, and weigh these things at the foot of the sanctuary before taking action. Be patient rather than agitated, and God will accomplish through you alone more than what many men together, acting without him, could ever accomplish.\textsuperscript{158}

**PART SEVEN**

*Various Employments and Sufferings of the Poor Christian Slaves in Barbary, and the Help and Services Rendered Them by the Missionaries*

To understand better the help which the missionaries of Monsieur Vincent gave to the Christian slaves in Barbary, we should be aware of the inhuman ways they were treated by the Turks, the exhausting work they had to do, and the excessive pressures brought to induce them to abandon the faith of Jesus Christ, and to embrace Islam.

At sea, the pirates of Tunis and Algiers captured Christians from all parts of the world. They took men and women of all ages and condition to be brought back to these two cities for sale as slaves. These captives were brought to the market like beasts. Since so many were captured, the Moslems in Barbary had a great number of slaves, who lived in places they called Bagnes.\textsuperscript{159} In Tunis and Bizerte the slaves were chained together, and guarded day and night, but in Algiers they were chained only during the night.

Imagine huge stables, each housing two hundred, three hundred, or even four hundred horses. This gives you some idea of the places where the Christians lived. The difference is, however, that horses are much better fed and cared for than the slaves. They lived in filth, misery, and total abandonment, mainly because of their religion, which the Moslems detested. Besides, having to depend on the whim or ill humor of their owner or of the guards, the slaves were beaten unmercifully, sometimes fatally, or crippled for the rest of their lives.

These poor slaves left these places only to go to work in the fields or to other hard labors, or possibly to serve in the galleys or join the crews of some other vessels that were so often at war with the Christians. They suffered all sorts of hardships, fatigue, blows, contempt, and unbearable pains. As a rule

\textsuperscript{158} CED IV:120-23.
\textsuperscript{159} Penal colonies.
they rowed or worked completely nude, except for a loincloth, exposed to
the burning sun in summer and to the cold in winter. When they returned
entirely exhausted from their labors, half-dead, they were returned like
beasts to their stables, not to rest, but rather to languish.

Monsieur Guerin, priest of the Mission, wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

We expect a large number of sick upon the return of the galleys.
If these poor people have suffered so greatly at sea, those who
remained behind have had their own troubles. They have had to
work all day in the hot sun, cutting marble. The best comparison I
can give for their work is that it is like a heated furnace. It is
astonishing to see both the work and the heat they endure, enough
to kill a horse. Yet these Christians endure both, losing only their
skin to the sun and heat. You can see them with their tongues
hanging out like poor dogs, because of the terrific heat in which
they work.

One day in winter an older poor slave felt sick and unable to
work. He asked to be excused, but the only response he received
was to be forced to work at splitting stone. I leave it to you to
imagine how these cruelties moved me and caused me such sorrow.
These poor slaves suffer these ills with an unbelievable patience,
and they bless God even amid all the cruelties visited upon them. I
must tell you that the French bear these things better than peoples
of other nations. We have two very sick persons at the moment, who
look like they will not recover. We administered all the sacraments
to them. Last week two others died as true Christians, of whom it
could be said, pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum ejus
["Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful
ones"].

My compassion for these poor people who work at cutting the
marble leads me to bring what small refreshments I can, especially
to those who are sick. Some others, who are not so badly treated,
stay in the homes of their masters. They serve various functions,
such as baking bread, taking care of commercial correspondence,
preparing meals, or other household work. Some others are given
assignments out of the house. Others are even free to work at
whatever they like. They pay their patron a certain amount each
month from what they manage to save from what they earn.

Besides the slaves in the cities, a large number lived in the countryside.
Some passed their entire lives here, never coming into the cities. They

160. Ps 116:15.
worked as farmers or woodcutters. They made charcoal, or hauled stone from the quarries, or worked at other similar occupations. After working hard all day they were usually locked up for the night. We have described all these various situations concerning the slaves to give the reader a better understanding of the work of the missionaries in Barbary.

In the cities of Algiers, Tunis, and Bizerte, there were about twenty-five penal colonies. In each of them was a sort of small chapel, where amid their sufferings and pain these poor Christian captives might have the happiness of hearing mass and receiving the sacraments. One of the priests of the Mission there wrote in a letter:

In this arrangement, we see the hand of Providence and the goodness of God. He has changed their prisons into churches to give the suffering members of Jesus Christ a way of persevering in the truth of the faith through the free exercise of all the sacraments. In these chapels the divine Savior himself has become a slave with the slaves, for each time mass is celebrated the sacred species are preserved. In this way, the truth of the words are borne out by which he promised to be with the faithful in their troubles: *Cum ipso sum in tribulatione* ["I will be with him in distress"].\(^{162}\)

Among the large number of slaves, some captive priests and religious were always to be found. The missionaries interceded with their masters asking that they not be given manual labor, nor be chained. They backed up their request with monthly payments. As vicars general of the archdiocese of Carthage they then appointed these priests as chaplains in the penal colonies, watched over their conduct, corrected them, transferred them or removed them from their office as it appeared necessary. This was one of the greatest of the blessings Monsieur Vincent had brought to this place, for previous to the coming of the Missionaries all was in disorder and confusion. The slaves contributed what they could, some more, some less, for the support of these chaplains, and for lighting and furnishing the chapels. This was done freely on their part, out of personal devotion, without constraint, and there were many totally unable to give anything, since they owned nothing save the bit of black bread given them each day for their sustenance.

Besides the chapels in the penal colonies, other chapels in the houses of the consuls served as the parishes of the Christian merchants, those who came on business to these cities, and for those resident there. The consuls and the Missionaries staffed, decorated, and maintained these chapels. The one at Algiers was under the patronage of Saint Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and the one at Tunis was dedicated to Saint Louis, king of France, whose death sanctified this land and this infidel city. The feasts of these saints were

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162. Ps 91:15.
celebrated with all possible solemnity, as were the main feasts of the year, to the great edification of all Christians who lived there.

Who can say how consoling it was for Monsieur Vincent to receive letters written from Algiers and Tunis, relating that the divine services were performed there with a solemnity rivaling that of Paris itself. High mass and the divine offices were celebrated on Sundays and feasts. Various organizations were established, and confraternities started in each of these churches and chapels to relieve the souls in purgatory or to help the poor slaves, or to honor particular saints on their feast days. The holy Mother of God was especially honored by confraternities of the rosary or scapular, with sermons and processions on appropriate days. In the churches and chapels of the missionaries the blessed sacrament, marked by lighted candles, was reserved day and night. The blessed sacrament was brought to the sick in the penal colonies with torches and candles, while other marks of respect were shown to this holy sacrament. Every year on the feast of Corpus Christi and during its octave, the blessed sacrament was exposed, and carried in procession in the chapels and churches, with all the attendants carrying candles in their hands.

It is a common belief among the saints that our sufferings erect a throne to the mercy of God. We might add that the miseries of these poor captives not only erected this throne, but another as well to the charity and holiness of the sons of God in these barbarous lands that they might say with the psalmist: “Triumph, O Lord, amidst your enemies.” Certainly, the Lord would not now be adored in these infidel lands, if Providence had not allowed Christian slaves to be taken, and the priests of Monsieur Vincent to be sent to them as their missionaries.

Monsieur Guerin added another remarkable point in the letter to Monsieur Vincent:

You will be pleased to learn that on every Sunday and feast day, we sing in our chapels and churches the *Exaudiat* and other prayers for the king of France. Even the other nationals have respect and affection for him.  

It is edifying, too, to see with what devotion these poor captives pray for their benefactors, who for the most part are in France. It is no small consolation to see peoples from all countries, in irons and chains, praying to God for the French.  

Besides all the services given by the missionaries to the Christian slaves,
by their preaching, instructions, administration of the sacraments, celebration of the divine office, and other such daily ministrations, another service was provided, no less important for their salvation. This was the consolation they offered these poor slaves in their sufferings, and the effort to soften the resentment felt because of the barbarous treatment they received, which led them to come within an inch of despair. This despair in turn brought some to the decision to put an end to their sufferings and unhappy lot by taking their own lives. Some cut their throats, some hanged themselves, some slashed their wrists. Others in fury attacked their masters, with the penalty of being burned alive for their troubles. Still others sought relief in denying their faith in Jesus Christ, incurring eternal damnation in their efforts to escape temporal sufferings.

It was an important duty of the priests of the Mission in Barbary to console these poor afflicted souls in every way possible. They encouraged them to make a good use of the sufferings they endured, and provided whatever aid was possible for them. The all too numerous sick were visited and helped. In keeping with the spirit of Monsieur Vincent, those who received the greatest attention were those who were the most abandoned.

PART EIGHT
Continuation of the Same Topic

The power of virtue to move even enemies to admiration and love is so great that the charity which the missionaries extended to the poor slaves attracted the attention, esteem and veneration of even many Moslems. This gave the missionaries the liberty to go into the houses where the slaves lived, or into the places where they worked. Since at first there was considerable opposition, one of the Missionaries used an artifice suggested by his charity. When there was sick slave in a place closed to him, he would first send a Christian pharmacist to visit. This man would report to the master that he could no thing until the doctor had visited. The priest would assume the guise of a doctor. In this disguise he would visit the place where the sick were, to speak with them, hear their confessions, administer the sacraments even in the presence of the masters who would not understand what was going on. They thought that these religious rites were part of the medical art.

The way the blessed sacrament was carried to these poor slaves was for the priest to place it in a small silver gilt box, which in turn was put in a silk purse hung about the neck. A small stole was sewn into the cassock, and then covered and hidden by a cloak. A Christian would walk ahead, carrying under his mantle or hood a lighted candle in a small lantern, a bit of blessed water in a tiny bottle, a folded surplice, a ritual, a tiny corporal and a
purificator. The priest and companion would greet no one along the way. This gave a signal by which the Christians would understand what they were doing. If they were free they would follow the priest, as their devotion suggested. In the city of Algiers, it is true, the Christian slaves would not follow the priest carrying the blessed sacrament, for fear of the unhappy consequences that might follow. A single priest in a penal colony of Algiers once gave communion to sixty sick slaves, after he heard their confessions, and a similar thing happened on several other occasions.

Another concern of the Missionaries was to preserve among the poor slaves a spirit of peace and union, a true mark and distinguishing mark of Christianity. To our shame we have to admit that the Moslems sometimes taught us a lesson in this. Monsieur Guerin wrote in a letter to Monsieur Vincent:

I must not hesitate to tell you what a Moslem told me recently, of his impressions of some badly disposed Christians. I was attempting to reconcile two Christians who were at odds. As this Moslem saw that I was having difficulty persuading them, he spoke to me in his own language, "Father, among us Moslems, we are not allowed to remain angry with one another longer than three days, even though the other might have killed one of our close relatives." I have seen this often enough among them. After fighting one another they would quickly come to terms, embracing each other in friendship.

I cannot say if this reconciliation is purely exterior or not, but for Christians there is no doubt these infidels will hate them until the day of judgment, resisting any reconciliation, either exterior or interior. They retain this hatred in their hearts, boasting of it, and they glory in the vengeance they have taken or wish to take on their enemies. Nevertheless, these people we call barbarians look upon it as a great shame if they hold hatred in their hearts against any of their own, or if they refuse to be reconciled with anyone who had done them evil.166

Besides what has already been said, several other extraordinary occasions arose in which it seemed that God wished to pour out his grace more abundantly upon these poor slaves. This was especially noticed at the time of some special jubilee, or at the celebration of the Forty Hours. On these occasions the priests of the Mission did not spare themselves in their service to the captives. Sometimes they would pass the entire night in the penal colonies for confessions, since there was no other time that this could be done. The masters would not allow the slaves to take time from their work during the day.

It happened once that a priest went six or seven nights without sleep. The

consul alerted Monsieur Vincent, who gave directives to the priest to moderate his zeal lest he succumb. Another occasion of grace was when the priests of the Mission would urge the captives to make their general confession. Most of them did so, with signs of true repentance. At this special time of grace, the most hardened sinners would recognize their miserable state and turn to God after being away ten, twenty, thirty years or more, from confession. At these times of mercy and pardon many renegades from various nations, French, Italians, or Spaniards, would decide to renounce their apostasy and return to the Church. In order to effect this renunciation, it was necessary to escape to their native land, but this could be done only at great peril to their very lives.

Because of God's blessing and the instruction and exhortation of the priests of the Mission some of these Christian slaves, after their general confession, began to lead a truly Christian life, and to practice extraordinary virtue. They preserved an inviolate fidelity to Jesus Christ amid the most severe persecution, and suffered cruel torments with a marvelous constancy, even to death itself, rather than offend God by sin. Two examples of this may be given. Monsieur Guerin reported the first in a letter to Monsieur Vincent, in August 1646:

I must tell you that on the feast of Saint Anne, a second Joseph was sacrificed in this city of Tunis for the preservation of the virtue of chastity. He resisted the lewd suggestions of his mistress for over a year, but received horrible beatings when this she-wolf falsely accused him. He finally gained his victory by dying for refusing to offend God's law. He was heavily chained for three days. During that time I was able to visit him, to console him, and to exhort him to suffer all possible torments rather than fail in the fidelity he owed to God. He confessed and communicated, and then said to me, "Monsieur, no matter what they do to me, I wish to die as a Christian." When they led him to his execution, I again heard his confession, and I had the consolation of attending his sacrifice, although this is usually never permitted by these barbarians. The last words he spoke, in raising his eyes to heaven, were: "O God, I die innocent." He died courageously, giving no sign of impatience at the cruel sufferings he had to endure. We managed to give him honorable burial.

His wicked and lewd mistress did not long enjoy her crime. When the master of the house came back from a business trip, he strangled her in a fit of rage. This saintly young man was Portuguese by birth, and was twenty-two years old. I invoke his help. As he loved us in life, I hope he will continue to do so in heaven.\footnote{CED III:14-15.
The other example happened in the city of Algiers, where a young slave was solicited to commit an unmentionable sin by his master, but refused courageously. In the act of defending himself from the master’s anger, he struck him in the face, which enraged his master exceedingly. This slave was then charged in front of a judge of attempting to kill his owner. Instead of the master being punished for his cruelty, as he deserved, the slave was condemned to be burned alive. He suffered this cruel death as a valiant Christian.

PART NINE

Help Given to the Poor Slaves of Bizerte and of Several Other Places

The priests of the Congregation of the Mission had been sent by their superior general, Monsieur Vincent, to help and serve the poor slaves in Barbary. They did not limit their charity to the cities of Algiers and Tunis, although the number of slaves there gave them ample occasion to exercise their zeal. They extended their care to all places where the poor captives languished in irons, and were in need of their services. This led Monsieur le Vacher, who ordinarily lived in Tunis, to go as far as Bizerte, a port city about ten or twelve leagues away, with five penal colonies of slaves, to offer consolation and services helpful for their salvation. Here is what he wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

Slavery is so evil that it causes many other evils. Among the slaves here, besides the ones in the penal colonies, I found forty locked up in a small stable, so small and crowded that they could hardly move. The only air comes from a small window, covered with an iron grill, located high up in the wall. The slaves are chained two by two, and permanently locked up. Yet they have to work at grinding wheat with a hand mill. Their quota is beyond what their strength allows. These poor people in truth are fed with the bread of sorrow, and can say that they eat by the sweat of their brow, in a place so stuffy, and at work so demanding.

Shortly after I began my visit I heard the confused cries of women and children, mingled with groans and tears. I raised my eyes to the tiny window to see five poor young Christian women slaves. Three of them had small children with them, and they were all in desperate condition. They had heard the noise of greetings to me when I had come to visit the men, and had rushed to the window to see what was afoot. When they realized I was a priest, their sad state moved them to break down in cries and tears. They asked to share in the consolation I had attempted to bring to the men in their prison.
I must admit that I was almost overcome with sorrow at the sight of these poor slaves loaded with chains, and at the lamentations of these poor women, mingled with the cries of their innocent children. The youngest of these women had been greatly persecuted by her owner, who sought to have her deny her faith in Jesus Christ so that he could marry her. Oh, that a small fraction of the enormous sums spent by Christians on superfluous vanities and delicacies could be used to relieve these poor souls from their grievous sufferings. Aided by God’s grace, I attempted to help these poor men and women as much as lay in my meager power. We live in a country where we have to pay large amounts just for permission to do good for the unfortunate. To get authorization just to speak to the slaves, you have to pay off their masters, as you must also do to have the slaves on the galleys unchained when they are preparing to leave port. I attempt to take the slaves, one crew at a time, to the penal colonies, to give them an opportunity to go to confession, hear mass, and receive communion. By God’s mercy this has been quite successful.  

In another letter, written by this same priest, he said:

Two galleys left port yesterday, each carrying more than five hundred Christian slaves. By the grace of God all had been given the sacraments. How sad that day was, and how many blows were rained upon their backs by those infamous renegades in charge of the crews! I know the convicts in the galleys of France are not treated any better, but at least these convicts suffer for their crimes, while the Christian slaves of Barbary suffer solely because they are Christian and faithful to God. On the day these poor people received communion and were returned to the galleys, I was able to provide a slight celebration, at which I provided two steers, and five hundred loaves of bread. Besides, I was also able to give each galley a hundredweight of white bread, to be given to any among them who would fall sick during their time at sea.

From there I went to visit the slaves at Sidi Regeppe. I found them unchained, in keeping with the promise their master had made to me the last time I was here. I found six young men among them, aged sixteen to eighteen years, who had been slaves for the past four or five years. Since they were not allowed out of the house, they had not been able to receive the sacraments as the others had. After preparing them, I heard their confessions. Then I asked them to prepare their poor dwelling as decently as they could, for I would

come back the next day with the blessed sacrament, as I would usually do in bringing communion to the sick. The next day, in fact, I celebrated mass in the penal colony in the chapel of the Annunciation. Then, accompanied by all the Christians I met in the streets of Bizerte, I sought out these poor slaves. O God, with what tenderness and devotion these young men received their Lord. The tears of joy and consolation which filled their eyes caused all present to weep also, not from their own miseries, but from their happiness. I heard the confession and gave communion to a seventh young man, who fell ill the next evening. I gave him the sacrament of extreme unction, but he died soon after. I used the remainder of my time in the service of the sick in the penal colonies.169

This is how the King of Glory, Jesus Christ, made use of the missionaries. He came himself, with unbounded charity, to visit, console, and vivify the souls redeemed by his blood. They were sought out even in the darkest prisons where they lived in the shadow of death. It was not an insignificant favor that he had inspired Vincent de Paul as the instrument of his mercy and grace in favor of these poor slaves. To him, after God, they owed all the consolation, aid, and helps for salvation given by the missionaries of his Congregation.

Monsieur Guerin, another of the priests of the mission, visited the same place, and gave a report to Monsieur Vincent of his trip to Bizerte, in a letter of 1647.

I was advised on Easter Sunday that a galley had just come from Algiers to Bizerte. At once I set off to visit the poor chained Christians, numbering about three hundred. The captain allowed me to conduct a sort of mission for ten days. I had another priest with me who helped with catechizing and hearing confessions. We managed to help all, except for several Greek schismatics. O great God, what consolation to see the devotion of these poor captives, most of whom had not been able to receive the sacrament of penance for many years. Among them were some who had not confessed for eight, ten, or even twenty years. I was able to have them unchained while I took them to a place apart to receive communion, after celebrating holy mass. After the mission I treated them to a small celebration, ending by giving them fifty-three ecus worth of foodstuffs.

During the time of the mission I stayed in the house of a Moslem, who would not take any payment for my stay. He said, "We must be kind to those who are kind to others," which is a remarkable

169. *CED IV*:443-44.
statement, coming from an infidel. What would amaze you even more is that almost all the Moslems of the locality were so taken and edified at the mission that some showed marks of respect to me, and kissed my hand. I have no doubt your heart would have been filled with joy at the sight. If the fruit of this mission of Bizerte was sweet, the road to it was difficult enough. I did not want to take a military escort in coming here, but I was waylaid by some Arabs who beat me. One of them took me by the throat so violently that I thought he was going to strangle me. Since I am such a miserable sinner, our Lord did not judge me worthy to die in his service.\textsuperscript{170}

Besides the slaves in the cities of Algiers, Tunis, and Bizerte, some were kept in country places because of their work. Some of these would from time to time come to the cities, where they would manage to receive the sacraments, but others never came, or only very rarely. These, too, the missionaries attempted to visit, in the wild and deserted places where the slaves worked, often enough at very difficult tasks. The Missionaries of Tunis, particularly, were active in going into the country. They would visit what they called the Maceries (the work places and habitations in which they live), in Perriere, Cantara, Courombaille, Gaudiene with its seven streams, Tabourne, Morlochia, Hamphya and Mamedia. Their places are three, six, eight, ten or twelve leagues from Tunis, and some are in high and arid mountainous regions, more suited to the native lions than to humans.

On the first such trip made by Monsieur Le Vacher, he came upon some Christians who had not been to the sacraments for twelve, fifteen, or eighteen years. Some had lost nearly all remembrance of Christianity by being deprived for so long of any of the practices of our religion. Here is what he wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

\begin{quote}
By giving some money to the owners or guardians of these poor slaves, I was able to bring them together for instruction and the sacraments, and by God's grace I was able to confirm them in the faith. Once I had selected the most decent place I could find, I celebrated mass, at which all communicated. Every one of these poor slaves was filled with the consolation it pleased God to bestow, amid the misery of their captivity, which is beyond the imagination of persons who live in freedom. The joy and consolation they experience in their pains could only be the gift of the grace of God. I embraced all, and to give them some small token of my esteem, I provided a celebration for them, as much as my poverty would permit. Besides that, I gave each of the very poorest a quarter \textit{piastre}.\textsuperscript{171}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{CED} III:196.
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{CED} III:358.
\end{flushright}
The paternal heart of Monsieur Vincent filled with joy upon receipt of such accounts. He could see his spiritual sons animated with the spirit of the good shepherd of the Gospel, seeking lost sheep in the most remote places, in bringing them back, in a way of speaking, in their arms and upon their own shoulders, to Jesus Christ, their true shepherd. What consolation for him to learn that his missionaries had rescued some of these poor slaves from the deplorable lapse into apostasy brought on by their despair, and had treated them with mildness and charity. Many recognized their fault, and regretted deeply their infidelity to God. They tearfully threw themselves at the feet of the missionaries, accepting the penance given them for their sin. It is impossible to express the joy in the heart of the father of these missionaries at such consoling news. He joined the angels in heaven in their rejoicing at the sight of a single sinner doing penance for his sin, and being converted to God.

PART TEN

The Conversion of Several Heretics and Apostates Brought About by the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission Whom Monsieur Vincent Sent to Barbary

An admirable example of the wisdom and goodness of God was his using the captivity of several heretics who had fallen into the hands of the Moslems, to bring about their deliverance from the slavery into which the devil had led them by their adherence to error. He used the iron and chains that oppressed their bodies to free them from the chains that bound their souls. In losing their personal freedom they recovered the true freedom of the children of God. This happened many times on the missions of Barbary where there were slaves infected with the heresies of Calvin and Luther. When they saw the miserable state to which they had fallen and had been instructed by the missionaries, at length, with the help of God's grace, they recognized the truth, abjured their errors, and rejoined the sheepfold of Jesus Christ.

We do not know exactly how many heretics were converted in the missions of Barbary, but it is certain that the number was considerable. One priest wrote to Monsieur Vincent of eighteen who returned. We can well imagine the other priests being no less successful, and possibly even more so.

Among all the converts, a young Englishman is particularly noteworthy. He was only eleven years old when captured by the pirates off the coast of England, and was brought to Barbary to be sold into slavery. Monsieur Guerin wrote of this young man in a letter to Monsieur Vincent, in June of 1646:

Two Englishmen have converted to our holy faith, and they have been an example to all the Catholics. There was a third, only eleven
years old, a more beautiful child you could not find. He was as fervent as you could wish, and very devoted to the Blessed Virgin. He invoked her continually for the grace of dying rather than renouncing or offending Jesus Christ. This, unfortunately, is the aim of his owner, who keeps him solely for this purpose, and uses every inducement to achieve his goal. If we could somehow receive two hundred piastres we could buy his freedom. There is good reason to hope that he would one day, with the grace of God, become a second Bede, such is his spirit and virtue.

There is nothing of the child in this young man. He made his profession of the Catholic faith on Holy Thursday, received communion the same day, and now receives the sacraments often. He has already been beaten twice to try to force him to deny Jesus Christ. The last time he told his owner during a beating that he could cut off his head if he wanted, but he was a Christian and would never be anything else. Several times he spoke to me about his resolve to die rather than renounce his faith in Jesus Christ. His entire conduct is admirable in one of his tender age. I can truly say that he is a temple of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷²

Besides the conversion of heretics, many apostates were brought back to the fold by the priests of the Mission, aided by the grace of God. One of the priests wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

There is a large harvest here in this country. This is aided by the presence of the plague, for besides the conversion of some Moslems we prefer to keep quiet about, others at the approach of death have opened their eyes to recognize and embrace the truths of our holy religion. There were three apostates who received the sacraments, and went to heaven. There was one recently who had received absolution for his apostasy. Yet at his last hour he was surrounded by his Moslem friends who urged on him his usual blasphemies. He would not give in, but rather, with his eyes fixed on heaven and a crucifix in his hands, died while giving signs of true repentance. His wife, a former professed religious, had also denied the Christian faith. She too had repented, and had been absolved from her double apostasy, showing as good dispositions as could be hoped for. She is now living in a secluded place. She never goes out, and daily makes the two hours of meditation which we imposed as a penance. We also ordered some bodily mortification besides those required by her rule. She was, however, already practicing some by her own initiative, so moved by regret at her sins that she would have wanted

¹⁷². CED II:597-98.
to suffer martyrdom as an expiation, were it not for the two young children in her care. We baptized these, and she in turn is raising them in keeping with her duty as a true Christian mother.

Another apostate who lives close by died, ending his days as a true penitent. Every day I prepare some Moslems for baptism. They are well instructed in our religion, often coming to see me at night and in secret. There is one among them who holds considerable rank in the country.173

In regard to both the Moslems and the apostates, the priests of the Mission were most prudent and circumspect in matters of conversion, lest there would be adverse effects on the good they sought to do among the infidels. Because of this, they spoke little of these events in their letters to France, and often used ambiguous language, for fear that these letters would be intercepted. Only God knows what they accomplished in their ministry to these unfortunate souls.

In a letter from one of his priests to Monsieur Vincent, wishing to speak of the conversion of two apostates, he used this circumlocution, "Our Lord has given us the grace of recovering two precious jewels that had been lost. They were most costly, and of a beauty beyond compare. I am most happy at the outcome."174

PART ELEVEN
The Remarkable Example of the Constancy of Two Young Slaves, the One from France, the Other from England

This account is tragic, but nevertheless considerably edifying. It enables us to see the great fruits which the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, animated with the spirit and zeal of Monsieur Vincent, gathered in these infidel lands. We owe our information to a letter written by Monsieur Le Vacher to Monsieur Vincent in 1648, of which the following is the substance.

There were in the city of Tunis two young boys of around fifteen years of age, one French, and the other English. Pirates had captured both of them, and brought them back to Barbary for sale into slavery. Although they were in two different households, they lived near each other. Their closeness in age and their common fate brought about a close friendship that bound them together as closely as brothers.

The English boy was a Lutheran, but he was won to the Church by his friend, a good Catholic. He was instructed by Monsieur Le Vacher, abjured his heresy, and became a member of the Catholic Church. Then some

173. CED V:397-98.
174. CED III:449.
English merchants, Protestants themselves, came to Tunis to ransom the slaves of their nation and religion. This young man boldly announced that he was a Catholic by the grace of God, and that he preferred to spend his entire life as a slave rather than secure his freedom by denying his faith. He courageously refused the offer of liberation, so ardently desired by all who endured slavery among the Turks. He judged it preferable to be maltreated and afflicted in fidelity to Jesus Christ, and to suffer all the ills of slavery rather than to fail in faithfulness to his Savior. This was the admirable effect of the grace of Jesus Christ in these two young men, who had received the word of God sown in their hearts by this good priest of the Mission. They displayed fruits ordinarily not seen, even in those who have passed their entire lives in the practice of virtue.

Continuing in their slavery, the two continued to see each other often. They encouraged each other to fidelity in their faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of whatever might be done to them to force them to renounce their beliefs. It seemed that God was preparing them for their trial, since their owners, moved by the evil spirit, redoubled their efforts to have them deny their faith in Jesus Christ. They carried their evil designs to such an extent that several times they beat the young men inhumanly, and left them on the ground nearly half dead.

One day the English boy stopped by for a visit, as he often did, since they lived so close to one another. They often spoke together for mutual support and consolation, in recounting what they had to endure for the sake of the Lord. He came upon his friend lying on the ground. He called to him by name, to see if he were dead or alive. The first words he said when he regained enough strength to speak, were, “I am a Christian, and I shall remain so for the rest of my life.” The English boy kissed the torn and bloody feet of his dear friend, but while doing so some Moslems came in to ask what he was doing. With fortitude, he answered, “I honor the limbs which have suffered for Jesus Christ, my Savior and my God.” The infidels were so irritated with him that they beat him, and forced him to leave, to the regret of his friend who had been so consoled by his visit.

Some time later, when the French boy had recovered from his wounds, he went to visit his friend, only to find him in the same state in which he himself had been a short while before. He was lying on a reed mat, half dead from the beating he had been given, surrounded by some Moslems and even his owner who had taken part in the torture. The French boy was so moved by the sad spectacle, and so influenced by grace that he boldly came into the room, approached his friend, and in the presence of the infidels asked him if he preferred Jesus Christ or Mohammed. The poor English boy, even in
his sufferings, answered in full voice that his preference was, of course, Jesus Christ, that he was a Christian, and that he hoped to die as one.

The Moslems were very angry with the French boy. One of them, wearing two daggers at his side, threatened to cut off his ears. As he came closer, this little champion of Jesus Christ seized the initiative. He grabbed one of the daggers and cut off one of his own ears, showing these barbarians that he had no fear of their threats. Holding the bloody specimen in his hand, he had the boldness to ask if they wanted the other ear as well. He was ready to cut it off, also, to show his esteem for his beliefs, and resolve to die rather than to give up his faith. The dagger, however, was wrenched from his hand.

The courage of these two young Christians so greatly astonished these infidels that they lost all hope of making them abandon their faith in Jesus Christ. Because of this, the Moslems never spoke to them again about it. The next year, after they proved their fidelity and constancy, God called them both to himself, on the occasion of a plague. This completed the purification of their souls, and made them ready for the crown prepared for them in heaven.\(^\text{175}\)

**PART TWELVE**

*Various Other Charitable Activities of the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission Whom Monsieur Vincent Sent to Barbary for the Relief of the Poor Christian Slaves*

It would tire the reader if we detailed all the activities which the priests of the Mission, animated with the spirit of their spiritual father and under his direction, contributed toward the aid of the poor Christian slaves of Barbary. They did everything humanly possible to aid them, whether in body or in soul. In these last paragraphs, we will speak only of some things not touched upon in the previous sections.

One of the most important services the missionaries rendered was to use all their influence to prevent some additional Christians from being forced into slavery, and to secure the release of others already held in ways that violated the customs of this country. Even in that violent and inhumane country, there was some sense of legality among the authorities. In a letter of January 1653 Monsieur Vincent wrote to Monsieur Le Vacher in reply to letters he had received:

> I thank God that by your intercession several Frenchmen captured at sea and taken to Tunis have been preserved from slavery,
and that you have been able to secure the release of some already
in chains. In rendering this service to these persons, you render great
service to God. May God in his goodness grant you the grace to act
forcefully and efficaciously with the authorities in these matters.\textsuperscript{176}

It is true that sometimes the violence and injustice proved too great for
all the efforts of their charity. Despite their efforts or their money they were
sometimes unable to stay the hands of these barbarians from harming the
poor slaves they saw in grave danger. Monsieur Le Vacher wrote to Mon­
sieur Vincent about such a case.

A young and attractive woman from Valencia, about twenty-five
years old, was brought to Tunis after capture near her native city.
She was put up for sale in the public marketplace, at which I
attempted to ransom her by bidding up to $330$ ecus, which the
merchants had lent me, but a wicked Moor outbid me when I came
to the end of my money. He already had two wives, this one making
the third. This poor creature wept three days without a stop. They
did not cause her to abandon her faith until she had been raped. Even
some religious, captured from their convent located near the sea­
coast, suffered the same fate. Alas! If some charitable persons
would contribute funds which could be used in similar situations, I
am sure they would be richly rewarded.\textsuperscript{177}

There was another act of goodness we cannot sufficiently praise. The zeal
which burned in the heart of Monsieur Vincent and the priests of his
Congregation, prevented many of these poor Christian slaves from denying
their faith, especially when they saw them being tortured and on the point
of succumbing. We might give several examples of this, among many others.

Monsieur Guerin wrote to Monsieur Vincent from Tunis in 1646:

We have rescued a French woman from the hands of an apostate
from her own country. All the merchants contributed something,
and I, myself, was able to give seventy ecus. The two other women
are deeply troubled, but I thought it best to save the one who seemed
in the greatest danger. There are other young and beautiful women
in great peril if they are not rescued. One would already have been
lost, if I, at great effort, had not secured an option of three months
in which to ransom her, and had I not put her out of reach of her
owner who surely would have violated her.

Not long ago one woman was beaten with more than five
hundred blows to force her to deny Jesus Christ. Not satisfied with
this cruelty, two of her torturers, as she lay half dead on the ground,

\textsuperscript{176} CED IV:544.
\textsuperscript{177} CED IV:575-76.
trampled upon her, and crushed her shoulder. She ended her life gloriously confessing her faith in Jesus Christ.\(^{178}\)

The same priest wrote in June, 1647:

We have done much with the money you sent, including the ransom of a poor French woman who had suffered so long at the hands of her Moslem owner. It is a true miracle to have saved her from this tiger, who would take neither gold or silver for her. One day he asked me to come to see him. During our visit we agreed upon a price of three hundred \textit{ecus}. I paid this at once after I obtained the official release from slavery, and immediately I took the woman to a safe place. Two hours later, this miserable man regretted his action, but it was too late, by the grace of God.

We also redeemed a boy from Sables d'Olonne, who was on the verge of renouncing the faith. I think I wrote before of how we tried to prevent this. He cost us 150 \textit{ecus}, of which I was able to give 36, the rest coming from wherever we could manage. I was also able to ransom the young Sicilian woman, a slave at Bizerte, whose husband had become a Moslem. During three years she had suffered indescribable torments rather than join in the apostasy of her husband. I wrote to you around last Christmas of finding her in a pitiable state, all covered with wounds. She cost 250 \textit{ecus}, which came from alms, including a part from myself.\(^{179}\)

In still another letter, this same priest wrote:

We have here a young boy from Marseilles, aged thirteen. Since his capture and sale by the pirates he has been beaten with more than a thousand blows to force him to deny his faith in Jesus Christ. Even more cruelly, the skin of one arm was stripped off, like you would do to a piece of poultry before putting it on the grill. This was followed by a choice of four hundred more blows, meaning death itself, or becoming a Moslem. I went at once to see his owner, and three or four times threw myself at his feet. I begged to ransom the boy, and he finally agreed to the price of two hundred \textit{piastres}. I had no money, but borrowed a hundred \textit{ecus} at interest, with a merchant supplying the rest.\(^{180}\)

Monsieur Jean Le Vacher wrote in one of his letters to Monsieur Vincent:

A French vessel was shipwrecked on the coast of Tunis. Six of the crew were saved from drowning, but fell into the hands of the Moors, who took them to Tunis to be sold into slavery. Some time

\(^{178}\) \textit{CED} II:585-86.  
\(^{179}\) \textit{CED} III:203.  
\(^{180}\) \textit{CED} III:222.
later the dey forced two of them, under torture, to deny their faith. Two others died under this treatment rather than imitate this infidelity. Since the dey was set on inflicting this same cruelty on the remaining two, we felt obliged to ransom them if we could. Six hundred piastres was agreed upon as a price, of which I contributed two hundred. For myself, I would rather suffer anything in this life than have anyone deny my divine Master. I would willingly give my blood and my life, even a thousand lives if I had them, rather than see Christians lose what our Lord purchased by his death. 181

We learn from other letters of Monsieur Philippe Le Vacher, his brother, written from Algiers to Monsieur Vincent about a young boy of Marseilles, only eight years old. Pirates had captured him, and he was now under duress to become a Moslem. He was ransomed, and returned to his own country. On another occasion he found three young women, sisters, natives of Vence in Provence, who had been captured by pirates and sold into slavery in Algiers. One of the sisters had fallen into the hands of the governor, who had her richly dressed, for he wished to make her his wife. Monsieur le Vacher redeemed all three at a cost of a thousand ecus, since this was the only way he saw to save them from this danger to their salvation. Another time he ransomed a mother and daughter and her small son, who were from the island of Corsica. All were in great danger because their owner wanted to have the younger woman deny her faith, so that he could marry her.

The priests of the Congregation of the Mission could not ransom all those whom they saw in danger of renouncing their faith because their resources were quickly exhausted. They often found themselves committed beyond their resources. This did not hinder them from continuing their preaching. By the sacraments they administered to these poor slaves in their sufferings they helped to strengthen and encourage them in their sad plight. Many of these slaves persevered courageously in their confession of belief in Jesus Christ despite all the violent persecution brought against them.

This spiritual help especially enabled ten women to remain faithful who had been badly treated for their beliefs among the many other slaves in Tunis in 1649. Their owners guarded these women closely, and did not allow them to leave their homes. They still managed to slip away long enough to attend mass, go to confession, and receive communion. They were so strengthened by the grace they received that not only did they suffer beatings and other indignities with patience, but even when they fell sick and could not be visited by a priest, they remained firm in their faith despite the efforts of the Moslem ministers who tried to force them to deny their allegiance to Jesus Christ. To understand better the inhumanity with which these poor slaves

181. CED IV:618.
were treated to make them apostatize, and the strength of virtue they needed to resist, we must realize that these Moslems had the false conviction that anyone who could cause a Christian to become one of them had an assured place in paradise, no matter what sins he may have committed.

With his understanding of the sad condition of the slaves, Monsieur Vincent took great pains to encourage his missionaries in their charitable service to them. In one of his many conferences, he said:

This ministry is so great and so holy that it has given rise to several orders in the Church of God. These orders have always been greatly esteemed, since they are devoted to the slaves. One such order is the Religious for the Redemption of Captives, who attempt to ransom the slaves and return them to their own country. Among the vows they take is one to commit themselves to the redemption of Christian slaves. Is this not excellent and holy, gentlemen and my brothers?

It seems to that me there is something even greater than going to Barbary to ransom the captives. It is to go there to live among them, to help them at every moment, in body and in soul, to look after their needs, to lend them a helping hand, to bring them every sort of help and consolation in their great afflictions and sufferings. Oh, gentlemen and my brothers, consider well the grandeur of this ministry! Do you know enough about it? Is there anything closer to what our Lord himself did, when he came to earth to deliver men from the captivity of sin, and to teach them by his word and example. This is the example all missionaries must follow. They must be ready to leave their country, their conveniences, their rest, to imitate our confreres in Tunis and Algiers who are so completely given to the service of God and neighbor in these barbarous and infidel lands.\(^\text{182}\)

To support all the charitable and holy projects these missionaries in Barbary were offering, Monsieur Vincent collected alms. From time to time he sent considerable sums, and added some of his own, when what he collected was not sufficient. These sums were spent mainly in rescuing those Christian slaves in imminent danger of losing their faith, either by ransoming them outright, or by giving them some alms by way of encouragement in their sufferings.

Monsieur Vincent also sent money to ransom some French priests and religious who had been taken captive by the Moslems.

On many occasions he sent the entire ransom money for several slaves. By the time of his death he had rescued, through the priests of his Congre-

\(^{182}\). CED XI:437.
gation sent to Barbary, either by their own charity or as agents for others, over twelve hundred slaves who later returned to their own country. What was spent in these ransoms and in other works of charity in these infidel lands came to nearly 1.2 million livres. In writing to one of his priests who had sent him an account of what he had spent, he said:

I have read over your account book. O God, what consolation I have received in reading it! I assure you it gave me more satisfaction than anything I have seen for a long time, because it records what you and your charity have accomplished for so many poor slaves of all nations and of all ages, afflicted with all sorts of miseries. Certainly, even though you could never be able to do more than you are already doing, what you have done is infinitely precious, and worthy of drawing immense blessings upon you. May it please the divine goodness of God to bless your work. 183

Monsieur Vincent also sent some money to the city of Algiers to set up a small hospital for the poor sick slaves, abandoned in their illness by their heartless owners. It was mainly through the generosity of the duchess of Aiguillon that this project began. Another service of Monsieur Vincent to the poor slaves from France was to serve as a clearinghouse for letters to and from the slaves. Not only did this allow the slaves to send news of themselves to their relatives, mothers, fathers, brothers, wives, and children, but to receive letters from them as well. This consoled them greatly in their unhappy state, and sometimes allowed them to work out their release. Before Monsieur Vincent introduced this service, the slaves from diverse regions, Picardy, Poitou, Guienne, Normandy, Brittany, Languedoc or other provinces, had little hope of receiving any response to their letters, for the mail to Marseilles and Paris was most unreliable. This added greatly to their desolation. Monsieur Vincent applied an effective remedy, almost without precedent. To appreciate it fully, the plight of the poor slaves would have to be recalled, where their total isolation from families added immeasurably to all the other sufferings of their captivity.

This then is a short sketch of what Monsieur Vincent did for the poor slaves during his lifetime, and which the members of his Congregation continued after his death. I say short sketch, for only God is aware of all that was done. This humble missionary hid, as much as he could, what he did in the service of the divine majesty, in order that the glory should be given totally to his name and not to himself. If he had done nothing else, aided by his confreres, than to establish and preserve the public exercise of the Catholic religion in this land of the Turk, even in the face of cruel persecution, this would have been a triumph in the service of Jesus Christ. The Lord

183. CED V:490.
had strengthened the arm of his faithful servant to raise a shrine to his most holy name in these two infidel kingdoms, even in the midst of its enemies. Christian charity triumphed in these places where it had seemed that even human dignity had disappeared, and where injustice and violence were everyday occurrences.

SECTION EIGHT

The Missions in Ireland

In 1646 our Holy Father, Pope Innocent X, advised Monsieur Vincent that the danger to religion in Ireland had come to his attention, because of the people’s lack of instruction and the efforts of heretics. He wished him to send some priests of his Congregation to do what they could to remedy this. At once this humble servant of God took steps to obey him whom he recognized as the head of the Church, and vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth. He chose eight missionaries of his Congregation, among whom were five priests of Irish extraction, all trained in the giving of missions. He instructed them before their departure:

Be united, and God will bless you, but this union must be the love of Jesus Christ within you. Any other source of harmony, not being cemented by the blood of Jesus Christ, will not endure. It is in Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, and for Jesus Christ that you must be united with one another. The spirit of Jesus Christ is a spirit of union and peace. How could you expect to attract other souls to Jesus Christ if you were not united among yourselves? This cannot happen. Have the same sentiments, therefore, the same will, or else you will be like those horses pulling a plow who pull in opposite directions. They spoil everything. God calls you to work in this vineyard. Go therefore, having but a single heart and a single intention, and in this way you will bear much fruit.

He also encouraged them to enter into a spirit of obedience toward the sovereign pontiff, the vicar of Jesus Christ. They were going to a country where some of the clergy were negligent on this point, and were not giving

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184. This request from Innocent X was communicated to Vincent by Cardinal Francesco Barberini, the pope’s nephew and prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. CED II:505.
185. CED III:82-83.
good example to the other Catholics of the country. He advised them how to act on their journey there, and what to do once they arrived. He suggested several ways to ensure the success of their mission, so that later they attributed much of their success, after God, to the wise counsels and the appropriate advice Monsieur Vincent had given.

After they received his blessing, they left Paris in 1646 for Nantes, but had to wait for a ship bound for Ireland. They used this time in visiting and serving the sick in the hospitals, teaching the poor, and similar good works, all done with the authorization of the appropriate officials. They also gave a series of spiritual conferences to the Ladies of Charity of the parishes on how to visit and help the sick, in the spirit of our lord Jesus Christ.

From Nantes, the Missionaries went to Saint Nazaire, which is near the mouth of the Loire, for the ship was to sail from there. They found several other passengers waiting, like themselves. They were able to offer a sort of mission to them, until the Dutch ship they were scheduled to travel on was ready. Among the passengers they found an English gentleman, who chose to embrace our holy religion. This was seen as a singular example of the mercy of God, for three days later he suffered a mortal wound. Seeing himself about to die he did not cease to thank God for having called him to the way of salvation before it was too late. His sentiments of thanks for this grace were so moving, as was his regret for the sins of his past life, that it drew tears from his hearers and edified them greatly.

The devil was enraged at losing his prey, and foresaw the Missionaries would steal many another from his grasp. He did all he could to hinder their passage, raising up persecutions and tempests, on land and on sea, but the missionaries escaped them all by God’s special protection. They were delivered from several situations which seemed inevitably destined to cause their deaths.

Once arrived in Ireland, they separated to begin their work. Some went to the diocese of Limerick, others to Cashel. They began by catechism lessons, then added simple clear and moving exhortations, for Monsieur Vincent had recommended that they use these familiar instructions to teach the people the truths of the faith and the obligations of Christianity, and then to urge them to live in keeping with these, renouncing sin by penance, and embracing the practice of the virtues proper to their state of life. This way of teaching and preaching attracted people from all the surrounding countryside, and was greatly approved by the bishops. When the nuncio to Ireland heard of the fruit of the missions, he congratulated the missionaries, urged them to continue, and even urged the clergy and religious of the country to adopt the same manner of teaching and preaching.186

It is difficult to tell how great were the fruits of the mission, whose exercises were almost unknown in that country, and how great was the devotion of all the Catholics who came from the surrounding region. Some even came from far away to attend the catechism lessons and to make their general confession. They had, at times, to wait an entire week for a confessor, so great was the crowd. Even more remarkably, the pastors and other priests of the places where the missions were given were usually the first in line to make their general confession. They were anxious to learn the new method of catechizing and preaching, so that they could maintain the good already accomplished in their parishes by the missions.

The effects of the missions became evident during the bloody persecution Cromwell raised against the Catholics of this poor kingdom. Not a single pastor in the places where the missions had been given abandoned his flock. They all remained to help and defend them until they were either put to death or banished for their confession of the Catholic faith, as happened to them all. In one case, one of the bravest of the pastors sought out the priests of the Mission who were living in a hut at the base of a mountain, to make his annual confession. He was delayed because he administered the sacraments to a sick person, arriving only the following night. The soldiers of the heretical party captured him and put him to death. His glorious death crowned an innocent life, and fulfilled his desire of suffering for our Lord, as he had expressed a year before during a retreat he had made at Limerick with the priests of the Mission.

Since the persecution of the heretics continued to increase, it became necessary to stop giving the missions, and by orders of Monsieur Vincent several of the priests returned to France. Before leaving they called upon the archbishop of Cashel, on August 16, 1658. He gave them a letter addressed to Monsieur Vincent, written in Latin, but given here in translation:

The departure of your missionaries gives me the opportunity to render my humble thanks and appreciation for what you in your charity have done for the flock entrusted to my charge, through your priests. Not only was the time ripe for this service, the occasion was most appropriate. By their efforts and their example they have aroused the devotion of the people, which increases day by day. Even though your good priests have suffered much inconvenience since arriving in our country, they have not ceased to apply themselves to the work of the missions as tireless laborers. Aided by the grace of God, they have gloriously extended and augmented the worship and glory of

187. Charles I of England was executed on February 9, 1649. Ireland proclaimed his son, the Prince of Wales, as King Charles II. Irish Catholics were persecuted by Cromwell with particular ferocity because of both their religion and their support of the Stuart cause.
God. I hope this same God, who is all good and all powerful, will himself be your recompense and theirs. For myself, I shall pray that you will be preserved for a long time, for you have been chosen for the good and for the service of his holy Church.\footnote{CED III:357.}

The bishop of Limerick wrote a letter at the same time to Monsieur Vincent:

It is only proper, Monsieur, for me to thank you with all my heart for the good I have received from your priests. I must also tell you of the great need we have of them in this country. I may confidently assure you that they have produced more fruit and converted more souls than all the rest of the clergy put together. What is more, most of the upper class, men and women alike, by the good example and efforts of your priests have become models of devotion and virtue. This did not happen before your missionaries arrived among us. The troubles of the times and the army have hindered their work. Nevertheless the memory of spiritual things and salvation are so imprinted on the hearts of the people of the cities and country that they bless God in adversity as well as in prosperity. I hope, through their help, to work out my own salvation.\footnote{CED III:356-57.}

The violence of the persecution increased more and more in this country, forcing Monsieur Vincent to recall all but three of his Missionaries. These continued to work for the salvation of the people with great success and blessing, by the help of the grace of God, notwithstanding the difficulties and dangers they encountered. They experienced that having but two or three gathered in the name of the Lord was enough to feel the effects of his divine presence. They undertook a task far exceeding their own strength, but succeeded by a special gift of divine goodness. The mission in Limerick continued, as the bishop wished, but it was no longer possible to go to the countryside, since the heretics controlled it. Also, poor Catholic villagers had taken refuge in the city. The Missionaries were greatly encouraged that the bishop himself wanted to help in the work of the mission. There were nearly twenty thousand communicants in the city, and they all made their general confession. Some were in grave sin, but gave all the signs of a true conversion. The entire city took on a penitential atmosphere to attract the grace of divine mercy. The magistrates of the city also contributed their part. Besides the good example they gave in attending the various exercises of the mission, they used their authority to root out all vice, and exterminate scandals and public offenses. Among other things, they legislated against swearing and blasphemy, with the happy result that these detestable vices were entirely eliminated from the city and surrounding areas.
God himself seemed to confirm these measures by two incidents that occurred. The first was at Thurles, where in the open market a butcher blasphemed the holy name of God. A priest of the Mission who happened to be passing by, admonished him. The correction had such a good effect upon him that he came to himself to say to the missionary that he deserved and was willing to be put in chains for his sin, but asked the Missionary to accompany him to the place of punishment. On the way, he met one of his relatives who attempted to dissuade him, out of respect for the family honor, but the Missionary insisted he should go through with his plan to satisfy the justice of God and to repair the scandal he had given. This relative then went into a rage, and picking up some stones threatened to harm the priest if he did not persuade his relative not to go through with his act of penance. On the spot, God struck this miserable man with a strange malady which left his tongue so black and swollen, that he could not withdraw it into his mouth. This lasted until prayers were said for him and holy water was sprinkled upon his tongue, which then returned to normal. He recognized his fault, begged pardon of the Missionary, and joined the butcher in doing penance for his sin in the stocks.

The other incident happened at Rathkeale when a gentleman in company of some friends cursed and swore in the public streets. One of his friends suggested he ought to kiss the ground at the very place the oaths had been uttered, but he was mocked for his efforts. In turn, he took to his knees on the spot, and as reparation, kissed the muddy road on behalf of his friend, who continued to mock him. When he returned home, God allowed him to fall from his horse, and so injure himself. He came to his senses, and recognized the sin he had committed. With great remorse of conscience he resolved to make a general confession of his whole life to one of the priests of the Mission, and afterward he lived so virtuously and gave such good example that he was the cause of several other conversions.

While the Missionaries worked in Limerick, the bishop wrote the following letter to Monsieur Vincent, by which we can see the great blessing God showered upon this mission:

I have often written to Your Reverence about your missionaries in this kingdom. To speak the truth as it is before God, I must tell you that never in the memory of man have we seen such great progress and advancement of the Catholic faith as we have lately seen by the industry, piety, and faithfulness of your priests, especially at the beginning of this present year when we began a mission in this city of more than twenty thousand believers. This has been done with such fruit, and such appreciation by all the inhabitants that I have no doubt most have been delivered from the clutches of
Satan by the remedies brought for so many invalid confessions, drunkenness, blasphemies, adulteries, and other disorders which have been abolished completely. The city has changed complexion. It was brought to penance by the plague, famine, war, and other dangers from all sides, which we receive as manifest signs of the anger of God. Although we are his unworthy servants, his goodness has granted us the favor of being engaged in this work. It was indeed most difficult at the beginning and for some beyond our hopes, but God used the weak to confound the strong of this world. The authorities of the city have been so assiduous at the preachings, sermons, and other exercises of the mission that the cathedral itself was hardly able to hold the people. We know of no better way to appease the anger of God than to eradicate sin, the cause of the evils which have befallen us. We of ourselves are finished, if God does not offer his hand. We look to him to have mercy and to pardon.

Father, I acknowledge that I owe the salvation of my soul to your confreres. Send them some few words of consolation. I know of no other mission under heaven more useful than that of Ireland, for if a hundred be given elsewhere there will be none that accomplish so much with so few laborers. Our sins are grievous. Who knows if God will not uproot us from this kingdom, and give the Bread of Angels to the dogs, to our blame and shame.190

We join to this letter of the bishop, one written by Monsieur Vincent in April of 1650 to the superior of the missions at Limerick, to encourage him in the possible difficulties he might have to endure:

Your letter has greatly edified us, seeing two excellent fruits of the grace of God. By the first, you give yourself completely to God, remaining in the country despite the dangers, exposing yourself to the threat of death rather than fail in your help to the neighbor. The second grace is your care of your confreres, in returning them to France to escape the perils in which they live. The spirit of martyrdom moves you to the former, prudence to the latter. In both you follow the example of our Lord, who was willing to suffer the torments of the cross for the salvation of men, but protected his disciples by saying, “let these go away, and do not harm them.”191 You have acted like a true child of this true Father. I thank him for the infinite graces he has given you, to enable you to act with such charity, the summit of all virtues. I pray that you may be filled with this, everywhere and always, to share it with those who lack it. Since

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the other priests with you are in the same disposition to remain, despite the dangers of war and pestilence, we agree they should be allowed to do so. Who knows what God has in store for them? He truly did not inspire such a holy resolution in vain.

O God, how inscrutable are your ways! Here we have a mission as successful and necessary as any we have ever seen. Yet it seems you withdrew your mercy toward a penitent city, to allow the scourges of war and pestilence to fall upon it. This is to reap the harvest of souls, and to collect the good grain into your eternal barns. We adore your holy will, O Lord.¹⁹²

Monsieur Vincent spoke correctly, as if he foresaw the future. The mission which accomplished so much was providentially to prepare the people for two great afflictions, to try their patience and their faith. The first of these was the plague which struck the country, especially in the city of Limerick, where over eight thousand people died, including the bishop’s brother. He had joined the missionaries in visiting the sick, consoling them, and looking after their needs. It was marvelous to see how these poor people supported this trial, not only with patience, but even with peace and tranquility of spirit. They said they died content because they had left the burden of their sins in the sacrament of penance during their general confession. Others said they did not complain, because God had sent the holy priests (so they referred to the priests of the Mission) to purify their souls. Others in their sickness asked for nothing except to share in the prayers of their confessors, whom they felt were, after God, responsible for their salvation. In a word, both the healthy and the sick expressed their thanks and their praiseworthy dispositions. When their bishop heard and saw this, he could scarcely restrain his tears, nor refrain from repeating often, “Alas, if Monsieur Vincent had never done anything else for the glory of God but what he has done for these poor people, he would have to be regarded as blessed.”

As a further trial and a new affliction, this poor city of Limerick was besieged and finally taken by the heretics.¹⁹³ They cruelly put to death many of the inhabitants, because of the Catholic faith they professed, notably four of the leading men of the town. These men showed on this occasion how much they had benefited from the instructions and exhortations of the missionaries, and from the spiritual retreats made in their house. They displayed an invincible zeal for the defense of the Catholic faith, especially Sir Thomas Strick, who at the end of his retreat was elected mayor of the city. He openly declared himself opposed to all enemies of the Church. When he received the keys of the city he immediately placed them at the feet of

¹⁹². CED IV:15-16.
¹⁹³. November 19, 1651.
the most holy Virgin, whom he implored to take this city under her protection. Afterward, he led a procession of the people to the church, where many religious ceremonies were carried out. Next the mayor addressed the people to encourage them to have an inviolable fidelity to God, to the Church and to the king, offering to give his own life for such a just cause.

God accepted this offer, for shortly afterward the enemy captured the city, and conferred martyrdom upon him and the three other leading men of the town, who had lately shared the spiritual retreat with him. All four endured their suffering not merely with constancy but even with joy, dressing themselves in their best clothes to show this externally. Before being executed they spoke to the people, and drew tears from the eyes of all, even the heretics. They testified before heaven and earth that they died for the confession and defense of the Catholic religion. This greatly strengthened the other Catholics to persevere in the faith, and to suffer any torture rather than fail in the fidelity they owed to God.

One of the three missionaries remaining in Ireland gloriously finished his life in his labors for the mission. The other two remained during the plague and siege, but left after the city was captured. In disguise and at great risk, they were finally obliged to return to France in 1652, after serving in Ireland for six years. They and their companions had worked ceaselessly at giving missions, always at the expense of the house of Saint Lazare, and supported by the limitless charity of Monsieur Vincent. He did not want to impose this charge on anyone else, but he did have some help from the generosity of the duchess of Aiguillon to cover the cost of the voyage of the priests, and of some necessary religious articles.

We are aware there were more than eighty thousand general confessions in these missions in Ireland, and other benefits beyond measure, but we cannot speak of them in detail for, out of humility, Monsieur Vincent wished to keep them under the cloak of silence. When the superior of the mission returned, he asked the superior general if he might compose a short account of the mission to Ireland. He replied:

194. These two missionaries were Gerard Brin and Edmund Barry. After the fall of Limerick to Cromwell’s forces, they left the city in disguise together with over a hundred other priests and religious. They mixed with the retreating soldiers who had been allowed to withdraw from the city by the terms of the surrender. The night before they had prepared themselves for death since it was well known that Cromwell showed no mercy to captured Catholic priests. Fortunately they were not recognized the next day, and their escape was successful. The two confreres separated to increase their chances of escape from the country. Brin fled the country with the vicar general of Cashel. Barry took to the mountains where he was hidden by a charitable woman for two months. Eventually he managed to get on board a ship bound for France and arrived at Nantes. Vincent was overjoyed at their escape since he believed that they had been killed in the Limerick massacre. A laybrother, Thady Lee, was not so fortunate. Cromwell’s troops discovered him, and horribly massacred him in front of his mother. He became the Congregation’s first martyr. (CED IV:343.) Why Abelly omitted this account is unknown.
It suffices that God knows all that has been done. The humility of our Lord requires that the little Company of the Mission hide itself in God to honor the hidden life of Jesus Christ. The blood of martyrs will not be forgotten by God, and sooner or later will bring about a new generation of Catholics.

SECTION NINE

On the Mission to the Isle of Saint Lawrence, Otherwise Known as Madagascar

PART ONE

Letter from Monsieur Vincent to Monsieur Nacquart, Priest of the Congregation of the Mission, About This Mission

We know of no better way to begin our discussion of this important mission than by quoting from a letter written by Monsieur Vincent to the late Monsieur Charles Nacquart. He was a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, a native of the diocese of Soissons, and the first one chosen for this mission. He happily spent his life in the service of the Lord, working for the conversion of these poor infidels. Monsieur Vincent wrote to him in April of 1648, from Richelieu where he was at the time.

For a long time our Lord has given you the desire of doing something special for him. When at the meetings at Richelieu, the proposal was made to open missions among the pagans, it seemed to me that the Lord made you feel you were being called, as you wrote me, together with several others of the community at Richelieu. This seed of divine vocation has begun to grow. In speaking for the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, of which the Holy Father is the head, the nuncio has chosen our Company to serve God in the isle of Saint Lawrence, also called Madagascar.

Our Company, in turn, has turned to you as the most precious offering it can make, as homage to our sovereign Creator, to go there.

195. Charles Nacquart was born in 1617 at Trelon in the diocese of Soissons. He died in Madagascar May 29, 1650.
with another priest of our Company. O dearest Monsieur! How does your heart respond to this news? Is it filled with shame and confusion at receiving such a grace from heaven? This is a vocation equal to that of the greatest apostles and the greatest saints in the Church of God! An eternal design of divine Providence, accomplished now in you! Only humility, Monsieur, is capable of accepting such a grace. You have only to abandon all you are or could be with overwhelming confidence in our sovereign Creator. Generosity and great courage are essential for you. You must have faith as profound as Abraham's, charity as complete as Saint Paul's, and the zeal, patience, deference, love of poverty and solitude, discretion, probity of life, and the same desire to consume yourself completely for God that inspired the renowned Saint Francis Xavier.

This island lies under Capricorn. It is four hundred leagues in length, and about one hundred sixty leagues wide. Its poor inhabitants live in ignorance of God, but they are simple, of good disposition, and quite capable. You must cross the equator to reach the island.

The first thing you must do is to model yourself on the great saint, Francis Xavier, in his trip to the East. You must serve and edify the ship's company, arranging public prayers if possible. Have regard for the inconveniences of others, and put yourself out as much as you can to accommodate yourself to the others. Make this voyage, which may last for five or six months, a happy one by your prayers and the practice of all the virtues, just as the sailors do by the performance of their duties. Always show the officers a great respect. Come what may, remain faithful to God and his interests, never betraying his trust in you for any consideration whatsoever. However, take care not to spoil by too great haste the designs of the good God, who takes his time and knows how to wait for the right moment.

Once you have arrived at this island, you must adapt yourself as best you can. It might be necessary to separate, to serve in different locations, but even then you must arrange to meet as often as you can for mutual support and consolation. In regard to the French colonists and any of the natives who shall be converted you must keep all the parish records. Follow the directives of the Council of Trent in all things, and make use of the Roman Ritual, not allowing anyone to introduce any other. If it should be that another ritual is already in vogue, strive gently to replace it by the Roman Rite. You will need at least two copies of the Roman Ritual.

196. The directors of the Company of the Indies.
Your main concern, once you see to your own maintenance, must be to live in gentleness and in good example among the people you have come to serve. Make these poor people, born in darkness and in ignorance of their Creator, come to know the truths of our holy faith, not by arguments drawn from theology but by reflections taken from the world around them. You must begin this way, leading them to understand that you are simply developing the signs God has left in them of himself, which gradually have grown dim by reason of their sins. To accomplish all this, Monsieur, you must often invoke the Father of Lights, and repeat what you say every day in the office: *Da mihi intellectum, ut sciam testimonia tua* ["Give me discernment that I may know your decrees"].

You will see all this by meditation on the insights he will give you.

You must prove the truth of a sovereign and first Being, and how this is related to the mystery of the Trinity, the necessity of the mystery of the Incarnation, wherein a new perfect man came to redeem us from the sin of the first man. You must make these people appreciate the weakness of human nature which they themselves recognize since they have laws and punishments. It would be good to have some books which treat of these questions, such as the Catechism of Granada, or some others which I will try to send you.

I do not have to repeat, Monsieur, that meditation will be the best teacher: *Accedite ad eum et illuminamini* ["Look to him that you may be radiant with joy"] giving yourself over to the Spirit of God who will teach you in these encounters.

Ah, may it please his divine bounty to give you the grace of cultivating the seed of Christianity which is already there, and enabling them to live in true Christian charity. If you do that, I do not doubt, Monsieur, that our Lord will use you in these distant isles to prepare an abundant harvest for the Company. Go then, Monsieur, sent by God as his representative here below to these people. Cast the net boldly!

I am aware of how much you are devoted to purity of heart. You will need to make good use of this virtue, for the people there offend in many ways in this regard. The infallible grace of your vocation will be your safeguard. We will look forward to hearing news from you, and will send you news from home. We will send you a complete mass kit, two Roman Rituals, two small bibles, two Acts

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197. Ps 119:125, said at least on Sundays at Sext.
198. *Introducción al simbolo de la fe*.
199. Ps 34:6.
of the Council of Trent, two books of moral theology, and pictures of all the main mysteries which will help your people understand and which they will be pleased to see. We have a young man here from Madagascar, about twenty years of age, who will be baptized today by the nuncio. I used these pictures to teach him, and they seemed to serve the purpose well.

You will have to bring the irons for making the hosts for mass, and the holy oils for baptism and extreme unction. You will each need Busee’s book for your meditations,²⁰⁰ copies of the Introduction to a Devout Life, and lives of the saints. We will send a letter giving you full authority from us, and one from the nuncio, who has this project very much at heart. For the rest, I give myself entirely to you, if not to follow you, which I am unworthy to do, at least to offer prayers every day for you, should God continue my days upon earth. If it should please him to show his mercy to me in my seeing you only in eternity, I shall see you among those called apostles, by reason of your present calling. I finish this letter by throwing myself at your feet. I beg you to commend me to our common Lord that I may remain faithful, and that in his love I may walk the path that leads to eternity. I remain, Monsieur, yours in our Lord.

The one we are sending with you is Monsieur Gondree, whom perhaps you met in our community at Saintes while he was still a cleric.²⁰¹ He is one of the best candidates of our Company, and has preserved the devotion he brought with him when he joined us. He is humble, charitable, cordial, exact, and zealous. In a word, he is someone I cannot say enough good things about.

Several merchants will leave here Wednesday or Thursday for La Rochelle. Monsieur Gondree will go with them to meet you at Richelieu, while they go on ahead where they will await you, around the fifteenth or twentieth of next month, before setting sail. Monsieur, please be ready. We will add to the books already mentioned the Life and Letters of the Apostle of the Indies. Don’t say anything about all this just yet. Wait until we have announced this from here.

One of the gentlemen engaged in trade with the Indies will join you on this voyage. He has paid your passage. We will send you something for your own expenses when you arrive. What more can

²⁰⁰. A volume of meditations, Enchiridionpiarummeditationum, by the Jesuit Joannes Buys (or Busaeus), which Monsieur Portail had edited and translated for the use of the Congregation at Saint Vincent’s request.

²⁰¹. Nicolas Gondree was born in 1620 at Assigny in the diocese of Amiens. As a subdeacon he was stationed at Saintes. Saint Vincent recalled him to Paris for his ordination to the priesthood, and his assignment to the Madagascar mission. He died in Madagascar in May of 1649.
I say, Monsieur, except that I pray that our Lord will give you some share in his charity, and his patience. There is nothing I desire more upon this earth, if it were permitted, than I might be your companion on this mission in place of Monsieur Gondree.  

PART TWO  
*The Departure of the Two Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, and Events that Occurred on Their Journey*  

Monsieur Nacquart had no sooner received this letter from Monsieur Vincent than he immediately began to put its directives into effect, considering it as showing not the will of a man, but of God himself. After Monsieur Gondree’s arrival they set off together for Richelieu on April 18. They had to remain at La Rochelle for nearly a month, awaiting the completion of preparations of the ship that was to carry them to their new mission. With the bishop’s permission, they used their time to catechize, to hear confessions, and to provide other services for the poor, particularly those in the hospital or in prison.  

On the twenty-first of the following May, the feast of Our Lord’s Ascension, the anchor was raised and the sails set for departure. During the first days the two good missionaries spent their time with the passengers, numbering about one-hundred twenty, helping them make their general confession. They did so because of the graces and indulgences of the Jubilee granted by our holy father, the pope.  

They stopped first at Cape Verde to take on fresh water. There they met a ship bound for the island of Saint Christopher, to whose passengers the missionaries were able to provide the same opportunity for general confession.  

Their journey continued well until they approached the equator. Here the winds became so strong and contrary that they entertained the thought of turning back. The two missionaries exhorted the crew to turn for protection to the holy Virgin. Following their suggestion, all made a public vow to God in honor of the queen of heaven to confess and communicate on one of the days preceding the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and to build a church on the island of Madagascar. The storm ended, and the winds became favorable, so that on the eve of the feast they found that they had crossed the equator. During the remainder of the voyage they experienced the help of the Mother of God on several other occasions. As they approached the Cape of Good Hope they were delivered from a particularly dangerous problem.

203. Saint Kitts, in the Caribbean, which had French colonists from about 1625.
Then they cast anchor in the bay of Sardaigne,\(^{204}\) where they spent eight days. Finally, after six and a half months at sea, they arrived at the island of Saint Lawrence.

During all this time the Missionaries did not remain idle. They had realized that several of the sailors and some of the passengers needed instruction, and so they provided it three or four times a week. They gave catechetical instruction on the main mysteries of the faith, and other matters of importance, using the method employed on the missions. A question period followed the instruction. During it, the youngest present were asked what had been taught.

As was customary in a ship so crowded, there always were some sick among the passengers, and the missionaries served them as diligently as they could. One would visit them in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Public prayers were offered both mornings and evenings, and mass was said daily, weather permitting. For those who were well the priests organized groups of three or four, where one would read from a good book such as the *Imitation of Christ*, the *Introduction to a Devout Life*, or other similar books. This helped the passengers avoid idleness, the source of many evils, and enabled them to use their time profitably.

The priests also persuaded many of those on board to attend spiritual conferences two or three times a week on topics appropriate to their state, especially on temptations and other occasions of offending God, and also on the ways to resist or avoid the suggestions of the evil one. On these occasions the words of our Lord, who promised to be with two or three gathered in his name, were sensibly felt. At the end of the talk one of the priests would summarize what had been said, add some thoughts of his own, and conclude with some examples from holy Scripture or from the lives of the saints.\(^{205}\)

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**PART THREE**

*Description of Madagascar and its People*

Before speaking of what these two good priests of the Congregation of the Mission accomplished in this country, and to be able to understand it better, we should briefly describe the island and the people who live there. We will follow in this the account given by Monsieur Nacquart when writing to Monsieur Vincent.

The island of Madagascar, otherwise called Saint Lawrence because of its discovery on the feastday of this great saint,\(^{206}\) is about six hundred Italian miles

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204. Saldanha, near Cape Town.
205. *CED* III:547-51, the author's summary of Nacquart's lengthy report to Saint Vincent.
206. August 10.
miles in length, and two hundred miles, or in some places three or four hundred, in width. Its circumference is around eighteen hundred miles. It has a warm climate, but is not unbearable. It is divided into several counties or provinces, separated from one another by high mountains. Those who have traveled widely in the island put its population at more than four hundred thousand.

Each county or province has a ruler who is accepted as the master or lord. He has several vassals, sometimes numbering up to three or four thousand or even more. The wealth of these rulers consists in the herds of animals they own, or in the tribute of rice or roots which their subjects provide. The natives are either blacks, with kinky hair, the original inhabitants of the country, or the light-skinned, whose long hair is like what we are familiar with in France. It is believed these people first came to the island from Persia, about five hundred years ago, and gradually made themselves masters in the land.

The people live in small villages. They have neither cities nor fortresses. Their houses are made of wood, and covered with leaves. Their beds and chairs are simple planks. They eat seated on reed mats.

The ordinary food of the country is rice and poultry, beef and mutton. They have no wheat or wine, but do have a drink made from honey. They also have some beans and melons, and some roots which are good to eat. Lemons and oranges abound. The rivers provide fish, but are dangerous because of the many crocodiles which frequent their waters.

Nothing seems to be fixed or stable in their religion, for in the entire island there are neither temples nor priests. Some very superstitious rites and ceremonies are based on false and impertinent notions, but some others are closely related to the truth.

They recognize one god, master of the whole world, whom they call Senhare. He lives in heaven, they say, like a king in his kingdom. In other places they recognize neither god nor the devil, unless it be merely by name. They honor the devil in their sacrifices, and offer him the better part, reserving the remainder to him whom they call god. Why they do this is not known, unless it is that they fear the one more than the other, or maybe because of some misfortune they have experienced in the past.

There is one group among the people called Ombiasses, that is writers, because they know how to read and write. They are the guardians of the ceremonies, customs and superstitions of the country. The people fear and respect them because of their ability to read and write, but they do not have much learning or doctrine. The best they can do is quote a few sentences

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207. The original has "fourteen hundred."
209. Ombiasa, in modern spelling.
210. The original adds "in Arabic."
from the Koran, a book first brought to the island by the early Persians. They
draw from the Koran a certain number of superstitions, which they believe
will enable them to cure the sick, predict the future, and find people who
have become lost.

They practice the custom of circumcision of children everywhere, but not
through any religious motive. This is strictly a traditional observance, from
purely human motives.

The light-skinned observe a sort of fast two months of the year. This
consists in not eating anything from sunrise to sunset, but at night they eat
to provide strength for the next day. They do not eat beef or drink wine, but
poultry and spirituous liquors are not forbidden. If it happens that someone
does not want to fast, he can arrange to have someone else fast in his place.

Of all the superstitions practiced on the island the one most opposed to
the honor of God and the most difficult to eradicate is the worship given by
the leaders of the country and their servants to the idols, which they call
Olis. The Ombiasses make these out of wood, roots, or other base material,
and sell them. They are carved crudely, often in human form. These they
hollow out, fill with a mixture of oil and a certain powder which the natives
believe makes the idols alive and able to respond to their prayers. They think
the idols can produce good weather, good health, victory over enemies, etc.
These idols are in every house, and are carried upon their person when they
travel. They have recourse to them in all needs, and seek their counsel in
their doubts.

The people believe that the first thought that comes to them after recourse
to the idol has been suggested by the Olis. When they are about to cross a
river they invoke these same idols to preserve them from the crocodiles.
They even pray to the crocodiles themselves, beseeching them in a loud
voice to do them no harm. They confess their misdeeds aloud, such as
stealing, and promise to repay what they have taken. Then, after they throw
water and sand to the four corners of the earth, they imagine they can
confidently cross the river. If, despite all these superstitious precautions
crocodiles catch and devour them, they explain it by saying their Olis did
not do their duty.

This superstition is so ingrained in the spirit of these people that they will
not allow anyone to question the practice or even speak to them about it. By
the grace of God, since the arrival of the priests of the Mission several among
them have had their eyes opened to the truth, and have recognized the
deception of the Ombiasses and of their Olis.

Another horrible custom of these people is to reject as cursed those
children born on the night between Saturday or Sunday, as likely to bring

211. Now spelled Ody, a charm.
disaster upon the family. They abandon these children to die, unless, as may happen, someone takes compassion on them, and rescues them from certain death.\textsuperscript{212}

\section*{PART FOUR}
\textit{The Arrival of Two Priests of the Congregation of the Mission in Madagascar, and Their Initial Activities}

The French quarter of Madagascar is a section of the island near the latitude of the Tropic of Capricorn. It is called in the language of the country \textit{Histolangar}, and a fort has been built there called Fort Dauphin.\textsuperscript{213} The two priests, Fathers Nacquart and Gondree, after a long voyage of six and a half months, landed happily on December 4, 1648. The French there received them joyfully, and participated devoutly in singing a Te Deum and at the solemn mass of thanksgiving. It had been nearly five months since they had been able to have mass.

One of the first concerns upon their arrival was to look to the spiritual care of the French themselves, and to help them profit from the Jubilee. They then applied themselves to studying the language of the country, which proved very difficult. The interpreters and intermediaries could not find words appropriate to explain the virtues and mysteries of our faith in a country where matters of religion are never discussed.

As soon as they could stammer a few words of the language they began to instruct the natives. They found much greater docility among the blacks than among the light-skinned, who thought of themselves as sufficiently informed and preferred not even to listen when matters of the faith were discussed. If they listened at all, they did so merely through curiosity, with no intention of being taught or converted.

Six days after his arrival Monsieur Nacquart heard of one of the lords of the island named Andiam Ramach.\textsuperscript{214} In his youth he had visited Goa and had lived there for three years. Monsieur Nacquart learned from this man himself that he had been baptized and instructed in our holy religion. To prove his point he made three signs of the cross on his forehead,\textsuperscript{215} and recited the Our Father, Hail Mary and the Creed in Portuguese. This led Monsieur Nacquart to ask if he might not teach these same truths to his subjects, and help them to pray to God, just as Monsieur Ramach had done.

\textsuperscript{212} CED III:552-59, the author's summary of Nacquart's lengthy report.
\textsuperscript{213} Now called Tolagnaro.
\textsuperscript{214} Andriandramaka.
\textsuperscript{215} This action is explained by referring to the original, which reads: "He made three signs of the cross on his forehead, mouth, and heart, and said [in Latin] 'By the sign of the holy cross deliver us from our enemies.'"
The response to this request was favorable, and the lord agreed to attend the sessions himself, together with the leading men of the region who stated that they were well pleased that their children would receive instruction. All this obliged this good missionary to apply himself even more diligently to the study of the native language to profit from such a favorable opportunity for the propagation of our holy religion among these poor unbelievers.

On the following feast of the Epiphany, commemorating the call of the gentiles to the faith, Monsieur Nacquart and his companion began to baptize several children. Monsieur de Flacourt, governor of Fort Dauphin, offered to be the godfather of the first child baptized. He named him Peter, as the first spiritual stone in the Church beginning to be built on this island.

Continuing to study the language, and gaining a little fluency, they began to travel from place to place to teach those they found disposed to listen. On Sundays they would present a sort of catechism lesson to the youth of the area.

One day, on returning to their usual place of residence, the French fort, they met one of the chiefs of a small village who had fallen sick. He begged the missionaries to come to his house to pray to God for his cure. Monsieur Nacquart explained to him that God often allowed sickness of the body to bring about the salvation of souls. In any case, he added, God was powerful enough and good enough to cure him, if he would abandon his superstitions and give himself to God in professing the true faith. He asked on the spot if he might be taught this true religion. Monsieur Nacquart assembled all the people of the village so that they too might profit from his instruction of the sick man. In their presence he explained through an interpreter the most important and necessary articles of the faith.

The sick man listened attentively to the instruction. He said his heart was consoled to hear this message, and that he believed all he had heard. He asked if Jesus Christ was truly powerful enough to restore his health. Yes, the missionary replied, provided you believe with all your heart, and your soul is cleansed from all sin by baptism, and you accept from divine Goodness whatever he will be pleased to send you. At once the sick man had a child bring water, and insisted the priest baptize him at once.

Fearing that he sought the health of the body more than that of the soul (as was later seen to be the case) Monsieur Nacquart thought best to defer the sacrament. He said that the patient must prove that his resolution to serve God and become a Christian was truly sincere. This would be shown, if after his return to good health, which he sincerely hoped the Lord would grant, he would have his entire family instructed in the faith. The wife of the sick man was present for this exchange. She told of how, long before the French arrived on the scene, she had prayed to God. She told how once while working at the rice
harvest, she was moved to raise her eyes to heaven, saying to God: “You cause the rice I harvest to grow and to mature. If you have need of it, I shall give it to you. I would want to give some to whomever has need of it.” This shows how even amid the darkness of infidelity God allows some rays of his grace to fall upon people to prepare them to know and to serve him.

All those attending the instruction of the sick man showed their satisfaction with all they had heard. They judged this knowledge more precious than gold or silver, which could be taken from them by force while no one could deprive them of the gift of knowing and serving God. After this, Monsieur Nacquart and his confère bade farewell. They left the sick man with hope of a cure and the others with the expectation of being more fully taught in the future.216

PART FIVE

The Death of Monsieur Gondree, One of the Two Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, and the Later Work of Monsieur Nacquart, the Only Remaining Priest on the Island

Although the judgments of God are inscrutable, as the holy apostle says, and his ways often unknown, we are still obliged to submit ourselves to his holy will and recognize and confess that all he does is for the best.

The two good priests of the Mission made good progress in their facility with the language and of their knowledge of many places on the island. They began to see the fruits of their work in the instruction and conversion of these poor unbelievers. Yet in the midst of their zealous optimism and hopes for the future, Monsieur Gondree was stricken with a fever which, together with some other complications, carried him off in a short time.

Monsieur Nacquart wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

At the time of the Rogation Days,217 Monsieur de Flacourt, the governor, asked one of us to accompany him on a visit he was about to make to different parts of the island. Monsieur Gondree went with him, but suffered greatly on the journey because of the heat and the small amount of food he took so as not to break the eucharistic fast. He ate only a little rice cooked in water. In this weakened state he was stricken with a fever which caused much pain in all his joints. Amid his suffering he displayed great constancy and exhibited truly Christian sentiments.

The feast of Pentecost came, and although I was terribly concerned about the sickness of this good servant of God, our Lord gave me the strength to minister to the French and to the catechu-

216. CED III:564-65, Nacquart’s lengthy report, summarized by Abelly.

217. The three days before Ascension Thursday.
mens. I heard confessions and preached twice a day, sang the office, and looked after the instruction of these poor people. Among others, I received two adult women into the Church. They later married two inhabitants of the region who had already been baptized.

Monsieur Gondree's sickness grew worse, so I administered holy viaticum and extreme unction, which he received devoutly. He said that his only regret was to be leaving these poor unbelievers. He recommended to the French the fear of God and devotion to his blessed Mother, to whom he was so devoted. He asked me to write to you, Monsieur, to thank you most humbly in his name for the grace of accepting him into the Congregation, and above all for having chosen him among so many others more capable than himself to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ on this island. He asked that the members of the Congregation would join him in thanking God for this grace. He also said that I ought to prepare to suffer much for our Lord in this country, and he repeated this warning twice. After passing a part of the night in continuous aspirations to God, he died in peace and tranquility. Thus he gave back his soul into the hands of his Creator on the fourteenth day of his illness.\footnote{218. May 26, 1649.}

The next day he was laid to rest, mourned by all the French. A large group of poor unbelievers was also present. They said that until our arrival they had never seen men who never became angry or irritable, or who taught them heavenly things with such affection and gentleness as our dear departed.

You can well imagine the feeling in my poor heart at losing one I loved as myself, and who was, after God, my entire consolation. I begged our Lord Jesus Christ to give me a portion of the graces he had given to the poor deceased, so that alone I might accomplish the work of two. After his death I felt the result of these prayers in a double strength of mind and body to work to convert these poor islanders, and for all that would contribute to advancing the kingdom of God in this country.

After this, afraid that death might overtake me, I felt driven to work on what I considered most necessary: composing a catechism in the language of this country treating of what is most necessary to believe and do for eternal salvation. I did this to make myself more aware of these things, and also to leave for the use of those who might come after me, should God call me from this life.\footnote{219. This catechism, the first book in the language of Madagascar, was eventually published. Petit}
After I had put this catechism in some order, I began to assemble the people of the neighborhood on Sundays and feasts. They were astounded to see how much of their language I had learned in such a short time, but in reality I was able only to stammer what I had picked up as necessary for their instruction. Among my hearers were the children of a chieftain of a region about two hundred leagues away, who had come here to conduct some business. They faithfully attended my catechism lessons, and on the point of leaving for their homes they assured me they would report to their father what they had heard of our religion, which they found very acceptable. I gave them reason to hope that in time I might be able to visit them. After their departure I learned that their part of the country is better and more densely populated than the region where we now are. The people there are anxious to attend the prayer services of the French who go there on business. All this gives me reason to think that there may be a great profit to be gained in that area.

I take every opportunity to preach Jesus Christ, by myself or by others, either to the blacks who come here or to those from more distant lands where the French have visited. Among these latter (after I exhort them to confess and communicate before leaving, and recommend that they avoid offending God at all costs and have a great concern to give only good example to the unbelievers) I ask those I find to be the most intelligent to let no opportunity pass when they might speak of our faith to the unbelievers. I give them written instructions on how to carry out this task.

Since the death of Monsieur Gondree, my dear companion in charge of our house here, I have not been able to take as many lengthy trips as I did before. I have to be here on Sundays and feasts to celebrate mass and the divine office, and preach to the French and the inhabitants of the region. My trips now last only five or six days.

Last August I went to the nearest mountains where during the day I instructed those whom I met in the small villages. In the evening I would repeat the same instruction for those who returned from their work. I was very consoled at the docility of these poor unbelievers, who stated that they believed with all their hearts what I had taught. Tearfully I wondered *quid prohibet eos baptizari?* ["What is to keep them from being baptized?"]220 But, fearing they

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220. Based on Acts 8:37.
were not yet sufficiently grounded in the faith, and without a priest to develop their Christian piety they would possibly abuse their baptism, I put all into the hands of the Providence of God. I would have baptized their infants, but again I feared that with time they would become indistinguishable from the others, especially since they move about so much. It seemed to me there should be some discernible way to tell the baptized and the unbaptized apart. I was well enough acquainted with those who lived near the fort to baptize them. They began to be called by their Christian names, such as Nicholas, Francis, etc.

I would test your patience if I recounted all the trips I have made, the names of the places and the peoples I have visited, to announce our Lord Jesus Christ, and all the events that have happened to me along the way. I can tell you that you could not wish for better dispositions for receiving the Gospel. All those I meet complain that for as long as the French have been in the country no one has ever spoken to them of the faith. They have a holy envy of those who live near us, since they may hear more of our holy religion.

I will recount here only what happened in November, in a visit I made to a distant village, to which I brought a large picture of the general judgment. Paradise was represented at the top of the picture, and hell at the bottom. On my arrival in each village, I would call out that I had come so their eyes could see and their ears hear things important for their salvation. After I explained what they should believe and do to assure their eternal happiness, I would display the picture to let them see the two eternal dwellings. I would urge them to choose either the one or the other, paradise or hell. These poor simple people cried out that they did not want to go with the devil, but that they wished to dwell with God. They complained that their Ombiasses never spoke to them of God, and never visited them except for some personal gain, or to deceive them. As for myself, I visited and taught these people completely at my own expense.

I went also, some time ago, beyond the mountains, to a region called the valley of Amboul [Ambolo], where I showed my picture to the lord of the region. I told him God would punish for all eternity those who kept several wives, since I knew well that he himself had five in his house. He was visibly affected, and I noticed that his face changed color. He composed himself somewhat and asked me to come to teach him. He also promised me that he would have his servants receive the Gospel.

Last Christmas I visited the region called Anos [Anosy], which
VINCENT DE PAUL

has a population of about ten thousand persons. I visited almost all
the surrounding villages to give the people their first knowledge of
Jesus Christ. I attempt to prepare his way, *in omnem locum, in quem
ipse Dominus est venturus* ["to every town and place the Lord
himself intended to visit"].221 I press ahead so that those who will
come after me will find the ground at least a little prepared.

There is nothing more to say, Monsieur, except that these poor
people whom I have begun to instruct await nothing more than
*aqua motum* ["the movement of the water"],222 and the hands of
several good workers to lead them to the pool of baptism. How
many times during my preaching in the countryside have I not heard
these poor people cry out, "Where then is this water that bathes our
souls, as you have promised? Bring it to us, and say the prayers."
But I continue to delay, fearing that they make this request like the
Samaritan woman in the Gospel. To save herself the trouble of
coming to the well, she asked our Lord for that thirst quenching
water, as yet unaware of the water that extinguishes the fires of
concupiscence and engenders eternal life.

When we arrived here we found five children baptized. It has
pleased God to add another fifty-two. Although there are many
adults well disposed, still I hesitate to administer baptism until I can
confer the sacrament of matrimony immediately after baptism, to
remedy a vice which is all too common in this country. Still, I take
great care that none of those sufficiently prepared will die without
baptism. Some time ago I did baptize a poor aged woman who had
become grievously ill, and God inspired her to show her thanks for
his goodness toward her. She was the first of the county to pass to
eternal blessedness, and her body was the first to be buried in the
French cemetery.

I will await the help and the directives you will be pleased to
send. If I cannot manage to do much more, I will at least strive to
maintain what has begun. Alas! Where and who are the doctors and
learned persons, as Saint Francis Xavier used to say, who waste
their time in the academies and universities while so many poor
unbelievers *petunt panem, et non est qui frangat eis* ["they cry for
food, but there is no one to give it to them""]223 May it please his
sovereign majesty in his goodness to provide for the harvest. Unless

223. Lam 4:4.
we have enough priests to teach and to reap the fruit of their instruction, we will not be able to do too much more.\textsuperscript{224}

\textbf{PART SIX}

\textit{Letter of Monsieur Bourdaise, Priest of the Congregation of the Mission, About the Missions of Madagascar}

Words cannot express the grief of Monsieur Vincent when he learned of the death of Monsieur Gondree. He grieved not only at the loss of such a good worker for the kingdom but for the anxiety he felt for Monsieur Nacquart, the only priest left on the island. He feared that he might succumb to the burden of the labors his zeal would entail. After he blessed God and abandoned himself completely to his holy will, he considered sending other priests to help their confrere in the development of this new Church. He thought first of Monsieur Toussaint Bourdaise, then of Monsieur Francois Mousnier, both priests of the Congregation and both quite capable of this apostolic mission.\textsuperscript{225} In view of the opportunities offered by this mission which suggested the need for even more workers, he followed the appointment of the first two missionaries with the appointment of three others. Fathers [Claude] Dufour, [Nicolas] Prevost, and [Mathurin] de Belleville were all of proven virtue and experienced in their missionary work. All poured out their lives in working for the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this infidel land. Since Monsieur Bourdaise survived the others, and worked the longest in this new Church, we cite here a letter he wrote in 1657 to Monsieur Vincent after the death of all his confreres. In it he recounted all that had occurred in these missions of Madagascar.

Monsieur, I cannot express the grief of my poor soul. God alone knows the regrets and tears we experienced when on first arriving on the island we found only the ashes of Monsieur Nacquart.\textsuperscript{226} We had hoped he would be another Joseph to receive his brothers in a

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[224.] Excerpted and summarized from CED III:569-77, Nacquart’s report, dated February 5, 1650.
\item[225.] Toussaint Bourdaise was born in 1618 at Blois. He entered the Congregation in 1645. Several times as a student he had almost been sent away as not having the necessary talent for the work of the Congregation. Providentially, he would become the true apostle of Madagascar. Jean Francois Mousnier was born at Saintes in 1628. At age eighteen he entered the Congregation. He was assisting in the distribution of alms in Picardy when Monsieur Vincent recalled him for assignment to Madagascar. He died in Madagascar, May 24, 1655.
\item[226.] It took three years for the news of Nacquart’s death to reach Paris. He was the only remaining priest on the island. When he sensed his death approaching, he encouraged the native Christians to remain faithful, and to continue to show respect to the blessed sacrament, which he left reserved in the church, being unable in his agony to consume it. He asked that the body of Gondree be exhumed and that they be buried together in the same tomb at the foot of the altar. He died May 29, 1650.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
strange land, or a Moses to lead us in the frightful deserts of this desolate place.

The loss shortly after of Monsieur Mousnier, whose zeal consumed him in less than six months, was all the more grievous to me because I had to bear the sorrow alone. This wound has continued to bleed in my heart. The hope of welcoming other missionaries alleviated my sorrow somewhat, except that the long delay in their arrival concerned me. What is most regrettable is that just when I was about to rejoice at the accomplishment of a good so long desired and anticipated, all was snatched from me. I have lost everything, and have no other resources. I now find myself, my dear father, in extreme desolation. I have nothing to hope for and nothing more to lose, since this ungrateful land devours so cruelly not its own people but those who have come to set it free. You understand, Monsieur, what I have to say, and what I would wish I could suppress, to spare your tears and my sobs. Monsieur de Belleville, whom I knew only by name and by his merits, has died on the way here. Monsieur Prevost did not survive the fatigues of the voyage, and also died. Monsieur Dufour, whom I knew here only long enough to realize the value of what I was to lose, is dead.

All those you sent to Madagascar are dead, and I alone, your miserable servant, remain to give you this sad and distressing news. Yet I cannot refrain from giving you cause for joy and consolation in recounting the holy lives they led on board ship and here on land, and the blessings God bestowed on all their activities since leaving France. I will attempt, Monsieur, to give you a brief account of these happenings.227

God alone knows the sorrow felt by Monsieur Vincent on the occasion of these losses, in a place where their presence and health were so very desirable. Let us hear Monsieur Bourdaise speak of this need. After we hear of his great disappointment, we will take note of the causes for joy with which he consoled Monsieur Vincent.

I had hoped that if there were two or three priests here, within a year we could have baptized almost the entire vast Anos [Anosy] country. In this region, there are many small villages. I cannot go very far afield and also care for those who come to our church here. The chiefs of these villages say they would willingly be baptized if they could have someone to help them pray to God. I attempt, at least, to arouse the desire for baptism, to have them act as though

227. CED VI:194-95.
they were baptized, in the hope that this baptism *in voto* ["of desire"] would suffice in this case.

In order to explain the doctrines of our faith to these people, I have asked a Frenchman who is expert at the language of the country, to help me by translating our small catechism word for word into their language. He has done so for me, and this has proven to be very useful. I no longer use an interpreter. They are attracted more and more to our holy faith, and I see new persons every day, coming to learn the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Creed, which I teach and explain. All the women of Histolango wish to be baptized and married in the Church.

When Fathers Dufour and Prevost came, and were still on the tiny isle of Sainte Marie, not far from here, I had already planned to have one live here and another there. This would allow me to travel to the surrounding areas to instruct the people. In order not to be a burden to anyone, I had planned to store some food in one of the main houses in the interior. In this way I could stay eight or ten days in one place, until I had taught someone in the village to pray to God and how to teach others to pray as well. These people were to help the others learn to participate in morning and evening prayers, just as we do here in our house. These plans pleased me very much. I often assured these poor blacks I would soon come to them, to teach them to know God and how to pray to him, all of which they greatly desired. I told them of my confreres who had come to help me, which pleased them greatly. God, however, wished otherwise.

I taught these good people who had received baptism how to confess, and I hoped all would confess before the feast of Easter, if it would please God. They were very faithful to the morning and evening prayers, and even those at midday. Those who felt shame, and the very old, I had come to our house, where I taught them privately.

Several wanted nothing more than to be baptized, but I preferred that they first learn how to pray. During this time I would test them, and check their behavior.

Many people told me that one of the things that held them back was fear that the French would not remain on the island. Others feared the light-skinned natives would murder them.

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228. A larger island, also called Sainte Marie, lies just off the northeast coast, some six hundred miles north of Fort Dauphin. Some other place is meant.
I make myself available at all hours for those who want to learn. I have obliged them all to pray aloud in the church. They sit in good order, both the young and the old. May it please God, Monsieur, that all our confreres hear the sweet harmony of so many different voices, the young and the old, men and women, the poor and the wealthy, all united in the faith of the one God.

I have recently baptized five families of blacks, the husband, wife, and children. I have presided at a dozen marriages of Frenchmen and native women. They have been the first to come to pray to God, the first to be baptized, and the first in their zeal for the honor of God. These women are examples for all the rest.

We have had much trouble in getting rid of the women of the streets. I have had to go into the cafes with a whip to drive them away, but I have done this only after my prayers and requests were to no avail. Fear alone drove them away. Before doing this I had the approval of the governor.

Four blacks baptized and married by the late Monsieur Nacquart, but who were later separated by the wars, have been reunited with their wives, at the cost of much effort.

Besides all this, we have celebrated a dozen marriages between blacks, and twenty-three between Frenchmen and women of the country. This number increases little by little. Each one goes back to their own home, coming back on the major feasts of the Church.

I am attempting to learn to read and write the native language, and to help me I have the aid of one of the most renowned and most learned of the Ombiasses. We have instructed four young cowherds, sons of four of the most important men of the country, who sent them to us. One has already been baptized privately. I await the arrival of the French to be their godparents, so that all may be baptized. They greatly desire this. They have cast away their Olis which they used to wear around their neck, and have replaced it with the cross.

I talked to a farmer, whose two oldest sons I baptized some time ago. I urged him and his whole household to be baptized, together with his father and brother, kings like himself. He is very close to a decision. He left his youngest son with me, and has agreed he may be baptized. This is important for a chieftain, for if he allows himself to be baptized there will surely be many who will follow his example.

The oldest son of another king named Dian Masse has also been baptized. He is one of the most courageous men of the island, and is both strong and intelligent. Every day he prays publicly, and has promised me he will teach his wife and family our holy religion.
I have here with me two children of two of the chiefs of the island, together with their slaves. Both want to receive baptism, which we will administer, God willing, with the greatest possible solemnity for the honor of God. We will do so that the people, particularly the leading men and women among them, will be encouraged to follow the good example these two will give. We must admit that the interests of our religion are advanced more by the conversion of a single nobleman and great lord than by a hundred of the lesser ones. Experience confirms this opinion.

Last year I was alerted that three of the most powerful rulers of all the country were unwell. The most important of them was sure to die within a few days. I was most disturbed, since I knew these men were strongly attached to their superstitions. I felt an inspiration of God to go see them. God gave them the grace of opening their eyes when I spoke to them of the truth of our faith. I assured them that no one could be truly happy or avoid the eternal flames after death unless he were baptized. At once they asked for the sacrament, and for the favor of being buried as a Christian after their death. I agreed to both requests, provided they would leave their superstitions and their Olis, which they carried on their persons. They did so at once, and I administered baptism. After their deaths I saw to it they were buried fittingly in our cemetery. I cannot pass over in silence the joy and edification these blacks gave me on this occasion. They gathered in large numbers to see these men buried whom just a while before they had regarded as gods. They gave a thousand praises to the Catholic religion, which buried so honorably those who before baptism wished us nothing but ill. You can see how ready these natives are for conversion, and how much influence the nobles have over them.

I have taken on three small French children together with two sons of the king of Mavaubouille, all around two years old. This is the age at which you can be sure they still have preserved their innocence, above all their chastity. This virtue is rare here, beyond what you can imagine. It is no wonder, for fathers and mothers do not even wait for the age of puberty to teach their children of either sex to lose their purity. What is worse, they themselves excite their children. This deplorable state shows how much these poor people need to be instructed.

I also have taken in hand four other young boys now seven or eight years old. They give me much satisfaction and I hope that I shall see them one day contributing to the conversion of their own
people. My hopes are principally on two of them, who already know how to read and to serve mass.

These poor natives come to me when they are sick, and thanks be to God, I have been able to help. As soon as anyone hurts himself or falls sick they send for me to come or to give them some remedy. This is important, for at such times the people are disposed to listen to me. On these occasions I have baptized several small children who died soon afterward, and as a result they went straight to heaven. We buried them with the usual ceremonies, with children of their own age carrying lighted candles.

When I went to see the lord of Imours, an old man in the last extremity of sickness, all his subjects gathered, alerted to my coming. I spoke to him of the other world and of the greatness of the Christian faith. I told him that if he consented to be baptized as a Christian he would be numbered among the children of God. This good man gathered all his remaining strength to tell me he indeed did wish to become a Christian. His illness was such that I thought it best to baptize him immediately in the presence of all the assembly. Afterward I exhorted them, and then returning to the sick man I gave him several cloves to strengthen him, for he had no more himself. He asked me if I would give him some French wine, which I promised to do.

He wanted to give me a present, but I refused with thanks. I told him that baptism was something of such worth that nothing in the world could repay its reception. Seeing him so well disposed I returned and gave him a bit of a panacea I had and a portion of hyacinth. At the end of three days he was cured. In this I owe thanks to the divine Goodness. By blessing these simple remedies for the body I find these good people are ready for the healing of their souls.

During the war a village near us was raided during the night, and about twenty men under the protection of the French were killed. They beat a woman with fifteen blows of their spears, and after ten days she was brought to me with a very high fever. Her wounds were so infected that the odor alone drove all away. The poor have no way of getting help from the Ombiasses, and their wounds are not treated. I gave her an ointment which quickly cured her by the help of God, even though she remained very nervous. When she recovered she brought her two sons to be baptized, and wanted to give them to me as slaves. I would not accept them on these terms, explaining to her that in our religion we do not have slaves.

An Ombiasse recently came to see me about a man of his village
who had not been able to sleep for the past three months. He suffered greatly from an abscess on his thigh which had become large and inflamed. The skin was so hard that it could not be pierced, but when I saw it I lanced it with my scalpel. The resulting discharge of the infection was the marvel of all the poor souls who saw it. He was cured three days later. He had a similar infection on his shoulder which I lanced in the same way. Soon he was entirely relieved of this ailment.

A persistent malady among the natives here is a form of dysentery, or gray flux, which they call *sorac.*\(^{229}\) It comes from lack of proper nourishment, and is usually prevalent three months of the year. This sickness is usually fatal in eight days, and they have no medicine to cure this condition. I gave them some of the panacea I had, which did cure this illness. More than a hundred were saved by God’s mercy, so that all come to me when they are afflicted. It is to be hoped that the bodily cures will dispose them to accept the spiritual ministration, as happened with the apostles and our Lord himself, who cured bodily ailments before converting souls.

There is a soothsayer here named Rathy, about sixty-nine years old, short of stature, simple in appearance, and of few words. This man has somewhat of a reputation because of his predictions, most of which have come to pass. Even the French pay attention to him. In 1654 he predicted that in less than six months ships from France would appear. This turned out to be true, for soon after, those sent by the Marshal de la Meilleraye arrived.\(^{230}\) Another time, on being asked if Monsieur de Flacourt, who was returning to France, would arrive safely, he said, “Yes, but as he approaches the coast of France he will run into three enemy ships.” It happened as he predicted, as Monsieur de Flacourt can tell you himself. He has proven true in other cases, also, as I can testify. This makes me wonder if this is not a true gift of prophecy from the hand of God, as he gave earlier to the Sybils, as a recognition of their moral virtue. He appears to be a good man, simple and naive.

Since he often comes to see me, I once asked him if he talked to the fairies, the imps, and forest creatures. He naively replied that he did, and often. I asked him where these spirits lived, and where they come from. He said they live in the high mountains, and appear to be all belly, though they do not eat; some among them speak, while

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229. The symptoms are those of a form of cholera.
230. Charles de la Porte, duke of La Meilleraye, 1602-1664. It was he who gave Monsieur Vincent the idea of sending missionaries to Madagascar.
others do not. I asked him if he dreamed of what was going to happen in future. He said, no, he just spoke what came into his head at the moment he was asked. I believe him, for he has answered questions immediately, with no time to consult the devil, such as when a person asks him if his father was alive, or how many brothers and sisters he had. With no possibility of knowing the right answer beforehand, he has replied correctly.

I asked him if this gift benefited him, and if it was good to pray to God. He replied very ambiguously, whether from doubt about what to say or because he was afraid to say no, and I did not press him further on this question. I asked him only if the spirit that moved him loved the priests. He stated the spirit feared rather than loved them, which led me to believe that the spirit was one of the evil sort. He predicted other things too, but we do not yet know the outcome, for example, that the whole island would be converted and baptized. Whether this prophecy is from the good or evil spirit I cannot say, it being God's will which will determine its fulfillment. We have reason to hope for this, if my sins do not prevent it.

Another of his predictions is just on the verge of being fulfilled: that he, his wife, and children will one day be baptized. He has promised to present himself soon. He comes to prayers every day, and tells me that once he has learned to pray he will accompany me to the villages, to teach the others. He no longer responds to those who ask him something about the superstitions of the people. He excuses himself on the plea that he is afraid of me. This man could do much to move the people away from their idols, for he is one of the most respected of their authorities on the Olis.

The famine here has become so serious that several of the blacks have died from hunger. I have prepared something for both the baptized and unbaptized children, who are delighted to have a bowl of soup every day. I present a catechism lesson myself at midday, at which they are very attentive and modest. Mothers come also, and bring their tiny children with them. I am very pleased at this for they take this spiritual milk with much eagerness, and seeing the fruit produced I am persuaded to continue the practice. Besides this usual feeding, I see to it that the older persons are taken care of, and also the children abandoned by their mothers, who have almost nothing to eat.

You see then, Monsieur, the rich and beautiful opportunities for extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this large island. At least six hundred of the inhabitants have already received the light of the
Gospel, and the number of those who await baptism is much greater. If we can judge from the favorable dispositions and the lack of resistance of these first converts how the others of the island may react, we can have great hopes for the remainder of the people of the island. We are speaking of the 400,000 inhabitants, plus the unnumbered multitude of those future generations who will owe their faith to this generation of converts. However, though I am a poor, small useless servant, if something should happen to me, alas, what would become of this poor Church? What would become of these people who live in ignorance, without the sacraments, and lacking all direction? God, who makes me aware of this pressing necessity, inspires me in spirit to throw myself at your feet to say on behalf of so many souls, with all humility and all possible respect, *Mitte quos missurus es* ["Send those whom you are going to send"]\(^{231}\). Send us missionaries, for those who have died on our shores were not destined to serve in Madagascar. They were called to pass this way on their journey to heaven. No place on earth needs your Congregation more than here.

I end this letter with some news, both joyful and sad, that happened recently. The mother of Dian Machicore, one of the greatest lords of the country, who was more than a hundred years old, died after earnestly requesting baptism. I was not able to answer her request because of the great distance of her home from mine. In truth, I was much put out that I had not been called earlier to help her in her last passage. There is good reason to hope that her fervent desire will supply for what was lacking, for surely she received the interior baptism of the Spirit. This thought gave me much consolation, and I am sure she should be numbered among our neophytes.

Other men and women are probably also among their number because of this same spiritual baptism, since they find it impossible to receive the sacrament. We must fear that the number of those who will be lost is much greater, for lack of someone to bathe them in this mystic pool. This is what gives me pain, above all when I picture to myself their guardian angels saying to me, *si fuisses hic, frater meus non fuisset mortuus* ["If you had been here, my brother would never have died"]\(^{232}\). O Missionary! If you had been here to help this man or this woman they would not have died this eternal death.

O my dear father, how often I wish those capable priests in

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\(^{231}\) Based on Exod 4:13.

\(^{232}\) John 11:21.
France who live in idleness, would come to know of the great need of workers in the Lord’s vineyard, and then would reflect carefully that our Lord addresses this reproach to each of them individually: O sacerdos! si fuisses hic, frater meus non fuisset mortuus, O priests, if you had been here on this island several of my brothers redeemed by my blood, would not have died in their sin. Beyond doubt this thought would move them to compassion and possibly to fright, if they reflect carefully that having neglected to provide this spiritual help, Jesus Christ will one day address these terrible words to them, Ipse impius in iniquitate sua morietur, sanguinem vero ejus de manu tua requiram [“The wicked man himself will die in his iniquity, and I will hold you responsible for his blood”]. If the priests, doctors, preachers, catechists, and others with talent and a vocation to the foreign missions would consider this, and would reflect on the account they will have to render for all the souls lost for lack of their help, I have no doubt they would be more attentive than they are. They would seek out the lost sheep to lead them back to the sheepfold of the Church.

Since this fervent Missionary thought that Monsieur Vincent might lose courage in the face of the death of the most excellent workers of his Congregation, he returned to his appeal.

Send us other workers, I beseech you, my dear father. If these unfortunate events make you doubt that this is properly the vocation of our Company, consider Saint Bernard in preaching the crusade for the recovery of the Holy Land, or the Israelites fighting against the city of Gibeon. Both these attempts failed, even though God had supported the first by a miracle and the second by direct revelation. The sad outcome of sending your priests here ought not to suggest that God did not call them, for other signs show his blessing. You know well, Monsieur, that God tears down and builds up according to his good pleasure. Thus we can hope that other workers whom your charity will send will succeed better than those who preceded them. This is what happened to the Israelites of whom I spoke earlier. After the Gibeonites had beaten and repulsed them twice, they were finally victorious on the third assault. It is true, my dear father, that you have lost many valuable members. Yet please, for the love of Jesus Christ, do not be discouraged, nor abandon so many souls redeemed by the Son of God. You can be sure that if so many good missionaries have died, it is not the climate of the country that brought this about. The fatigues of their voyage, their

233. Based on Jer 31:30 and other passages.
excessive mortification, or the excess of work, which will always be the case here with too few workers, were undoubtedly the cause of their early deaths. 

PART SEVEN

Letter of Monsieur Vincent to Monsieur Bourdaise, to Whom He Sent Five More Missionaries

The sad news of the loss of so many good workers deeply grieved Monsieur Vincent. This no doubt wounded his paternal heart, since it was so sensitive to the welfare of all his confreres. In this, as in all things, he remained perfectly submissive to the will of God. He was committed to his glory, and to God he had offered and continuously sacrificed of his life and that of all his spiritual family. After these shocking events, he certainly had reason to question whether God wished him and his Congregation to serve in such a distant mission. It seemed presumptuous, perhaps, to pursue an undertaking which it appeared divine Providence did not favor. This was the opinion of some of his friends, guided by the light of human prudence. Yet human prudence is always a risky thing to follow in a matter of apostolic undertakings.

This man of God, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, recognized that all these reverses signified God’s approval rather than his disfavor. This is why, like the palm tree flattened by the storm, he decided to continue what he had begun with the help of God’s grace, in which he placed all his trust. He wrote:

The universal Church has been established by the death of the Son of God, and strengthened by that of the apostles, popes, and bishops martyred for the faith. She increased through persecution, and the blood of martyrs was the seed of Christians. God’s usual way of acting was to test his followers, especially when he had a great work in store for them. His divine Goodness has revealed, now, as always, that his name should be known, and the kingdom of his Son be established in all nations. It is evident that the island people are well disposed to receive the light of the Gospel, for more than six hundred have already received baptism by the ministry of a single Missionary. It would be against all reason and charity to abandon the single Missionary God has preserved, and to abandon these people who ask only to be instructed in the faith.

All these and other similar considerations led him to decide to send five other Missionaries to this distant island, four priests and a brother. These

236. The missionaries for this fifth expedition were: Nicolas Etienne, Pierre Daveroult, Pasquier
men, disdaining danger and death, offered themselves to him, to work in this perilous and difficult mission. Before their departure he gave them the following letter addressed to Monsieur Bourdaise, in which we can read, as if it were written about himself, a description of his own zeal and virtue.

I must first tell you, Monsieur, of our uncertainty whether you are still in the land of the living. The short time that those who preceded, accompanied, and followed you survived in this inhospitable land which swallowed up those sent to cultivate it, has given us concern. If you are still alive, how great our joy will be to hear from you. You would have no trouble realizing this if you knew the esteem and affection I have for you, which is as great as it is possible for one person to have for another.

Your last report to me has allowed us to see the strength of God working in you, and to hope for extraordinary fruit from your missionary labors. We shed tears of happiness because of you, and of thanksgiving to the goodness of God. He has taken such admirable care of you and your people whom you evangelize by his grace with such zeal and prudence on your part, and such admirable dispositions on their part to become children of God. We also shed tears of sorrow at your loss in the deaths of Messieurs Dufour, Prevost and de Belleville, who found rest rather than the occupation they expected, and who increased your concerns where you had expected relief. This sudden separation was a sword of sorrow for your soul, just as the deaths of Messieurs Nacquan, Gondree and Mousnier were earlier.

You expressed such distress at their loss, in giving us news of their deaths, that I could sense your extreme affliction at these heavy losses. It seems, Monsieur, that God is treating you just as he treated his Son. God sent him into the world to establish his Church by the passion, and in the same way it seems he wishes to bring the faith to Madagascar by your sufferings. I adore his divine guidance, and I pray that his designs will be accomplished in you. It may be he has some special good in store for you, since among so many missionaries sent to the island, you alone survive. It would seem the good that they desired to accomplish will be fulfilled by you alone, whom God has preserved in life.

Be that as it may, Monsieur, we have greatly lamented the loss of these good servants of God. Yet we have good reason to admire in this surprising turn of events the incomprehensible scope of his

Desfontaines, Francois Feydin, and Brother Philippe Patte, a surgeon.
guidance. He knows that we devoutly kiss the hand that strikes us, submitting ourselves humbly to what touches us so deeply. Still, we cannot know the reasons for this sudden death of such promising men in the midst of a people pleading for instruction, and after so many signs in them of a vocation for evangelization.

Despite these latest losses, neither the earlier losses nor the accidents that have happened since will weaken our resolve to help you. The four priests and a brother who were attracted to your mission and who have long requested to be sent, have not slackened in their resolution.

(Here Monsieur Vincent included a description of the good qualities of each of the missionaries, and then continued:)

I do not know who will rejoice more at their safe arrival in Madagascar, you who have awaited them for such a long time, or they themselves, who have a great desire to be with you. They see our Lord in you, and you in our Lord. With this perspective they will obey you as they would the Lord himself, with the help of his grace. Please agree to be in charge of them. I hope God will bless your direction, and their submission.

You would not have had to wait so long for reinforcements if it were not for unhappy incidents on two different occasions. In one case the ship carrying two of our priests and a brother, foundered at Nantes with a loss of nearly a hundred persons.²³⁷ It was only a special protection of God that saved our confreres. The second ship left last year, but Spaniards captured it, and the four priests and a brother aboard were returned here. It pleased God that no aid or consolation would come to you from us, but from himself alone. He will be your first and last hope in this apostolic work to which he has called you, to show that the establishment of the faith is strictly his work and not a human enterprise. This is the way it was at the beginning of the Church, when he chose only twelve apostles. They soon separated to go to the four corners of the earth, to announce his coming and his doctrine to the whole world. This holy seed of the Word began to increase, and Providence allowed the number of laborers to increase. Your Church will also grow little by little, and will in time have priests to develop and extend it.

O Monsieur, how happy you are to have laid the first foundations of this Church. It will lead so many souls to heaven who otherwise

²³⁷ For this fourth expedition, the priests were Charles Boussordec and Francois Herbron; the brother was Christophe Delaunay. For Vincent’s account of these events, see CED XI:372-80. Boussordec died on a later voyage in 1665.
would not have entered there, if God did not pour out on them the principle of eternal life through the teaching and sacraments which you have administered. May you continue, with the help of his grace, for a long time in your holy ministry, and serve as an example and an encouragement for the other Missionaries. This is the prayer the whole Company frequently offers, for it has your person and your work very much at heart. I feel this deeply.

In vain will we ask God to keep you safe, if you do not cooperate. I beg of you, Monsieur, with all my heart, to take care of yourself and of your confreres. You know from your own experience how important this is, especially in that region. Your own intuition that our dear departed hastened their end by their excessive work must lead you to moderate your zeal. It is better to have some strength in reserve than to exceed your limit. Pray to God for our little Congregation. It needs both men and virtue for the many and diverse harvests we attempt to reap on all sides, among the priests or among the people. Please pray to God for me also. I feel I do not have much longer to live, given my age, now above eighty, and my bad legs no longer can support me. I shall die in peace if I know that you are still living, and if I am informed of the number of children and adults you have baptized. If it should be that we no longer meet in this world, I hope to see you in the presence of God. I remain faithfully yours.

These five Missionaries left France near the end of 1659, but Providence decreed they were to return to Paris after eighteen months. The ship on which they were sailing was shipwrecked at the Cape of Good Hope, but thanks be to God, all aboard were saved. These good Missionaries stayed there until a Dutch fleet called at the port ten months after the shipwreck, and kindly brought them back to France.

By the time news of this terrible accident was received, Monsieur Vincent had died. Undoubtedly he would have been greatly distressed. By now, nineteen or twenty members of the Congregation had been sent to Madagascar at various times to work for the conversion of the people of the island, to establish among them the empire of Jesus Christ. Of these, seven had died in this effort, including Monsieur Bourdaise, the last of those on the scene.

238. Abelly perhaps altered this expression, since the saint would have turned eighty in 1660, as other letters of his clearly show. Perhaps the original read "now turning eighty" or "going on for eighty years."

239. CED VIII: 156-60.

240. Eighteen men were sent in six expeditions: First, (1) C. Nacquart, (2) N. Gondree; Second, (3) F. Mousnier; (4) T. Bourdaise, (5) Bro. R. Foret; Third, (6) C. Dufour, (7) N. Prevost, (8) M. de Belleville; Fourth, (9) C. Boussordec, (10) F. Herbron, (11) Bro. C. Delaunay, also on the fifth expedition; Fifth, (12) C. Leblanc, (13) I. Arnaud, (14) P. Desfontaines, (15) P. Daveroul; Sixth,
The others, by the secret and incomprehensible order of divine Providence, had to return to France without being allowed to cultivate the fertile field of this poor struggling Church.

The superior who succeeded Monsieur Vincent immediately sent five missionaries in December, 1662, to continue this work. They had to wait at Nantes until May of the following year. They finally embarked then for Madagascar with the same wish to work and suffer for the glory of God among these poor infidels which animated all the others who preceded them in this mission. We have since learned that by the grace of God all have happily arrived at their destination.

SECTION TEN

The Mission to Poland

Her serene highness, the queen of Poland, moved by an earnest desire to obtain the spiritual good of her people, and to have Jesus Christ reign in their hearts, saw the great need they had of receiving instruction and help in their spiritual development. As a result, in 1651 she requested Monsieur Vincent to send priests of the Mission to her country. This good servant of God wanted to correspond to the designs of this virtuous princess. Since he knew the great need which the vast reaches of her realm had of the type of help his missionaries had produced in other places, he decided to send some of his priests for this work. Among those he sent was the late Monsieur Lambert, his assistant at Saint Lazare. He was his right arm in the administration of the Congregation, a man of good health, energy, and sound judgment, and one for whom Monsieur Vincent had a special esteem and affection.

Nevertheless, by a heroic act of virtue and by an entire detachment from all created goods, even from him to whom he was so closely attached for the welfare of the community, he willingly surrendered this faithful collaborator

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(16) F. Feydin, (17) N. Etienne, (18) Bro. P. Patte. The seven who died en route or in Madagascar were Nacquart, Gondree, Mousnier, Bourdain, Dufour, Prevost, de Belleville. This listing generally follows Coste, Life.

241. Rene Almeras.
242. The five were N. Etienne, M. Manie, Bro. P. Patte, and Bro. G. Lebrun. They were joined by a secular priest, Fr. Frachey.
243. Lambert aux Couteaux, who zealously worked for twenty-two years, and died January 31, 1653.
together with all the help he might expect from him. In doing so, Monsieur Vincent offered a perfect sacrifice of all things, including himself, to our Lord. He sent this worthy missionary as superior of the new venture.\textsuperscript{244} By the grace of God he arrived safely with his little band in Poland. He found not only enough to do there, but also, in imitation of the patriarch Isaac, enough to suffer in carrying out the will of God in perfect obedience. From the time he and his band of missionaries arrived there, God allowed the kingdom to be afflicted by war, plague, or famine, sometimes even by all three of these scourges together. This is what the queen of Poland herself wrote to Monsieur Vincent in September 1652:

Monsieur Vincent, I am obliged to you for so many signs of your regard, especially the joy you had to hear good news of the king's health and mine, for which I thank you.

That good priest, Monsieur Lambert, saw the dread the Polish people had of the plague, and wanted to go to Warsaw to reorganize the relief for the poor. I gave orders to house him in the castle, in the king's own rooms. Every day I had news of him, and every day I urged him not to expose himself to contagion. He has everything he needs to return here as soon as the arrangements he had made in Warsaw are on a sound footing. I have urged him to return here as soon as possible. Except for this illness, which has upset our plans, we would have completed them in Warsaw. Two days ago the Daughters of Charity arrived, with whom I am very satisfied. They seem like good women.\textsuperscript{245}

One of the first tests God had prepared for the virtue and zeal of Monsieur Lambert and his confreres was to tend to the spiritual and corporal relief of the poor of the great city of Warsaw, in desperate condition because of the plague which ravaged the region. This is what Monsieur Vincent wrote to the superior of one of the missions, relating what he had heard from there:

The missionaries in Poland have worked with great blessings. I do not have the time to tell you everything in detail, but will tell you simply that the plague has gripped the city of Warsaw, where the king ordinarily lives. All the inhabitants who can, have fled the city, so that just as in other stricken places, there is almost no semblance of order, but only complete disarray. Even the dead are not buried. They are left in the streets, and dogs feed on the corpses. As soon as a person is stricken by this disease, the others put him into the streets to die, for no one brings them anything to eat. The poor

\textsuperscript{244} Four confreres accompanied Monsieur Lambert to Poland: Father Guillaume Desdames, the subdeacon Nicolas Guillot, a cleric, Stanislaus Zelazewski, and Brother Jacques Posny.

\textsuperscript{245} \textit{CED} IV:487.
artisans, men and women servants, the poor widows and orphans are entirely abandoned. They can find no work, nor can they even beg their bread, for all the wealthy have fled the city.

Monsieur Lambert was sent this sad situation to bring relief to all these miseries. By God's grace, he has managed to bury the dead, bring the sick to places where they could be helped in both soul and body, and he has even taken care of other sick people who do not have a contagious disease. He has found three or four different houses, separated one from the other, to be used as hospices or hospitals. There he has gathered the poor who are not sick, men to one side, women and children to the other, all helped by alms and other benefits from the queen.246

This is the short sketch of great works accomplished by this virtuous priest with his confreres in that country, where his zeal found new persons and new opportunities to help every day. Divine Providence, however, seeing his past services and the ardent desire to continue in his service, judged his course completed and his crown prepared. In January, 1653, while reaping a harvest of souls, God called him from this life to give him eternal rest in the next. Monsieur Vincent spoke of him in the circular letter he sent to the houses of the Congregation in the following March, in which he revealed his sense of loss of such a missionary.

May the consolation of our Lord be with us all, to accept with love the huge loss the Company has suffered in the person of the late Monsieur Lambert, who died on January 31 of this year. He was sick only three days, but of such a painful illness that despite his great patience he said himself he could not long endure the pain. He died after receiving the sacraments from the hands of one of our priests of the Congregation. The confessor of the queen of Poland wrote to tell me he is universally lamented. According to the people it would be hard to find a priest more gifted and devoted to the service of God. He added that he should be called Dilectus Deo et hominibus, cujus memoria in benedictione est ["Dear to God and men, his memory is held in benediction"].247 He was, he told me, a person wholly given to God, and never was anyone seen to rise so quickly in the favor and esteem of the king and queen as he. Neither was there anyone who gained such universal approval, for wherever he went he left the remembrance of his virtues. These are the thoughts of the chaplain of the queen. His Majesty himself wrote a long letter in his own hand in which he expressed his appreciation

246. CED IV:533-34.
247. Based on Sir 45:1.
of Monsieur Lambert’s contributions, and the regret he felt at his loss. He concluded by the words, “if you do not send us another Monsieur Lambert, I do not know what we shall do.”

I have no doubt, gentlemen, that this loss which has saddened the entire Company has touched each of you individually. But consider: the hand of God in human affairs is adorable, and we must accept it with love. That is what we must do in this situation, persuaded that the dear departed will be more useful to us in heaven than he was on earth. We will consider someone to take his place, to continue our efforts in support of that kingdom where the needs are so pressing. The priests there need a strong personality to help them. May God be pleased to give us such a person. 248

The one whom Monsieur Vincent chose to send to Poland as a replacement was Monsieur Ozenne, an older priest of the Company and a respected missionary. 249 He worked for several years blessed by God, and finally succumbed to the difficulties of the work, dying in that distant mission. 250

The plague continued to afflict the city of Warsaw, and to add to its woes, war broke out against the Poles. The Swedes invaded from the one side, and the Russians from the other. When the queen realized the city of Warsaw was suffering these two scourges of war and pestilence, she ordered all but two of the Missionaries to leave for safer regions. 251 The two who remained suffered much from their dedication to the poor, particularly to the most abandoned. They remained steadfast at their post during several years, despite the troubles brought on by the war and the plague. They persevered in their service of the poor, administering the sacraments to both the healthy and the sick, providing all sorts of help with a courage and charity which deeply touched Monsieur Vincent’s heart. One evening, at the end of a conference he had given the house, he recommended these two priests to the prayers of the community, and encouraged them by the example of their constancy in their sufferings.

One of them had a serious stomach problem, brought on from the poorly treated illness of the plague. 252 I was told that he was treated by having fire applied to the putrefied flesh of his side, but his patience was so great he did not complain. He suffered the treatment with peace and tranquility of spirit. Another person there might have complained at being sick three or four hundred leagues from his own country.

248. CED IV:560-61.
249. Charles Ozenne, 1613-1658, a missionary in Poland from 1653 to his death five years later. (See CED II:147.)
250. August 14, 1658.
251. Guillaume Desdames and Nicolas Duperroy.
"Why did they send me so far away? When will they call me back? What, are they forgetting me entirely? Others are at their ease in France, and I am left to die in a strange land."

This is a sensual man speaking. He is moved by purely natural reasonings, and does not enter into the sufferings of our Lord, who found happiness in his sufferings. This is a good lesson for us, to love what divine Providence sends us. Look at the first man, who has worked so long in peace of mind and with wonderful confidence, not deterred by his long stay or the difficulties he encounters, nor concerned by its dangers.

Both our priests were indifferent to death or to life, humbly resigned to whatever God ordained for them. They gave no sign of impatience or of murmuring. On the contrary, they seemed ready for even more sufferings. And what of ourselves, gentlemen and my brothers? Are we ready to accept what God sends, repress the movements of nature, to live only the life of Jesus Christ in us? Are we ready to go to Poland, Barbary, the Indies, to sacrifice our own satisfaction and our very lives? If so, let us bless God. If on the contrary we fear any inconvenience, or complain at any item that may be lacking, or wish to be changed from house to house because the climate is not good, or the food is poor, or because we are not free enough to come and go as we please, if in a word, gentlemen, if we are still slaves of nature, given to sensual pleasures like this miserable sinner who speaks to you, who at the age of seventy is still so worldly, let us see ourselves as unworthy of the apostolic vocation to which God has called us. We should be ashamed at seeing our brothers fulfill this ministry so worthily, while we remain so far from their courageous spirit.

What do our men have to bear in that country? Famine? Yes. The plague? Yes, both, and more than once. War? They are surrounded by armies, and have experienced living amid enemy soldiers. God has tried them by all these scourges. And we live here like shut-ins, without heart and with little zeal. We see others braving dangers in the service of God, while we are as timid as wet hens. O misery! O wretchedness! Look at twenty thousand soldiers who go to war and suffer all sorts of ills. One will lose an arm, another a leg, and some their very lives, all for uncertain hopes. Yet they have no fear, and set off as though they were going after a treasure. To gain heaven, gentlemen, scarcely anyone will lift a finger, and those who say they are seeking to gain heaven, lead a life so lazy and sensual it is unworthy not only of a priest or a Christian, but even of a rational
man. If there are any such among us they would be merely the corpse of a missionary. O God, be forever blessed and glorified for the graces you have given to those who abandon themselves to you. Praise be to you for giving your grace to these two priests of ours in Poland.

Let us give ourselves to God, gentlemen, to go to the whole world to carry his holy Gospel. Wherever he leads us, let us remain at our post, faithful to our customs, until we are recalled, at his good pleasure. May difficulties not deter us when there is question of the glory of the Eternal Father, the fruitfulness of his word, or the passion of his Son. The salvation of peoples, and our own, is a good of such magnitude it deserves to be bought no matter what the price. It matters not if we die in the fight. Only let us die with our weapons in our hands, and happy, for by our death the Company will not be the poorer, because, *Sanguis martyrum, semen est Christianorum* ["The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians"]\(^253\) For one Missionary who gives his life out of charity, God will raise up others who will do the work he left behind. May each of us resolve to resist the world and its maxims, to mortify our flesh and its passions, to submit to God’s orders, and to spend ourselves in the duties of our state and in the accomplishment of his holy will, wherever in the world he wills. Let us now together take this resolution, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, with perfect confidence that he will help us in our needs. Do you not wish to do so, my brothers in the seminary? Do you, my brothers, students, wish to do so? I do not ask this of the priests, for without doubt they already have this disposition of heart.

Yes, my God, we all wish to cooperate with the designs you have for us. This is what we together, and each of us in particular, propose to do with the help of your grace. We will not be so much in love with our lives, our health, our comfort, and our ease, for one relationship over another, nor for anything else, not for anything in the world which might hinder you, O gracious God, from granting us this grace we all ask, one for another.

I do not know, gentlemen, how I came to say all this, for I did not think of it before. What I had heard of our two priests in Poland and the graces God had given them so moved me that I could not resist sharing my feelings with you.\(^254\)

We can judge the spirit that motivated Monsieur Vincent from these

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\(^{253}\) This famous statement is found in various ancient authors, among whom is Tertullian; PL 1.1:535.

\(^{254}\) *CED XI*:410-14.
words, and from how he strove to influence others. We can appreciate the joy he felt when he saw the priests of the Congregation of the Mission ready and disposed to undertake any mission, courageous in the face of danger, and ready to embrace confidently the suffering of the cross, to further the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls. Among these, the ones for whom he had a particular concern were the most afflicted and the most abandoned. He strove to bring them as much aid as was in his power, as was evidenced in the great kingdom of Poland, stricken by war and pestilence, and subject to both ancient and modern heresies. He was not satisfied to send laborers from his Company, but had recourse to prayers and frequent reminders of the sufferings of these people, both inside and outside the house. Here is how he spoke to his community of Saint Lazare, in August 1655:

The queen of Poland has such good will for our Company that she has requested in all her letters that we should pray to God for her poor suffering kingdom. May God have pity on it, for it is under attack from all sides.  

In September 1656, he said:

We must humble ourselves before God, since he has allowed (if rumors are true) the good we have prayed for so to be delayed. Undoubtedly our sins have caused this. There is unconfirmed word that not only have the troubles of the kingdom not come to an end, but that the king, with an army of one hundred thousand men has given battle, and has been defeated. A nobleman of the court of Poland wrote me that the queen has gone to find the king, and has come within two days travel of the army. Her letter is dated July 28, and the battle took place on the thirtieth. This means she herself was in danger. Oh, gentlemen and my brothers, how concerned we should be that our sins have moved God to delay answering our prayers. We must grieve that this vast and great kingdom is so grievously attacked, and is on the point of being lost, if the news we have is true. We must grieve for the Church which will be lost in that country if the king is defeated. Religion cannot endure unless the king is saved, for the Church will fall into the hands of its enemies.

The Russians already occupy a hundred or a hundred and twenty leagues, and the Swedes threaten the rest. This gives me much reason to fear the outcome predicted by Pope Clement VIII, a holy man, esteemed not only by Catholics but by heretics as well. They

255. CED XI:303-04.
256. King Karl Gustav of Sweden, had invaded Poland with an army of 60,000 men. At the end of July 1656, aided by the elector of Brandenburg, he marched against Warsaw. The king, John Casimir, remained with his troops. The queen was separated from him and the enemy by the Vistula river. Warsaw fell to the Swedes on August 1.
recognize him as a man of God and of peace, and even his enemies praise him. I have heard that even Lutherans praise and admire his virtue. This holy pope received two ambassadors from some ruler of the Orient where the faith had begun to grow. Wishing to thank God publicly, he offered mass in their presence for the intentions of this new Church. While at the altar, during his Memento he began to cry, sob, and weep, to their enormous astonishment. Afterward they asked why, on an occasion which should have been a joyous one, he had shown such distress. He said, yes, he had begun the mass with much satisfaction and contentment, because of the progress of the Catholic faith, but soon afterward all this turned into sadness because of the losses and harm which come upon the Church every day from the hands of heretics, so much so that there was reason to fear God willed to remove the Church to other lands. We ought, gentlemen and my brothers, to join in his concern and fear that the kingdom of God will be taken from our midst. We see this deplorable situation enacted before our very eyes, where six kingdoms have expelled the Church, that is, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, England, Scotland and Ireland. Besides, there is Holland and large parts of Germany, and several of the larger Hanseatic cities. O Lord, what a loss! And now we are on the verge of seeing this great kingdom of Poland lost, if God in his mercy does not save it.

Indeed, God has promised to be with his Church until the end of time, but he has not promised his Church would last in France, Spain, or any other specific country. He has said he will never leave his Church, and that it will endure till the end of time, wherever it might be, but not here or not there. If there ever was a country where you would have thought the Church would endure, surely it would be the Holy Land where he was born, where he began the Church, and where he worked so many of his miracles. And yet it was from this land, for which he had done so much, that he took the Church to bestow it upon the Gentiles. Formerly, the children of this same land lost the Ark. God allowed it to be taken by their enemies, the Philistines, as though God preferred to live a prisoner in the Ark among his enemies than to remain with his own people who continued their evil ways. This is how God acted, and continues to act, towards those upon whom he has bestowed so many graces, and yet continue to offend him, as we do ourselves, miserable creatures that we are.

What a curse to those people to whom God says, “I will have
nothing to do with you. Your sacrifices and offerings, your devo-
tions and your fasts no longer please me, I want nothing to do with
them. You have soiled everything by your sins. I abandon you. Go,
you shall have no part with me.”

257 Alas, gentlemen, what unhap-
piness! But, O Lord, what happiness to be among those God uses
to bring his blessings and his Church! Think of this comparison of
an unfortunate nobleman who sees himself pressed on every side
by war, by the plague, the burning of his houses, and by the shame
of seeing the desertion of a prince. Amid this desolation he sees
some come to his help, offering to serve him and to help him salvage
what he can save. What a consolation and happiness for this
gentleman in his misfortune! Then, gentlemen and my brothers,
what joy will God experience in seeing amid the ravages of his
Church made by heresy, or by the fires of concupiscence, some few
persons who will offer themselves to carry off the remains of the
Church, if I may speak this way, or to preserve it where it remains?
O Lord, what joy to see such servants, either to preserve what is
good on the spot, or to go anywhere to gain new lands for you!

O Lord, what joy will be yours to see such zealous servants
defend for you what remains here, while others go off to gain new
grounds for you! Oh, gentlemen, what a reason for rejoicing. You
are aware that conquerors leave a portion of their troops to guard
what they already have gained, while they send off others to win
new territory for their empire. This is what we must do, maintaining
courageously the goods of the Church and the interests of Jesus
Christ, and still working for new victories, and making him known
even to the most distant peoples.

One day a heretical author said to me: 258 “God has finally grown
weary of the sins of all these countries, and his anger has withdrawn
the faith of which they are unworthy. Would it not be rash to oppose
the designs of God, and to seek to defend the Church which he has
resolved to destroy? As for myself, I would prefer to further God’s
design by working for this plan of destruction.”

Alas, gentlemen, perhaps what he said is true, that God might
wish to destroy the Church because of our sins. Yet this author of
heresy is wrong in saying it is an act of rashness to work against
this decree, to use one’s energies to conserve and to defend the
Church. God asks this of us, and we must do it. It is not rash to fast,
to suffer, to pray, to appease his anger and fight to the death to

257. Based on such passages as Isa 1:13.
258. The Abbe de Saint Cyran.
sustain and defend the Church wherever it is found. If our efforts up to the present seem to be fruitless because of our sins, or at least it seems this way, we must not stop because of that. We must rather humble ourselves profoundly, and continue our fasts, communions, our mental prayer in union with all other faithful servants of God who pray unceasingly for this same intention. We must hope that God in his mercy will relent and hear our prayer. As much as we can, let us humble ourselves then, because of our sins. But we must have confidence, great confidence, in God who wills that we continue in prayer for this poor kingdom of Poland which is so tried, all the while acknowledging that all depends on him and his grace.  

Up to this point we have seen by the words of Monsieur Vincent his ardent zeal and his desire that his confreres share this same virtue. It seemed this faithful servant of God was so moved by a holy confidence in his infinite mercy that he sought at any price to gain what he sought, that is, the protection of God for the kingdom of Poland and the preservation of the Catholic religion threatened with imminent peril. Therefore he urged his confreres to humble themselves, to offer to God their prayers, communions, and penances. For several years, and at almost every community gathering after mental prayer or his conferences, that is, two or three times a week, he would speak on this topic, never growing weary of repeating the same thoughts. Who can say how many were his sighs and tears before God, the mortifications he practiced, and the recommendations he made in any gathering he attended to obtain this grace from God. After his death a virtuous priest recounted that he was present at an assembly at which Monsieur Vincent spoke. He described the misery of this poor kingdom of Poland with such feeling, to urge his hearers to pray for this intention, that he drew tears from all eyes.

A little before his death it pleased God to give him the consolation of seeing the king of Poland reestablished in all the provinces of his realm. The Swedes and the Russians were driven out, and most powerful enemies were obliged to sue for peace. The Church and the Catholic religion were preserved, despite all the efforts of those who sought to destroy them.

259. CED XI:351-56.
If the most reliable sign of perfect charity is the preference of the interests of Jesus Christ over one’s own, or to say it better, complete forgetfulness of self and total commitment to Jesus Christ, then we can truly say Monsieur Vincent had this virtue in an eminent degree. In all his undertakings he put his personal advantage and that of his community out of mind, and always looked to the glory of God and the service of his divine Master. The missions discussed in previous chapters are proof of this. The one presented in this chapter will show more clearly the motive of pure charity which animated him to begin it, for there was no semblance of earthly gain in it.

We must realize that there are many islands in the Hebrides, but they are not large. Since they lie to the north of Scotland in a cold climate, they are infertile. The inhabitants are so poor that even those who pass for nobles and the most wealthy are reduced to eating oat bread. Most of the people have only straw for furniture, for both bed and table, and for some it serves as tablecloth and napkin as well. We can easily deduce the poverty which must be the lot of the ordinary people.

Once the Catholic religion had been barred from the region by the separation of England from the Roman Church, and the priests had been driven away, few ministers or other preachers of the new sects were willing to live in this forbidding region. The lack of spiritual help to most of the poor inhabitants of these islands was such that persons could be found, eighty or a hundred years old or more, who had never been baptized. One can easily imagine how it was with others. Most of those poor people did not know if they were Catholics or heretics, since hardly any religious practices remained in use among them.

In face of these extreme conditions, Monsieur Vincent needed no further motivation to help these poor islanders than his own charity. It was enough for him to know the extremity of their spiritual state to decide to send some of his priests, sparing neither cost or anxiety. We could apply to him these words: *Sufficit, ut noveris; neque enim amas et deseris* ['It is enough that you know; for what you love you will never be able to leave.']\(^260\) He proposed to several Irish and Scottish priests of the Congregation that they might go work with their brothers. They accepted willingly, notwithstanding

\(^260\) Augustine, PL 35:1749.
the great danger to which they would be exposed because of the repressive
laws in force against all Catholic priests. He selected two Irish priests for
this mission to the Hebrides, and another priest, Scottish by birth, to work
in Scotland.261

They left in 1651, dressed as merchants to escape the notice of the heretics.
For this same reason they went first to Holland to embark. There they happily
came in contact with a Scottish laird named Glengarry, as noble in virtue as in
his birth.262 He had recently converted to the Catholic religion. He took the
missionaries under his protection, and continued to be of service to them.

They sailed for Scotland with him, but had scarcely landed when an
apostate priest who had become a Protestant minister recognized them. He
wrote letters to places throughout Scotland, alerting people there to the
presence of these missionaries. God in his goodness saved them from this
danger by striking the body of this miserable apostate, causing him great
suffering and the loss of his hearing and his sight. He finally recognized the
hand of God in this malady, and that his sins had caused his sufferings.
Touched by divine grace, he decided to convert, and he did so. He made a
long journey to find Monsieur Duggan, one of the missionaries, to beg
pardon for his fault, and to receive absolution for his apostasy. He threw
himself at the feet of the missionary with evident marks of contrition, and
begged him to accept his abjuration and to receive him once again into the
Church. The priest of the Mission did so, in virtue of the special powers he
had received from the sovereign pontiff.

We know of no better way to present the fruits of this mission, and the
sufferings entailed in exercising their ministry, than by citing two letters
written to Monsieur Vincent by Monsieur Duggan. The first was dated
October 28, 1652:

God gave us the grace soon after our arrival in Scotland to help in
the conversion of the father of the laird of Glengarry. He is an old
man of ninety years, brought up in heresy from his youth. We
instructed
him
and reconciled
him
to the Church during a severe
sickness which soon brought him to the tomb. And before he received
the sacraments, he expressed his regret for having lived so long in
error, but also his unspeakable joy at dying as a Catholic. I also
reconciled several of his servants and friends, but did so in secret.

261. The two Irish priests were Francois Le Blanc and Germain Duiguin, as they were known in
France, and referred to by Vincent. Their English names were Francis White and Dermot
Duggan. The Scottish priest was Thomas Lumsden, originally from Aberdeen, who was received
into the Congregation at Paris, October 31, 1645. Lumsden arrived one year after his two Irish
confreres.

262. Scottish names and terms in this chapter have been corrected and updated from Abelly's original
text.
That done, I said goodbye to my companion, leaving him here in these mountains of Scotland to reap great spiritual fruit, and to attend to all the good that needs to be done here. I left for the Hebrides Islands, where God by his all-powerful mercy has worked marvels above anything we might have hoped for. He so moved hearts that the laird of Clanranald, master of a good part of the isle of Uist, converted, together with his wife, the young prince his son, and all his family. All his gentlemen and their families too, came into the Church.

I also worked with the people of this island, and then went to those called Eigg and Canna, where God brought about the conversion of eight or nine hundred persons. They were so poorly instructed in religion that no more than fifteen knew anything of the mysteries of the Christian religion. I hope the others will soon give glory to God. I have found thirty or forty persons here of advanced age, of eighty, or a hundred or even more, who have never been baptized, who died soon after receiving the sacrament. Beyond doubt they are now praying for those who brought them this great blessing.

A large number of the inhabitants were living in concubinage, but thanks be to God we have been able to bring some relief, marrying those who wished, and separating those who did not. We have taken nothing for the services we have given the people. Besides, I have had to hire two men, one to row me from one island to the other and to help carry my vestments and clothing, for I sometimes have to walk four or five leagues by poor roads to offer mass. The other man helps me teach the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Creed, and serves my mass, for he is the only one available capable of doing so, once I taught him how.

Ordinarily we eat only once a day, a barley or oat loaf, with some cheese and salted butter. Sometimes we go a whole day without eating, since we find nothing to eat, particularly when we cross the deserted and uninhabited mountains. We almost never eat meat, but occasionally it is available in places far from the sea, especially in gentlemen’s homes. But the meat is so bad and so filthy prepared that our hair stands on end when we see it. They throw it on the ground on a bit of straw which serves for table and chair, for tablecloth and napkin, for plate and saucer. To purchase a piece of meat to cook as we do in France is impossible because there are no butchers in these islands. Only a full steer or sheep can be bought, but we cannot use these, for we are constantly on the road to administer baptism or the other sacraments.
There are fish in the sea surrounding the islands, but the people are not skilled in catching them, since they are lazy and not industrious. It would be a great service to God to send good Gospel workers here who could speak the language, and know how to suffer hunger, thirst, and be able to sleep on the ground. Also, they ought to have an annual income if they are to get along.\textsuperscript{263}

In the second letter sent, in April 1654, he said:

We are infinitely grateful, and thank the divine goodness for the blessings he has showered upon our work here. I can tell you some few things, for it would not be possible to tell you all that has happened.

The islands I have visited are Uist, Canna, Eigg, and Skye; on the mainland the regions I have visited are Moidart, Arisaig, Morar, Knoidart, and Glengarry.

The isle of Uist belongs to two lairds, one called the captain of the Ranald clan, and the other of the MacDonald clan. The part belonging to the first has seen the conversion of all the inhabitants except for two men without any religion, and who seem to want to be free to sin as they please. About a thousand or twelve hundred souls have returned to the fold of the Church. In the other part of this island, belonging to MacDonald, I have not yet visited, although I have been invited. A minister wanted to engage me in controversy by letter. I responded to him, and hope for some good from the exchange. The nobility have asked me to come, and the laird agrees. I am inclined to do so for I know the minister is fearful, and has tried to prevent my coming. The two servants he sent to me have returned home Catholics, by the grace of God. I heard their general confessions after I had prepared them for the sacrament.

Most of the inhabitants of the small island of Canna have been converted, as well as some from Eigg. The island of Skye is ruled by three or four lairds, one part by MacDonald and his mother, another by MacLeod, and a third by MacFimine.\textsuperscript{264} In the first two parts, several families have been converted, but as of yet I have not been able to do anything in the third part of the island.

As to Moidart, Arisaig, Morar, Knoidart and Glengarry, all have been converted, or are prepared to receive instructions when we have time to visit their villages. There are six or seven thousand

\textsuperscript{263} CED IV:515-16.

\textsuperscript{264} Probably a typographical error for a name variously spelled: MacSimon, MacSymon, MacShiomoun.
people in these places, very remote from one another, difficult to reach on foot and inaccessible by horse.

At the beginning of spring I went to another island called Barra, where I found the people so devout and anxious to learn that I was thrilled. It was enough to teach a child of each village the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Creed, and in three days the whole town would know it, the great and the simple alike. I have received the leading people of the town into the Church, including the young prince and his brothers and sisters, with a hope of receiving the older laird at the first opportunity. Among those converted was the son of the minister who greatly edified the region where he is known. Ordinarily I defer communion to my converts for some time after the general confession, so the people can be better instructed, and better disposed by a second confession, and also to arouse in them a greater desire and stronger affection for communion.

Among those who received communion five did not seem to have proper dispositions, for having put out their tongue to receive the sacred host they did not draw it back. Three remained so long in this attitude the host was picked off their tongue. Later they confessed once more in a much better disposition, and then received the bread of life with no more difficulty. The other two have not yet come back, and God has given the other Christians of the locality something to think about when they approach this divine sacrament, by the extraordinary signs he permitted to occur. In the same way, some marvelous things were seen by the use of holy water, enough to induce a sense of piety in these poor people. We baptized many infants and some adults, thirty, forty, sixty, or eighty years old and more, who insist they never before have been baptized. An evil spirit troubled some of them. They have been entirely delivered from his influence after receiving baptism, so much so that there is no more evidence of his activity among the people.265

The virtuous and zealous missionary planned to visit the island of Pabbay, once he had cleared it with the governor of the locality. This is what he wrote to one of his confreres, March 5, 1657:

I plan to leave here the tenth of this month for Pabbay. I have not spoken of this before lest the danger and difficulties should cause you some anxiety, for this is truly a forbidding place. We have hope of rescuing some stray sheep and returning them to the sheepfold of our Lord. Our trust in his goodness, together with the hope that the inhabitants have not been infected with heretical opinions, leads

265. CED V:116-17.
us to believe they will, with God’s grace, come to hear and persevere in the word of God and the truths of our holy religion. This makes me disdain the perils, even death, and we shall go with God’s help, submissive to his holy will. This is why I ask you not to delay in coming. But be careful not to reveal my intentions to anyone, except Monsieur Nouelly, because for several reasons I want it to remain secret and hidden.

This good missionary was not destined to carry out this plan, for he fell sick shortly after sending this letter, and died on May 17, 1657, to the great grief of all those for whom he had worked so hard.

After speaking of the missions to the Hebrides, we must now speak of those in Scotland, where Monsieur Lumsden worked so zealously. This is what he wrote to Monsieur Vincent, in 1654:

God has greatly blessed the missions given in the lowlands. I might say that all the inhabitants whether rich or poor have never, since the time they fell into heresy, been better disposed to recognize the truth and of being converted to our holy faith. Every day we receive some who come to abjure their errors, some of high station. Besides these activities, we seek to confirm Catholics in their belief by instructing them in the word of God and by administering the sacraments. On Easter day I was in the house of a laird where more than fifty people received communion, among whom were twenty recent converts. The success of our mission inspires great jealousy among the Protestant ministers, who lack the power but not the desire to do us harm. We trust in the goodness of God, who shall, if it please him, always be our protector. 266

By another letter, in October 1657, speaking of the same subject, he wrote:

The people of these northern regions are much better disposed to receive the truth than they have ever been before. The grace of God has not been idle this past summer. By its influence I have been able to bring back to the Church some highly placed people who have abjured their heresy. I have continued to confirm the faith of Catholics by the instructions I have given, and by the sacraments I have administered. I have even taken a trip to the Orkney Islands, and visited the regions called Moray, Ross, Sutherland, and Caithness, where they have not had a priest for several years, and where practically no Catholics remain. As I began to work, I received into the faith a good man from Caithness. He had invited me to come spend some time in that province, where he hoped for many

266. CED V:124-25.
CHAPTER ONE, SECTION ELEVEN

conversions. I was obliged to leave hurriedly, for the enemy of our salvation had raised up a new persecution against Catholics, at the instigation of the ministers who had obtained an order from Protector Cromwell addressed to all judges and magistrates of the kingdom of Scotland. It stated that many people, especially in the northern provinces, had gone over to papism, and to stop this abuse they were required to search carefully, especially for priests. These latter were to be put in prison, and punished according to the laws of the kingdom. Since the minister of Bredonique was particularly hostile to me, and sought to have me taken, I had to flee to seek some haven until we could see how this persecution was to turn out. I cannot write in greater detail for fear that our letters will fall into the hands of our enemies.\(^{267}\)

Not without reason did this virtuous missionary take precautions against falling into the hands of the heretics. It was not the fear of prison or even death, but the risk of depriving Catholics in this poor kingdom of the help and consolation he was able to bring. Beginning in 1655, on the occasion of a similar order from Cromwell, issued at the request of the Protestant ministers, the English authorities had hunted down Catholic priests. They found three in the castle of the marquess of Huntley, one of whom was his confère, Monsieur White. He had been imprisoned in the city of Aberdeen since February of that same year.

When Monsieur Vincent heard the news he spoke to the community on the trials and persecutions missionary priests would meet in their ministry, and the constancy they should show in these situations.

We recommend to God one of our priests, Monsieur White, who worked in the mountains of Scotland. The English heretics have imprisoned him, together with a Jesuit priest. They have been taken to the city of Aberdeen, where Monsieur Lumsden is. He does not fail to visit him and help him. There are many Catholics in that region who visit and console the suffering priest. Yet, seeing this good missionary threatened with martyrdom, I do not know if we should be happy or sad. On the one hand God is honored by his detention, for it comes from love of him. The Company could be blessed if God would find him worthy to become a martyr. He would be happy to suffer for God's name, and to offer himself for whatever it shall please God to ordain concerning his person and his life. What acts of virtue are called forth in his present situation, of faith, of hope, of love of God, of resignation, and of self-offering,

by which he prepares himself to receive such a crown! All this brings much joy and thanksgiving to God.

On the other hand, our confrere suffers and should we not suffer with him? For myself, I admit that according to human nature I am deeply afflicted and I feel it most keenly, but thinking of this according to the spirit, I believe we must bless God for a special grace. This is the way God acts after someone has rendered outstanding services to him: he places the cross upon his shoulders, then adds sorrows and afflictions. Oh, gentlemen and my brothers, there must be something the mind does not understand, in the cross, in suffering, since God usually sends them to those who have served him so well. He adds afflictions, persecutions, prison, and martyrdom, to raise those who give themselves so perfectly to his service to a high degree of perfection. Whoever wishes to be a disciple of Jesus Christ ought to expect this, but he should also hope, when these occasions arise, that God will give him the strength to support these afflictions and overcome these troubles.

Monsieur Le Vacher once wrote me from Tunis of a rough and ready priest from Calabria. He developed a desire to suffer martyrdom for the name of Jesus Christ, such as animated Saint Francis of Paula, but which did not occur since God had destined him for other things. This priest was so obsessed by this holy desire that he crossed the sea to seek martyrdom in Barbary where he was finally discovered, and where he died in confessing the name of Jesus Christ. May it please God to inspire us with this same wish to die for Jesus Christ however it shall please him. What a blessing this would attract upon us!

You are aware there are several forms of martyrdom, not only the kind we have been speaking of, but there is another kind too, of constantly mortifying our passions, and even another, to persevere in our vocation in the accomplishment of our duties and our exercises. Saint John the Baptist, for his courage in reproving the king for his sin of incest and adultery, was put to death for his pains. Yet he is honored as a martyr, even though he did not die precisely for the faith, but for the defense of a virtue against which the king had sinned. Dying in defense of a virtue is then a kind of martyrdom.

A mortified and obedient Missionary who does his duty well, and who lives in keeping with the rules of his state in life, makes it evident by the sacrifice of his body and soul that God alone deserves to be served, and that God should be preferred absolutely to all advantages or pleasures the world has to offer. To do so is to
demonstrate the truths and maxims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not by words, but by the conformity of one's own life to that of Jesus Christ. Giving testimony to his truth and his sanctity to both Christians and infidels, to live and die in this effort, is another form of martyrdom.

Let us return to our good Monsieur White, to consider how God dealt with him after a life of dedication as a missionary. Here is a marvel, what some would call a miracle. A certain inclemency of the weather happened to affect the fish of the region with sterility, resulting in much suffering for the people. He was asked to lead prayers and to bless the sea with holy water, for it was felt that spells of some sort caused this difficulty. He did so, and God willed that immediately after, the difficulty passed and the fish returned. He wrote of these things himself in a letter to me.268 Others have told me of the great work he did in the mountains to strengthen the faith of the Catholics and convert heretics, the constant dangers he braved, the hunger he endured, eating only bread made from oats. Only a person who deeply loved God would do and suffer so much in his service. Should God permit still greater crosses to come and that one become a prisoner of Jesus Christ, ought we not adore God's ways, submitting ourselves lovingly to them? Ought we not offer ourselves to him in order that he accomplish his holy will in us? Let us then ask this grace of God to thank him for this latest test of the fidelity of his servant. We should beg of him, if it is not yet in keeping with his will to deliver him, at least to strengthen him to bear the ill treatment he is suffering or will suffer in the future.269

According to all appearances, this virtuous prisoner was in danger of his life, since he was in the hands of his cruel enemies who wished for his death, but it pleased God that he be released after five or six months in prison. According to the laws then in effect against Catholics, there was insufficient evidence against him to convict him of having celebrated mass or performing other functions of his ministry. Someone testified against him, but unconvincingly. When challenged, he took back what he had said, stating that he did not want to be responsible for the condemnation of the accused. Monsieur White's parole was granted under the strange condition that if he preached, instructed, baptized anyone, or administered any of the sacraments, he would be hung without any further trial.

When Monsieur Vincent heard news of his release, he spoke to the community:

268. This letter no longer exists.
269. CED XI:173-76.
We thank God for having delivered the innocent, and that someone among us has been found to suffer so much for the love of his Savior. This good priest, disdaining the threat of death, went back to the mountains of Scotland to work as before. What reason we have to thank our Lord for having given one of our Company the spirit of the martyrs! The light, the grace to see how glorious, how great, how divine, to die for the neighbor, in imitation of our Lord! We thank God and we pray that he will give each of us that same grace to suffer and to give up his life for the salvation of souls.\textsuperscript{270}

\textsuperscript{270} CED XI:304-05.
CHAPTER TWO

The Spiritual Exercises to Prepare for the Proper Reception of Holy Orders

SECTION ONE

The Pressing Need of Clergy Reform at the Time Monsieur Vincent Established the Ordination Retreats

In the previous chapter we have seen the abundant blessings God had poured forth on the missions of Monsieur Vincent and his Congregation. We can judge from their fruits how appropriate they were for converting souls to God, dispelling ignorance, helping them leave their sinful ways, and leading them to take up the practice of Christian living. Our Savior Jesus Christ planted faith and other virtues in all parts of the earth through the ministry of his apostles, the main and first of the Missionaries, which is what the title apostle means. In the same way he also used Monsieur Vincent and all those who share his spirit to restore that same faith in many souls, and even to augment it and make it more fruitful.

Although this may be true, we must admit that for most people their weakness and inconstancy in doing good makes it difficult to preserve the fruits of the missions. They need shepherds and priests available to them, who will devote themselves to cultivating the good seed.

Thus it was that Monsieur Vincent earnestly besought God to supply a remedy to this pressing need. He said, speaking of this matter:

Conquerors build forts and supply garrisons for the places they have captured. In the same way, the Missionaries, who rescue souls from the power of Satan, must see to it as well as they can, that the parishes have zealous pastors and good priests to help the people persevere in the good dispositions awakened in them by the missions. Unless this is done, the devil, driven from their souls, will retake his ground with little opposition.

Experience showed Monsieur Vincent only too well that few of the clergy were committed to this role. He saw everywhere what abuses existed among the clergy in the greater part of the places where he had worked. Had he been
unaware of these things from firsthand observation, the complaints and laments coming from all sides, sometimes from great and respected prelates, would convince him of this.

This is the way a certain priest of noble birth and known piety, and now a canon of a cathedral church, wrote him of the situation in 1642.

In this diocese the clergy are without discipline, the people without respect. Priests lack devotion and charity, pulpits lack preachers. Learning is not respected, vice is not punished, virtue is oppressed. The authority of the Church is either hated or defied. Personal interest is the law of the sanctuary, while the most scandalous are the most powerful. In short, flesh and blood have supplanted the Gospel and spirit of Jesus Christ. When you see the condition of our diocese, I am sure you will do what you can to help us. *Quis novit utrum ad regnum idcirco veneris, ut in tali tempore parareris?* [“Who knows but that it was for a time like this that you obtained the royal dignity?”] The humble prayer I make to you to consider this seriously before the Lord is worthy of your charity, for it comes from one of the first of your sons.2

A worthy prelate told him one day that he and his vicars general worked as hard as they could for the welfare of the diocese, “but with little success because of the large number of ignorant and evil clergy. Neither word nor example would move them to amend their lives. I am horrified when I think that in my diocese nearly seven thousand drunken or immoral priests approach the altar daily, lacking any semblance of a true vocation.”3

Another prominent prelate wrote to him on this same subject in 1643. “The extreme desolation of the clergy in my diocese and the impossibility of remedying the situation obliges me to turn to your zeal. Everyone knows your reputation and your strong dedication to restore ecclesiastical discipline where it has been seriously weakened or entirely lost.”4

Another prelate wrote, among other things: “Except for the canon theologian of my church, I do not find among all the priests of my diocese anyone qualified for ecclesiastical office. You may judge from this how great the necessity is for us to have help. Please allow your missionary to help us prepare our candidates for ordination.”5

From these samples we may judge the state of affairs of the clergy in most

1. Esth 4:14. This alludes to the fact that at this time, Vincent began to be consulted by Louis XIII, Anne of Austria and Cardinal Richelieu regarding the appointment of bishops.
2. As a member of the Tuesday conference. *CED II*:282.
5. *CED VI*:53.
of the dioceses of the kingdom, and the pressing need to bring about a reformation. This is why Monsieur Vincent recognized, as we said in Book One, that no other remedy would be effective if the root of the evil were not attacked. It was essential that those in future preparing to receive priestly orders must bring the appropriate dispositions of soul to this great sacrament. This was Monsieur Vincent's constant goal in all that he did with such great devotion to the ordination retreats he established. In the following chapter we will follow the steps he and his priests took to bring this about, and the results they achieved.

SECTION TWO

The Beginning of the Ordination Retreats

We read in Book One how Monsieur Vincent began the ordination retreats at Beauvais in September 1628, under Bishop Augustine Potier. These proved beneficial not only to this devoted prelate, who, with the help of Monsieur Vincent, continued them to the advantage of his clergy, but also to many other bishops of the kingdom and elsewhere. They established the retreats in these various dioceses with most happy results.

First, His Excellency Jean Francois de Gondi learned of what Monsieur Vincent had done in Beauvais, and decided to imitate it in Paris. For many years he had recognized Monsieur Vincent as a gift of God to the whole Church. The archbishop invited him to begin these same retreats for the candidates to the priesthood. They started in Lent of 1631 in the College des Bons Enfants, where his small Congregation was then housed. These ordination retreats were a tiny spring whose waters were destined to irrigate the whole field of the Church. Paris was the source from which several bishops and some other influential clergymen learned of the value and utility of the ordination retreats. This led them to have these retreats introduced into their localities.

Monsieur Vincent wrote two years later about this:

The archbishop, following the ancient practice of the Church in which the bishop confers with those who wish to receive orders, decided that henceforth in his diocese the candidates had to come

6. Ch. 25.
to the priests of the Mission ten days before each of the orders to make a spiritual retreat. They would also learn the art of meditation so necessary to the clergy, make a general confession of all their past life, review their moral theology, especially in what related to the sacraments, and learn all the rites and functions proper to the clergy. They receive room and board during this time. This happens with such fruit, by God’s grace, that those who have made the ordination retreats continue to lead an exemplary life, and for the most part have committed themselves publicly to works of Christian charity.  

On another occasion he spoke to his community about how their various services did not come from their own planning but from the direct intervention of divine Providence: “Did we plan to give the ordination retreats, the richest source of grace the Church has put into our hands? No, that never came into our thoughts.”

In 1631 there were six ordination ceremonies in Paris. On each occasion Monsieur Vincent received the candidates into his house to have them make their retreats. Things continued this way until 1643, when the archbishop thought it best to stop the mid-Lent ordination, for his council thought time was too short between each ordination for the candidates to bring to the next one the proper dispositions. It should be noted that up to 1638 only candidates from Paris attended the ordination retreats. At that period some pious women noted the remarkable changes brought about among the clergy of Paris and thought to suggest to Monsieur Vincent that he might admit candidates from other dioceses as well, from among those who already had come to Paris for ordination.

To cover the expense of such a program, a pious woman, the wife of the President de Herse, offered to provide a thousand livres for each group for five years. Since then, she and others among the Ladies of Charity of Paris have continued to support this enterprise. The Marquise of Maignelay, sister of the archbishop of Paris, a woman of great piety and virtue, had a particular esteem for Monsieur Vincent. She contributed to Saint Lazare to defray the great expenses of the candidates. The queen mother herself, at the beginning of the regency, attended a lecture in the church of the College des Bons Enfants, given by Monsieur Perrochel, the bishop-elect of Boulogne.

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7. CED I:179-80.
8. CED XII:9.
9. Charlotte Marguerite de Gondi, the wife of Florimond d’Halluin, the marquis of Maignelay. After her husband’s death, she dedicated her life and great fortune to charity. She died in 1650.
10. Francois Perrochel, a cousin of Jean Jacques Olier, and a student and companion of Vincent in the work of the missions, was ordained a bishop June 11, 1645, in the church of Saint Lazare. He was bishop of Boulogne for thirty-two years. He resigned his see in 1677 and died five years later at age eighty.
was convinced of the usefulness of this practice for the Church. Several ladies encouraged her to support it with a royal grant, which she did after the five-year subsidy from Madame de Herse had run out. She contributed financial help for two or three years. However, for the next eighteen years, the entire cost of this service fell upon the house of Saint Lazare which had no source of funds to support the large number of persons attending the ordination retreats. This was accomplished only at the cost of much inconvenience, especially since 1646 even those receiving the four minor orders were obliged to follow the exercises. The purpose was that before advancing to sacred orders they might have the light to discern if God had truly called them, and if he had, to prepare themselves more thoroughly.

Much as the financial obligations surpassed the resources of Saint Lazare, Monsieur Vincent never uttered a single word of complaint about the great expense of continuing the ordination retreats. He remained silent, abandoned to God's good pleasure, and preferred always the glory of his name and the good of his Church to any temporal interest of his Congregation.

The number of those at each session of these exercises was seventy, eighty, or ninety or more, and they all lived at Saint Lazare for the eleven days of each meeting, making fifty-five days each year. Not a sou was asked in payment, so that they would more willingly come, seeing that nothing was being spared to prepare them better for serving the Church.

We recall here the testimony of a priest of great reputation on this question:

It is impossible to express adequately the care taken by Monsieur Vincent to assure that everything be well done during the ordination retreats. The expense did not seem to matter, although it was far beyond the resources of Saint Lazare, which must have run into great debt because of this. I recall that during the troubled times in Paris, several important persons, well aware of how difficult it was for Monsieur Vincent to continue to support the ordination retreats, suggested that he no longer subsidize these programs. He refused to listen to this advice, despite the shortages of both food and money. He continued to spend freely for the upkeep of the candidates during their eleven-day stay, and thought little of the temporal when it was a question of spiritual good. He looked upon perishable goods as useful only to the extent they contributed to the glory of God.

He often spoke to the members of his community as the time for one of these ordination retreats approached about the excellence of the priesthood, exhorting them to render whatever service or help they could to the candidates. He exhorted them to use all the strength
of body and soul to encourage the growth of the clergy in holiness. His words were like burning darts, penetrating the heart. They are worthy of preservation, even in writing. If not, it would be an incomparable loss.

SECTION THREE

A Summary of What is Done During the Ordination Retreats, and the Regulations that Govern Them

Those who wish to receive ordination come to the house of the priests of the Mission ten days before the Saturday on which they are to be ordained. Upon arrival their names are recorded, their ecclesiastical rank, degrees, etc. Some priests of the house are present to receive their guests, to take their cloaks, to show them to their rooms or around the house, to wait on them, to encourage them, and to explain the order of the retreat. They also recommend recollection, silence, and modesty and the exact observance of all the usages of the exercises so they would gain the maximum profit from them, and prepare themselves to receive orders worthily. A director of the ordination retreats is charged with the general responsibility of the program. The candidates are answerable to him. His chief care is to see that all who serve the candidates and those who make the exercises are animated with the same spirit.

Each day two conferences are given, the first in the morning on the principles of moral theology and on practical matters a clergyman should know. The other conference is given in the evening on the virtues, qualities and functions proper to those in holy orders.

There are ten different topics for these talks. The order of the topics for the mornings on moral theology is:
On the first day, the general censures of the Church.
On the second, particular censures, such as excommunication, suspension, interdict, and irregularities.
On the third, the sacrament of penance; its institution, its form, effects, and the conditions necessary for the confessor to administer the sacrament well.
On the fourth, dispositions for receiving the sacrament of penance well, i.e., contrition, confession, satisfaction; and indulgences.
On the fifth, divine and human laws. Sins in general; their kinds, circumstances, causes, effects, degrees, and remedies.
On the sixth, the first three of the ten commandments, which include the duties of man toward God. The three theological virtues, the virtue and acts of religion.

On the seventh, the other seven commandments, which refer to the neighbor.

On the eighth, the sacraments in general; confirmation, and the eucharist as sacrament.

On the ninth, the eucharist as sacrifice; extreme unction; marriage.

On the tenth, the Apostles Creed, emphasizing what a priest should know about each article, and the way to teach the creed to others.

The order for the evening conference:

On the first day, mental prayer is spoken of, with reasons why clerics should practice it. Then an explanation of mental prayer, the method to be used, and how to pray well. This is chosen as the first evening topic because during the retreat some time each day is reserved for this kind of prayer.

On the second, the vocation to the ecclesiastical state. The necessity of being called by God to this state before accepting orders. What this vocation consists in, how a person may recognize the call, and how he may correspond well to this grace.

On the third, the true ecclesiastical spirit is discussed. The obligation of acquiring this spirit; its signs, the means of acquiring it, and how to perfect oneself in this spirit.

On the fourth, orders in general; their institution, necessity, matter, form, effects, differences among them, dispositions required to receive them profitably.

On the fifth, the clerical tonsure; the doctrine behind this ceremony; obligations imposed, qualities it should have, dispositions to bring to its reception, response to objections, and several difficulties about the tonsure.

On the sixth, the minor orders: definition, matter, form, function, and virtues required to exercise these functions with profit.

On the seventh, the subdiaconate; the virtues proper to this order, especially chastity.

On the eighth, the diaconate, and the virtues proper to this order, particularly charity toward the neighbor.

On the ninth, the priesthood; the knowledge proper to priests to acquit themselves worthily of this order.

Lastly, on the tenth day, a conference is given on the life of an ecclesiastic, in which it is explained that the life of a cleric ought to be much more holy than that of laymen. Various ways are suggested to help them lead such a life.

Each day following the conferences, the candidates are divided into groups, each composed of from twelve to fifteen persons. The groups are
formed of those having similar backgrounds, presided over by a priest of the Mission, to discuss among themselves what had been said. This helps fix the matter and their own reflections more surely in their memories.

Each day about a half-hour is given for mental prayer, and afterward the discussion groups meet to help those unacquainted with this form of prayer. It is explained how to make the considerations, arouse the affections, and arrive at practical resolutions.

Each day they have the opportunity to practice the particular rite of the order they are to receive, and the rites of both private and solemn masses.

They recite the divine office together, with close attention paid to the pauses and periods of reflection.

Special attention is given to encouraging everyone to make a general confession of their entire life if they had never made one before, or at least of the time since their last general confession, if they had done so previously. It was for this reason that the subject of general confession had been discussed in the conference on the things a cleric should be aware of in his calling. The day following their confession, a Thursday, all receive communion at the high mass.

Seven and a half hours are given to sleep, and two hours a day to holy and upright conversation after meals, at which there are readings from holy Scripture and the book on the dignity and sanctity of priests, by Molina the Carthusian.11

In a word, the candidates are introduced to a well-ordered life, not too free and not too austere, but well suited to their calling as ecclesiastics, which they might continue to live after leaving Saint Lazare.

The Sunday after ordination they return home after high mass, at which all receive communion in thanksgiving for the grace of ordination.

This, then, is a summary of the ordination retreats begun and since continued by Monsieur Vincent, and carried on by his Congregation for the welfare of the whole Church.

He strongly recommended that those who gave the conferences follow carefully the notes drawn up for each talk. These had been well prepared, covering just those points most necessary and most important for the candidates, and in a sequence most suited for attaining the goal of the exercises.

When a bishop himself would give these conferences, Monsieur Vincent strongly commended their contributions, as father to his children, solid in their spiritual doctrine, and showing the active role of the Spirit of God in their life and teaching.

Monsieur Vincent said to his priests, “Simplicity impresses the candi-

dates. They are very happy with it, and they are not looking for anything else here. Presented in this garment, truth will be well received, and will be most effective in an unadorned modesty.” One day, when someone gave a conference in a fashion other than in the spirit of the Mission, he fell on his knees before him, and begged him earnestly to be simpler and more devout.

SECTION FOUR

Monsieur Vincent’s Thoughts on the Ordination Retreats

Before speaking of the development and the results of the ordination retreats, it would be appropriate to recall the way Monsieur Vincent looked upon them, and how he exhorted his confreres to devote themselves to them.

Once he said, “To devote yourself to fashioning good priests, as a secondary efficient and instrumental cause, is to do what Jesus Christ did. During his mortal life he strove to raise up twelve good priests, his apostles, by having them live with him, by instructing them, and by forming them to their divine ministry.”

Another day, during a conference to his community on this same matter, after which he had invited others to comment, he ended by saying:

Blessed are you, Lord, for the good things which have been said, for you have inspired those who spoke. But, my Savior, all this will come to nothing, if you do not supply your helping hand. Your grace alone will bring about all that we have spoken of, and will bring us that Holy Spirit necessary for anything we do. How can we, miserable as we are, know what we should do? O Lord, give us the spirit of your priesthood which your apostles and the first priests who followed them had. Give us the true spirit of that sacred character that you conferred on poor fishermen, artisans, low-born, in those latter days. By your grace, you bestowed on them your divine Spirit. For, O Lord, we too are these wretched people, poor workmen, peasants. What comparison exists between our miserable selves and our holy, eminent, and heavenly calling? Gentlemen and my brothers, we ought to pray earnestly to God for this pressing need of the Church. In many places the Church teeters on the brink

12. CED XI:8.
of disaster because of the evil lives of priests, and there are many
who fit this description. It is only too true that the depravity of the
clerical state is the chief cause of the ruin of the Church of God.

I attended a meeting recently at which seven bishops were
present, to discuss the disorders that have become evident in the
Church. It was publicly stated that the clergy were chiefly to blame.

It was the priests. Yes, we are the cause of this desolation which
afflicts the Church in so many places. It has practically been
destroyed in Asia, Africa and even in a large part of Europe, such
as in Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, and
the other United Provinces, and in large sections of Germany. How
many heretics do we not see in France herself? Look at Poland,
already deeply affected by heresy, and now threatened by the
invasion of the king of Sweden, to be lost completely to the Church.

Does it not seem, gentlemen, that God is about to transport his
Church to some other country? Yes, if we do not change radically
we may fear that God will abandon us completely, as we see
powerful enemies of the Church force their way in. In less than four
months the notorious king of Sweden has invaded a good part of
this great kingdom. He may be a scourge from God raised up to
punish us for our sins. These people are the same whom God raised
up in other times to afflict us: the Goths, the Visigoths, and the
Vandals, all come from that same region. God used them, over
twelve hundred years ago, to punish the Church of those times.
What is happening now, as unusual as it has ever been, ought to put
us on our guard. A kingdom as vast as ours, invaded out of nowhere,
in the space of four months! O Lord, who knows if this powerful
conqueror will stop there? Finally, Ab aquilone pandetur omne
malum [“From the north evil will boil over”],\(^\text{13}\) from there came the
evils our ancestors had to endure. That’s the region to fear.

Look to the restoration of the clerical state, for evil priests are
the cause of all these woes, and bring such disasters upon the
Church. These good bishops have recognized this from their own
experience and have spoken out openly, in the sight of God. Yes,
Lord, we are the ones who have provoked your anger. Our sins have
brought about these calamities.

Yes, the clergy and those aspiring to that state, the subdeacons,
deacons, and priests, yes, we priests, have brought about this
desolation in the Church. What now, O Lord? What can we do,
humbled before you, now that we have resolved to change our lives?

\(^{13}\) Jer 1:14.
Yes, my Savior, we desire to do all in our power in satisfaction for our past sins, and to restore the clerical state. We are assembled here for that purpose, and we implore your grace upon us. Ah, gentlemen! What can we not accomplish!

God has given us the grace to work for the rehabilitation of the clerical state. God has not confided this task to doctors of theology, nor to any other communities renowned for knowledge and holiness, but to this wretched, poor, and miserable Company, the last of all, and the most unworthy. What does God see in us for such a great task? Where are our great triumphs? Where are the mighty deeds we have done? What prospects do we offer? Nothing of all this. God has solely by his own will confided this task to a miserable group of men, to try to repair the breaches made in the walls of his kingdom, and to reform the ecclesiastical state.

Oh, gentlemen and my brothers, let us preserve this grace God has conferred upon us in preference to so many learned and holy men more deserving than ourselves. If we fail by our negligence to carry out his purposes, God will take it from us to give to others, and punish us for our infidelity. Alas, which of us would want to be the cause of such a misfortune, and deprive the Church of such a blessing?

Could I ever be so awful? Let each of us look into his own conscience and say to himself, never could I be so deplorable. Unfortunately, it takes only one such as I am to turn the favors of heaven away from a whole community, and make the curse of God fall upon it. O Lord, who see me weak and filled with sin, do not withhold your grace from this little Company! Grant that it may continue to serve you with humility and fidelity, and may cooperate with your will, so that by its ministry it may re-establish the honor of your Church.

But how can we do this? What shall we do for the success of the next ordination retreat? We must pray much, since we lack so much. We must offer our communions, our mortifications, our mental prayer and all other prayers for this intention. We must do everything for the edification of these candidates, treating them with respect and deference, never arguing with them, but serving them graciously and humbly. These must be the weapons we missionaries use. If we use them we will succeed. In humility we must truly look forward to our own self-effacement. Believe me, gentlemen and my brothers, believe me when I repeat the infallible maxim of Jesus Christ that a heart must be empty of itself to be filled with God. Then God will live and act in us, and this wish for self-efface-
ment will empty our hearts. Humility, holy humility, will bring this about, and then it will no longer be ourselves who act but God in us, and all will go well.

Those of you working directly with the ordination retreats must have the spirit of the priesthood, and inspire those who do not. You who have these souls confided to you to receive this holy and sanctifying Spirit, look solely to the glory of God. Have simplicity of heart toward him, and great respect for the candidates. Be persuaded that by these means you will accomplish much. Any other course will be fruitless. Humility and the pure intention to please God have made these ordination retreats succeed up to now. I recommend also the ceremonies, and I pray that all the Company will observe them carefully. These ceremonies are but the shadow of the underlying truth, but they should be performed with as much care as possible, with religious silence, and much modesty and gravity. How will the candidates observe these practices if we ourselves do not do them well? Let us sing with moderation and recite the psalms with devotion. Alas, what shall we reply to God when we render an account, if we have done them poorly?14

On another occasion, Monsieur Vincent spoke as follows:

Gentlemen and my brothers, we are now on the eve of another of these days when we begin the ordination retreats. Tomorrow, O God, you providentially send us those whom you wish us to form to a better life. What! Gentlemen and my brothers, here is surely a large mouthful—to form clerics to a better way of life. Who could fully appreciate the significance of our task? What state is equal to the ecclesiastical state? Principalities and kingdoms do not compare with it. You are aware that kings cannot change bread into the body of our Lord, nor remit sin, nor perform the other services which are so far superior to temporal power. Yet these are the people being sent to us to sanctify. Could there be anything like this? O poor and wretched workmen, how unfitted we are for this task. But since God does us the honor to assign this responsibility to our small Congregation, the last of all and the poorest, we on our side must use all our energy to see that the retreats are fruitful. We must prepare our candidates for sacred orders, and inspire them to acquit themselves well of their duties. Some will be pastors, some canons, some provosts, abbots, bishops, yes bishops. These are the ones we will be receiving tomorrow.

This past week the bishops met to consider the problem of the drunkenness of priests in a certain province, a thing strictly forbid-

den. Holy doctors say that the first step for someone wishing to acquire virtue is to control the mouth. What shall be the result if a person gives in to his every desire? What disorder! They become servants, slaves, unable to control themselves. Nothing is so base, so deplorable as to see most of the priests of a certain province so given to this vice that bishops had to call a meeting to search for some remedy for it. What shall happen to the people?

What should we not do ourselves, gentlemen, to give ourselves to God to rescue his ministers and his spouse from this disorder, and the many others we are aware of? Not that all priests are guilty. No, O Savior! There are some holy men among the clergy whom we see here on retreat, pastors and others who come from far away to look to the state of their soul. And don’t forget the many good and saintly priests of Paris. Among the priests attending the clergy conferences here not a single one was not edifying in conduct. They all work with exceptional success.

There are evil clergymen in the world, and I happen to be the worst, the most unworthy, the greatest sinner of them all. On the other hand, some give great glory to God by the sanctity of their lives. What happiness for us that not only has God called such poor persons as ourselves, without learning or virtue, to help in the reformation of a fallen and disordered clergy, and even to contribute to the development of the virtuous, as we have seen happen. How happy you are, gentlemen, to further by your dedication, meekness, affability, modesty, and humility, the growth of the Spirit of God in the souls of these priests. You serve God in these great servants of God. How happy you are, you who give such good example at the conferences, the exercises, in choir, in the refectory, everywhere. How happy we shall all be if by our silence, discretion, and charity we fulfill the purpose for which God sent them to us. We must be on the lookout to notice anything they may need or want. We must be attentive to all their wishes. By serving them we will surely edify them. We must ask the grace from our Lord to do all this. I ask the priests to offer mass for this intention, and the brothers also to have this same intention when they attend mass.¹⁵

On another occasion, he said:

Now that we have an ordination retreat about to begin, we must pray that God give his Spirit to those who address the candidates in the conferences and the discussions. Above all, be attentive to act with humility and modesty. Our learning will not make us success-

ful, nor will the brilliant things we say to them. They are much more learned than we are. Several have their bachelor’s degree, others have the licentiate in sacred theology, some are doctors in the law, and only a few do not know philosophy and perhaps theology as well. They are used to disputations. Practically nothing we could say to them is new or what they haven’t heard before. They themselves say that these things do not impress them here, but what does impress them is the virtues they see practiced here. Be humble, gentlemen, considering such an honorable position as that of helping make good priests. What could be greater? Be humble at our own unworthiness, we who are uneducated, poor in understanding, poor in our position in society. Why has God chosen us for such a great service? Because God, as a rule, chooses only the basest things for the marvels of his grace. The sacraments bear witness to this, where he uses water and a few words to confer his greatest graces.

Pray for these candidates, yes, but pray, too, for ourselves so that God would turn away from us anything that might hinder the working of God’s Spirit, which he seems to want to send upon our Congregation. Have you ever been on pilgrimage to one of the holy shrines? Ordinarily upon entering the shrine some feel ecstatic, others are suddenly moved by devotion, others are filled with respect and reverence for the holy places, and still others feel other pious sentiments. Where does this come from? This comes about because God’s Spirit is there, moving the hearts of those present. We must look forward to the same thing in regard to the candidates, if the Spirit of God abides in this house.

We must make our moral preaching practical, relating it to actual situations so that the principles will be well understood. We ought to aim at having the candidates carry away exactly what was said to them in the conferences. Be on your guard lest the evil spirit of vanity should show its face, urging us to speak of high and mighty things. This would only destroy rather than edify. They will carry away what has been spoken of in these conferences, if we speak simply after impressing this point upon them. We should speak only of this, and not of other things, for many good reasons. 16

Once, when a brother spoke during repetition of prayer about his mental prayer, and how he prayed that God would send good priests to his Church, Monsieur Vincent used the occasion to say:

God bless you, brother, for asking God to provide good bishops, good pastors, and good priests. This is something we should all pray

16. CED XI:11-12.
for. “Like priests, like people.” The officers of an army get either the credit or the blame in a war, and we can say the same thing in the Church. If the ministers of the Church are good and do their duty, all will go well. On the contrary, if they do not, they bring about all sorts of disorders. God calls us all, in the state which we have embraced, to work at producing a masterpiece. What greater masterpiece could there be than to form good priests, in comparison with which we can think of nothing greater or more important. Our brothers can contribute to this by their good example and by their temporal work. They can offer the divine office for the intention that God will be pleased to bestow his Spirit to these candidates for ordination.

Let each of us do the same, and be on the lookout to edify these gentlemen. We should anticipate their wishes as much as we conveniently can. Those with occasion to speak with them or to help at their discussions must raise their minds to God to know what to say to them. God is the unlimited source of wisdom, of light, and of love. We must draw inspiration from him for what we say to them.

We ought to deny our own spirit and our own personal feelings to be open to his grace, which alone enlightens and warms the heart. We must leave our own selves to enter into God’s designs, turning to him to learn his thoughts, and pray that he will speak in us and by us. In this way it will be his work, not spoiled by what we are or do. In conversing among men, Our Lord did not speak of himself, but as he himself said, “the words that I speak are not my own, but come from him who sent me.”17 This shows how much we must have recourse to God so that it is not we ourselves who speak and act but rather God in us.

God may possibly bless our work with some success. It could well be that this is attributable to the prayers of a brother who has not even talked to the candidates. He could be taken up with his ordinary work, but often raising his mind and heart to God, invoking his blessing upon these ordination retreats, and it might well be that God will answer his prayer because of the dispositions of his soul. There is an expression in the Psalms, Desiderium pauperum exaudivi Dominus [“The Lord hears the desire of the poor”].18

Monsieur Vincent stopped at this point, not remembering the rest of the verse. He asked how the rest of it went. His assistant completed it: Praepa-
rationem cordis eorum audivit auris tua ["Strengthening their hearts, you pay heed."] "God bless you, sir," Monsieur Vincent said to him in a spirit of joy, being taken by its beauty, and having repeated it several times in a devout and touching manner, he then continued:

What a marvelous way of speaking, worthy of the Holy Spirit. The Lord has heard the sighs of the poor. He has understood the wishes of their heart to make us see that God responds to hearts well disposed even before they cry to him. This is a great consolation. It ought to encourage us in our service of God, despite our own wretchedness and poverty. Do you recall that fine reading we heard at table yesterday? We heard that God conceals from the humble the treasures of grace he has given them. A few days ago one of you asked me about the virtue of simplicity, although he already possessed this treasure. He did not think he even had this gift, although he is one of the most ingenuous of the Company.

It was reported to me that some have been in certain places where many clergy lived, but these were almost all ineffective. They did recite the breviary, celebrate mass, and administer the sacraments, however poorly, but that’s all. Even worse, they lived in vice and disorder. If it please God that we become thoughtful and recollected, we may hope that God will use us, wretched as we are, to effect some good, not only for the people generally but more importantly for the sake of the clergy. Even if you do not say a word you may touch hearts merely by your presence, if only you are wholly taken up by God. The two Fathers de Chandenier and others who came to give the mission in Metz in Lorraine, went in surplice from their house to the church, then back again without saying a word. Their recollection was so remarkable that it made a strong impression on those who saw them, never having experienced the like. Their modesty was a silent sermon so efficacious, I am told, that it may have contributed more than anything else to the success of this mission. What we see influences us much more than mere words, for we believe our eyes beyond what we merely hear. Even though faith comes by hearing, fides ex auditu, virtues we see in operation impress us more deeply than those we are taught.

All physical things are distinguished by their specific differences. Each animal and even man differs from each another, and can be told apart. Likewise, the servants of God are distinguished from sensual men by a certain exterior deportment, humble, recollected, devout, which comes from the grace within which influences

the soul. There are those so filled with this grace that I can never look on them without being moved. The painters of the saints often depict them surrounded by rays of light, to represent to us the aura coming from the just who live such saintly lives.

Such grace and modesty marks the images of the holy Virgin that it strikes all who look on them with reverence and devotion. This appears even more noticeably in our Lord, and in due proportion with the saints. All this, gentlemen and my brothers, makes us aware that if we are committed to acquiring virtues, and if we are filled with divine things, and strive to perfect ourselves, each one in particular and without ceasing, even if we have no special talents to contribute, God will use our presence to enlighten the minds and strengthen the wills of the candidate for ordination, and so make them better.

May it please God to grant us this grace. This work is so difficult and so exalted that God alone can help us. That is why we must pray incessantly that he will bless the small services we render, and the words we say to them. Saint Teresa saw in her time the great need the Church had for worthy ministers. She besought God to inspire good priests, and counseled the sisters of her order to pray often for this intention. Perhaps the changes for the better in the condition of the clergy which we have begun to notice are due in part to the devotion of this great saint. God often uses the weakest instruments for carrying out his greatest designs.

Even in the beginning of the Church did he not choose poor and unlearned rustics? Yet our Lord used them to overthrow idolatry, subject to the Church the princes and powers of this world, and extend our holy religion throughout the whole world. He can use us, wretched as we are, for the progress of the clergy toward a life of virtue. In the name of our Savior, gentlemen and my brothers, let us give ourselves to him completely, by our service, our good example, our prayers, and our mortifications.\textsuperscript{20}

These simple and touching exhortations are but samples of the many which Monsieur Vincent gave on this subject. On the one hand they serve to show the great need the Church had of good priests, and the absolute necessity of a worthy preparation for this office. On the other hand they show his devotion to those who aspired to this vocation, and the care he took to inspire the same spirit in his Congregation, demonstrating the appropriate means to success, namely, humility, meekness, respect, penance, prayer, interior life, and purity of intention. He urged these virtues by his words, but

\textsuperscript{20} CED XII:14-19.
still more by his example. He was a master at joining practice to persuasion. This is seen even in his talks where he humbled himself. Urging others to prayer, he lifted his own soul to God, and gently attracted others to do the same. Lastly, the correctness and purity of his own intentions inspired the same sentiments in the members of his Congregation.

SECTION FIVE

Some Examples of the Blessings Brought About in France by the Ordination Retreats

The first testimony we will cite is Monsieur Vincent himself. In 1633 he wrote a letter to a priest of the Congregation who was in Rome, in which he spoke from the depths of his heart of the blessings which God had bestowed upon the ordination retreats from their beginning.

I must tell you, if I haven’t already done so, that it has pleased the goodness of God to bestow a very special and unbelievable blessing on the ordination retreats. All those who have participated in them, or almost all, are leading lives becoming their station as good and perfect priests. Some among them of noble birth, or gifted in some other way by the goodness of God, live as regular a life as we do ourselves. Some even are more recollected than many among us, especially myself. They schedule their time, make mental prayer, celebrate mass, examine their conscience every day as we do. They regularly visit the hospitals and prisons, and even the colleges, where they catechize, preach, hear confessions, all with the evident blessing of God. Among others, twelve or fifteen in Paris live this way. These are respectable men, who are becoming known to the people.

A few days ago, one of these priests suggested that perhaps those who had attended the ordination retreats might form some sort of assembly or company. This took place, to the great satisfaction of all the others. The purpose of the assembly is to look to their own perfection, and to lead a life pleasing to God, to make him known and served in society, and to procure his glory in the clergy, and among the poor. All this is done under the guidance of someone here, where they meet every week. In imitation of some of the
pastors of the diocese making retreats with us, these gentlemen thought of doing so too, and have actually begun. God will, we hope, be pleased to give his blessing to all this, which I recommend especially to your prayers.\textsuperscript{21}

These are the first fruits of the ordination retreats which Monsieur Vincent had the happiness of harvesting from the first services he rendered the ordinands. Later they were to produce abundant advantages for the entire Church, not only in Paris but in the dioceses of France and Italy as well. These exercises were started in Rome itself by priests of the Congregation of the Mission. Inspired by the spirit of their holy founder and guided by his counsel, they succeeded in filling his Church with good priests. This same thing happened in many other places where the priests of the Mission were not yet established, or where the bishops themselves set up ordination retreats according to the model furnished by Monsieur Vincent and which his community has continued wherever they worked.

Let us add to the testimony of Monsieur Vincent that of some other clergy. Henry Louis Chastaignier de la Rocheposay, bishop of Poitiers, sent his candidates for ordination to Richelieu, where the priests of the Mission offered the same ordination retreats as at Paris. The superior of the house there wrote to Monsieur Vincent in June of 1642:\textsuperscript{22}

We received only forty-three candidates. Their modest demeanor has begun to produce a marvelous edification, so much so that the people seeing them at the divine office could not restrain their tears of appreciation at the sight of their good order, modesty and devotion. These good people seemed not to see men but angels from paradise. To God alone be the glory. To Cardinal Richelieu, who brought us here, be the merit and reward. To ourselves be shame and embarrassment before heavenly and earthly powers at daring to serve in such a lofty ministry.\textsuperscript{23}

In December of 1643, Monsieur Vincent received a letter from the bishop of Angouleme in which he, among other things, asked to have a house of the Congregation of the Mission established in his diocese. He referred to how God had blessed the ordination retreats which he had begun that same month. That blessing had been so great, he said, that everyone in the city of Angouleme praised and blessed the name of God, and prayed for the continuation of such a good work.\textsuperscript{24}

In the same year, 1643, Eleonor d’Etampes, archbishop of Reims, had written to Monsieur Vincent requesting priests of the Mission to offer the

\textsuperscript{21} CED I:203-05.
\textsuperscript{22} Abelly’s text reads 1649, a typographical error.
\textsuperscript{23} CED VIII:523.
\textsuperscript{24} CED II:430.
ordination retreats to the first group of candidates to be ordained in his
diocese since his installation.

I do not know how to thank you for the favor you did me in
sending your missionaries to conduct the ordination retreats for my
candidates. I assure you they were badly needed, and could not have
been sent to any place where they were more needed. They them­
selves will send you an account of the success of this retreat.25

In the same year, 1643, the ordination retreats were begun by the priests
of the Mission in the city of Noyon. The clergy of the local conference wrote
to Monsieur Vincent as follows:

If our thanks should match the blessings received, our Company
would fail in its duty to thank you sufficiently for the magnificent
edification received from your priests in the direction and instruc­
tion of our ordinands. We have waited a long time for this blessing
from you, but now that our group has experienced for itself the
happy results of this service, we find that we lack words to express
the sentiments we feel.26

From the pen of a pious member of this same Conference comes a
personal letter to Monsieur Vincent:

I would like to be able to find the proper terms to express the
consolation and edification we felt at the sight of the candidates,
but also of the members of the conference, and particularly the
conferences which Monsieur N. of your Congregation gave. He so
touched hearts that the gentlemen of the Conference could not stop
speaking of it. Among the ordinands, many let it be known before­
hand that they wanted nothing to do with the making of a general
confession, and especially not to one of your priests. After hearing
the conferences they were so moved they openly admitted their bad
intentions, and contrary to their original resolution, stated their
desire to make their general confession, and to one of the mission­
aries. This they all did, so moved to tears were they. In my own
name, I thank you for your great charity toward us, and in addition
I write in the name of these gentlemen. They asked me to tell you
how pleased they were at the retreat.27

In May 1644, Monsieur Vincent sent two priests of his Congregation to
Chartres at the invitation of Jacques Lescot, then bishop of that city. So
blessed was their work for the ordinands that the bishop wrote his thanks in
these words:

25. CED II:39.
27. CED II:399.
The two Missionaries you did me the honor of sending for the Pentecost ordinations are fine representatives of the clergy. They are upright, learned, capable, careful, and zealous. Thanks be to God, their work was blessed abundantly, for which I and the entire diocese are infinitely obliged to you. The people here are well disposed. But we need the help of your charity. Please, Monsieur, I am counting on it, since your charity is so universal and great that you can refuse no one.28

In March 1645, the bishop of Saintes wrote to thank Monsieur Vincent for the priests of the Congregation he had sent for these same retreats. “Our ordinands make them with exceptional blessings, but there is such a demand for places now that we will be hard pressed to accommodate all who want to come.”29

It would take entire volumes to relate in detail all the benefits these retreats produced wherever they were offered, or to speak of all the graces and blessings received by those who put no obstacle in the way of grace. This appeared even in their exterior deportment after their ordination in their changed life and in the practice of all the priestly virtues. It is enough to say that because of lack of workers Monsieur Vincent was unable to respond to each of the bishops of the kingdom for priests to conduct the ordination retreats in their dioceses. This general approval is an obvious tribute to the excellence and usefulness of the retreats.

SECTION SIX

The Ordination Retreats in Italy, and the Great Results Produced by Them

Since the nature of goodness is to communicate and diffuse itself, we should not be surprised that the ordination retreats, which were so effective and beneficial, expanded readily outside of France to other countries, including Italy. They had the same blessing and success there as they did in France. We will recount here the events in only two of the leading cities in Italy, as characteristic of what happened in many others.

The first is Genoa, where Cardinal Durazzo, the archbishop, had estab-

28. CED II:461.
29. CED II:506.
lished a house of the priests of the Congregation of the Mission for the instruction of his people and the reform of his clergy. He determined that every ordination in his diocese be preceded by the candidates’ making the ordination retreats. This produced marvelous results in the clergy who took part in this grace. The superior of the Mission at Genoa wrote to Monsieur Vincent on this subject, and we can suppose the same fruits were reaped in other places as well.

Our ordination retreat was small in number, but rich in blessings. God was generous in the gift of his grace. They followed the regulations faithfully, and the silence and modesty of the ordinands especially during meal times was so evident it seemed they had been formed in one of our own houses. The grace of God was even more evident during mental prayer and the discussions which followed. I don’t think it possible these exercises could be attended to with greater fervor than these gentlemen brought to them. During the time of mental prayer and even during the discussions some were in tears. Others publicly thanked God for the grace of participating in the ordination retreats, with its insights of knowing well the state they were about to embrace, and how to live in keeping with God’s designs upon them as true priests.

Among others, one was making his farewells at the end of the retreat, and told me with great emotion that he had prayed to God to send him a thousand deaths rather than let him offend his goodness. When this was repeated yesterday to Cardinal Durazzo, the archbishop, he wept with joy and appreciation. His heart could not contain the emotion he felt at the blessings God had bestowed upon this ordination retreat.

The second city we speak of is Rome, where the sovereign pontiff, Urban VIII of happy memory, had received the priests of the Congregation of the Mission in 1642. The following year they began to receive in their house those who came on their own initiative to prepare themselves to receive holy orders. The success of these first efforts was reported after several years to His Holiness, who in November 1659, directed the cardinal vicar of Rome to order that all who aspired to sacred orders should make the ordination retreats with the priests of the Congregation of the Mission. This was done under the authority of our holy father, Pope Alexander VII.

When this order was first given, the superior of the Mission in Rome wrote to Monsieur Vincent as follows:

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30. Stefano Durazzo, archbishop of Genoa from 1635 to 1664.
31. CED VIII:294.
32. CED IV:601-02.
In our weakness we are preparing ourselves to serve the candidates for ordination. Our confidence is in God, who shows himself ever more the author of this good work, seeing that we do not know how this order came about, nor who promoted it. I can rightfully say: *a Domino factum est istud* ["By the Lord has this been done"],\(^3^3\) and so there is reason to hope that *qui coepit ipse perficiet*\(^3^4\) ["He who has begun the good work, will carry it through to completion"].\(^3^5\)

Monsieur Vincent was pleased to see used in the Church during his lifetime the ordination retreats to which God willed that he give himself from the beginning and which he began. He was also especially gratified to see them established in the mother city of all Christendom. What is more, his own priests were charged with giving these retreats in Italy, although they had done nothing to promote them outside of France.

This first ordination retreat was given in December 1659. Divine Providence arranged that the Fathers de Chandenier, nephews of Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, had gone to Rome at the time, and were housed with the priests of the Mission when the ordinands were received.\(^3^6\) God so disposed it that these two virtuous priests contributed by their saintly deportment to the edification of all who saw them, for it would be impossible to find two models of modesty better suited to show the ordinands what their exterior behavior should be. The older of the two brothers celebrated high mass daily in the chapel of the Mission, at which all the ordinands attended. He displayed his usual gravity, devotion, and recollection, while his brother humbly filled the role of acolyte and thurifer. Two Italian priests of the Congregation of the Mission gave the conferences in the morning and evening, and all went so well that a favorable report was given to His Holiness, the pope. He referred to this in a consistory held soon after, in which he stated that he was most pleased with the ordination retreats. Cardinal Santacroce\(^3^7\) informed the superior of the Mission of this, and he in turn wrote to Monsieur Vincent, who asked for some additional details. His reply to Monsieur Vincent was as follows:

Monsieur, you requested information about the ordination retreats, and whether there seems to have been a carryover for the ordinands. As to the retreats themselves, and to all the particulars of the rule observed in France, we have tried and are still trying to

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\(^{3^3}\) Ps 118:23.

\(^{3^4}\) Phil 1:6.

\(^{3^5}\) CED VIII:183.

\(^{3^6}\) Claude Charles de Chandenier and his brother Louis were both devoted to Saint Vincent.

\(^{3^7}\) Cardinal de Sainte Croix, in Abelly's text. Marcello Santacroce, 1619-1674, was the cardinal protector of Poland.
have them observed in the same way as in Paris. We schedule each
day and hour according to the memorandum we received from Saint
Lazare. The ordinands declared they were very pleased, and not
only ourselves, but some outsiders have reported the fruits some of
them have taken by God's grace from the retreats. We even have
some taking part in a second program in which we are now involved,
in this first one for this Lent. These men are giving good example
to the others. It seems that God in his infinite goodness wishes to
bestow his blessing upon these retreats, and to confer his graces
upon the priests of this country as he has done elsewhere.38

At the end of each session this superior informed Monsieur Vincent of
how things had gone. We report here only a few extracts from his letters.

By the mercy of God, the fruits of previous retreats are in
evidence. Several of these gentlemen who have made the retreats
come here to visit us from time to time, telling us of their perseverance
in their good resolutions. One of them, a person of some
standing, who has attended three of these sessions, came here
yesterday to celebrate his first mass, after making a short retreat to
prepare himself for this occasion.39

In another letter the same superior told Monsieur Vincent that “some
cardinals and other prelates had come to hear the conferences. Among the
ordinands were several from highly placed families, among others a canon
of Saint John Lateran and nephew of Cardinal Mancini, a canon of Saint
Peter's named Count Marescotti, and others of high standing. The pope was
firm in insisting that no one was to be exempt from attending the ordination
retreats.”40

He said in another letter:

The ordinands we had at the beginning of Lent and those we have
at the moment have been faithful to the retreats. Their devotion has
astonished us. I might say, in regard to modesty and silence, that
they could not have done better. Our Lord makes us realize by this
that he alone is the source of all the good done here.41

In still another letter, he said:

We had in the last ordination retreat a Spanish gentleman, a
doctor from the diocese of Piacenza, whose bishop is now the
ambassador extraordinary of the king of Spain. This good gentleman
had planned to receive holy orders, and so came with great
sentiment to take part in the retreat. However, after hearing the

38. CED VIII:244-45.
40. CED VIII:294.
41. CED VIII:275.
conferences, he recognized the importance of not receiving holy orders unless one were called by God. In addition, he realized the great obligations assumed by the one who does take orders. These considerations raised great fear in him, and left him in a confused state of mind. At length, he resolved his uncertainties, and received orders with fine dispositions. The changed style of life in himself and in many others after the ordination retreats gives reason to hope he made a good decision.

After the retreat, he told his bishop of his experiences. The bishop in turn asked to speak to us, and we went to see him this morning. We found a zealous prelate who had arranged several missions in his own diocese much like the ones we of the Company give, except they are somewhat briefer. He himself preaches, hears confession, and catechizes, but this emphasis on forming good priests delights him. He asked if he might come here to our next session, to observe what we do, and asked if, on his return to Spain, we might give him one of our priests. While awaiting these developments, he would like to alert his diocese to what we do in the ordination retreats, so they might be introduced there. 42

This good prelate came to the following session not simply to learn about the ordination retreats in theory, but to follow all the exercises so he could bring the practices back to his own diocese.

After Monsieur Vincent received this news, he felt that the priests in Rome were moving too quickly on the question of sending a priest of the Company to Spain. He was ever on his guard about any human activity which would lead to the extension of his Congregation. He alerted them by letter, the tenor of which we can gather by the reply the Roman superior sent him.

As to the bishop of Piacenza, ambassador of Spain, God has given us the grace, according to your wishes, not to return to his house to speak further about the ordination retreats. According to your orders we will do nothing, God willing, to seek new jobs or to push ourselves. Even if we are pressed we will always refer everything to you for decision. We hope to be faithful in this. 43

Since the best and holiest activities are the ones most open to jealousy and contradiction, the fruits of the ordination retreats and the comments heard in the city of Rome led some religious persons, convinced they were rendering service to God, to attempt to remove the priests of the Mission and substitute their own community in the direction of these retreats. This is an account of these events, written by this same superior to Monsieur Vincent in May 1660.

42. CED VIII:269.
43. CED VIII:285.
I must alert you, Monsieur, to some opposition that has recently arisen about the continuation of the ordination retreats. First, a while ago the cardinal vicar told me that another religious community had asked to be put in charge of the ordination retreats, and that the ordinands should be sent to them and not to us. The cardinal absolutely refused the request. I had previously been informed of this move, and told which community was involved.

Second, I was advised that on the occasion of the examination for sacred orders, Father N. had said that since so many distinguished people came to Rome to be ordained, it was not proper to oblige them to keep attending the ordination retreats, and that he would speak to the pope about this. I have learned that he did speak to him, and tried his best to persuade the pope not to oblige the ordinands to come to us. His Holiness is well informed of what is done in the ordination retreats, and paying no attention to the remonstrances, remains firm in his commitment. You see, Monsieur, how we are under the special protection of our Lord and of his holy Mother.44

Since that time many attempts have been made to abolish the ordination retreats. Both the pope and cardinals were appealed to in complaints that the retreats had to be made with the priests of the Mission rather than elsewhere. They seemed to be of the opinion they could not be well made except in their own houses. All this made no impression on the mind of the pope. He remained persuaded that all should observe the brief he had published earlier. He also published a second one in 1662 on his own authority.45 It approved and confirmed all he had said on the question, but added the obligation not only that every person of whatever nation or class who was to be ordained in Rome should make the ordination retreats, but that those of the six suffragan dioceses should do so likewise. He was so convinced of the efficacy of the ordination retreats in the formation of the clergy that he reserved to himself the power of dispensing from this obligation. Even those who were dispensed, to receive orders extra tempora ["outside the canonical time"], he obliged to make a spiritual retreat with the priests of the Mission before ordination.

All these graces and favors could rightly be attributed to the protection of God and to the great purity of intention that motivated Monsieur Vincent. Because of this he was not overly disturbed by all the storms raised against the retreats. He recognized that God had originally given them to the missionaries, and that God was good and powerful enough to look after

44. CED VIII:290-91.
them, as long as the priests of the Mission would be faithful to their obligations. He was aware that failing in this, they would deserve to be deprived of them.

It would seem that so many efforts against the ordination retreats would surely reduce their success, but the contrary was the case. These attacks seemed to attract new blessings, or to publicize the retreats. For example, a single ordinand from the kingdom of Naples who had attended one of the sessions returned home and persuaded his archbishop to have all the ordinands of the archdiocese attend the retreats before receiving holy orders.

Cardinal Barbarigo heard about the happy fruit of the ordination retreats, and called the priests of the Mission of Rome to his city of Bergamo, in the state of Venice, of which he was the bishop. Recognizing the importance of the ordination retreats, he began them with the intention of continuing them in future. When he returned to Rome the following year, 1663, he attended one of the conferences, at which several other cardinals happened to be present as well. His presence visibly impressed the ordinands and greatly edified the other cardinals.

Several other cardinals attended the following session, that is, Cardinal Albizzi, and Cardinal Santacroce, to the great approval of the other cardinals, bishops, prelates, generals of orders and other notables in attendance.

The same superior remarked in several of his later letters that by God's grace the good effects of the retreats on the clergy were evident. This good result extended even beyond Rome itself, for among the ordinands there were, besides those from Italy, some from other countries.

These are some examples of the happy fruits of this enterprise established in the Church by the all-encompassing zeal of Monsieur Vincent, and by the blessing of God given for his own greater honor and glory.

46. Gregorio Barbarigo, 1625-1697, was canonized by Pope John XXIII in 1960.
47. Francesco Albizzi, called Albici in Abelly's text, died in 1684.
CHAPTER THREE

The Spiritual Conferences for Priests

SECTION ONE

The Beginning of the Spiritual Conferences for Priests Established at Saint Lazare

A bond among the virtues not only causes one virtue to lead to another, but in those rightly disposed, attracts other entirely new virtues as well. The same thing may be said of grace, the source of the virtues and generally of all God’s gifts. These always increase beyond measure in those who do not resist nor put any obstacle to God’s sovereign goodness, its source.

God had wished to inspire Monsieur Vincent to begin his work with the missions, and with them the ordination retreats, both of which were everywhere successful. Then in his divine goodness he moved Monsieur Vincent to begin another service for the Church. This not only preserved and confirmed the grace received in ordination, but helped priests to exercise all the functions of their sacred ministry with dignity and fruit. This is how this came about.

This great servant of God witnessed the good effects of the ordination retreats. This filled him with joy and led him to give continuous thanks to God. Aware of the weakness and inconstancy of the human heart, he feared that the priests at the conclusion of these retreats would return to their worldly ways. Since, as the apostle says, they were obliged to live among a wicked and perverse generation, they were in danger of little by little losing their first fervor and perhaps the graces they had received. This led him to reflect on what might be done to warn and strengthen them in such a way that their own weakness or the wickedness of the world would not trouble or lessen the saintly resolutions they had taken.

Despite his insights on the problem, his humility always made him hesitant of his own lights. One of his maxims was never to push himself ahead of the designs of God. He felt, therefore, the best course of action was to invoke the Holy Spirit, awaiting a manifestation of his holy will. During this wait, a virtuous priest who had attended the ordination retreat at Paris

1. Phil 2:15.
came to see him. He proposed the formation of some sort of group for priests. They had already come to Saint Lazare to prepare for ordination, and now wished to meet there periodically to discuss among themselves matters pertaining to their sacred ministry.

Monsieur Vincent looked upon this proposal as coming from God himself. He recognized the good effect such spiritual conferences had among the fathers of the Egyptian desert in former times. They defended them against the attacks of their hidden enemy, and helped their progress in the way of perfection. As a result, he judged it would be no less helpful to the clergy of his own time in their life amidst the dangers of the world. After mature reflection and prayer to the Lord, and after receiving the approval of the archbishop of Paris, he looked around to find the right ones to begin this project. The providence of God provided just such an opportunity, as we shall see.

Several priests who had attended the ordination retreat realized their debt to Monsieur Vincent for the good dispositions God had given them through his help. As a result, they came to offer themselves to him to work at whatever ecclesiastical function he might judge most useful. Monsieur Vincent responded by asking them to organize a mission to the masons, carpenters, and others who were building, near the Saint Antoine gate in Paris, the church of the Visitation of Saint Mary, whose superior and spiritual father he was. At the beginning of June 1633, these good priests began their work with great affection and ingenious charity in such a way they did not interfere with the progress of the construction. They found a way to give the usual instructions and exhortations every day, and prepared the workers to make a general confession and to lead a good Christian life, according to their particular state.

While the priests were working on this mission, Monsieur Vincent observed the zeal for the salvation of souls which motivated them, and the union of hearts which reigned among them. He thought it appropriate to begin what he had in mind. On the eleventh of that same month, the feast of Saint Barnabas, he went to speak to each one privately of his thought of bringing them together for mutual support. He found them receptive to his plan, leaving all in his hands as he might think best for their own advantage and for the greater glory of God. He asked all to come to Saint Lazare on a particular day, when he outlined in more detail what he had in mind. He spoke of the need of persevering and cultivating the holy dispositions God had inspired in them and the graces they had received in their ordination. He then exhorted them strongly to give themselves completely to his divine majesty, to continue for their entire life what they had begun so well. In this way, he said, they would meet the obligations of the state in life they had

2. See CED 1:204.
embraced, and so it would never be said of any of them that he had begun well, but failed in courage to complete the building. Since they had been honored with the sacred character of the priesthood and raised to a truly holy state, they should give themselves entirely to the service of God. It should never be said of them what the prophet Jeremiah deplored in his day, that the gold had become dim, had lost its shine and beauty, and that the precious jewels of the sanctuary had been scattered among the stones on the streets.3 All this happens when those whom Jesus Christ has chosen as his ministers in the Church begin to fail in the charity and perfection which should mark their state in life. Those who are closest to the sanctuary and who are the dispensers of its mysteries allow themselves to walk the highways of the world, and become blameworthy by their dissolute life.

He explained to the assembled priests that he did not expect them to separate themselves from the world, to live together in the same house. This would give rise to many difficulties. They were to continue to live in their own homes or possibly with their relatives. They should be united by a special bond of charity, a life of virtue, and ecclesiastical dedication. He proposed to draw up a rule of life whose observance would preserve them from worldly corruption and help them fulfill perfectly the obligations of their calling. In short, what one of the prophets said could be said of them: Stellae dederunt lumen in custodiis suis, et vocatae dixerunt, adsumus; et luxerunt illi cum jucunditate, qui fecit illas ["Before whom the stars at their posts shine and rejoice; When he calls them, they answer, 'Here we are!' shining with joy for their Maker"]⁴ They would be in the Church as so many brilliant stars, spreading the light of their good example in their families. They would be always ready to go wherever and work at whatever they were called to, so that Jesus Christ, the author of the priesthood, would be honored in their service.

The priest who had first proposed this assembly to Monsieur Vincent was not present on this occasion, since he was working on a mission away from Paris. For that reason Monsieur Vincent wrote this letter to him:

God be blessed, Monsieur, for all the graces and blessings he showers upon your mission. Does it not occur to you that so many idle workers could be well employed in the great harvest at which you are working? Those who know the need of the master of the harvest for workers are guilty of the blood of his Son, which remains without effect if it is not applied. How well the clergy have received the plan you did me the honor of explaining a while ago, all as a group, and each one in particular. We met two weeks ago, and

agreed to all you had suggested to me, with a union of spirit which can come only from God. I began my talk to them by what you had said to me, but without mentioning your name until I had to name you to save a place among them. They are to meet again today. How much good we can anticipate from this company! You are the mover, and you are interested in its success. Please pray for it, Monsieur, and especially for me.⁵

These priests came together once more, on the ninth of July, to organize this conference, choose their officers, and set the Tuesday of each week as the most convenient day to assemble to discuss the virtues and functions of their ministry. Monsieur Vincent chose as the subject of the first of his conferences with them, on July 16, the spirit of the ecclesiastical state.⁶ He divided it into three parts: first, the reasons and motives which priests and other sacred ministers have to acquire the ecclesiastical spirit; second, what this spirit consists in; and third, the means to acquire and preserve it, and to bring it to its full development. One of the members of the Company took notes of this first conference, as well as later ones. These notes are the source of much of what we have written.

The members have continued to meet every week, and take as their topic of conference the matters suggested by Monsieur Vincent. These were always on the virtues or functions proper to their calling. Their manner of speaking in these conferences was humble, simple, and familiar, in keeping with the spirit of their director, his suggestions, and his example. He had a special grace which was effective and grace-filled when speaking of the virtues or other pious topics. His language was simple and without display, but vigorous and from the heart.

Ordinarily he did not prepare himself by any special study, but used his time in prayer in God’s presence. He shared the lights he received in prayer with his hearers. His talks were founded on principles derived from holy Scripture, particularly the examples and words of the Son of God found in the Gospels, whose intent he penetrated in a way all his own. Often he added little or nothing to what had already been said by someone else. He was satisfied to share a good thought, or to comment on what had been said. In so doing he added a new force to it, for he had an extraordinary way of treating the most common and ordinary things. He used expressions which moved people, often producing good results, showing that our Lord Jesus Christ spoke with his lips, and inspired his words and his heart.

Among the other good results he had on his hearers, was that of leading

⁵ CED 1:202-03.
⁶ Since July 16 was a Saturday that year, the probable date is July 19, the mistake caused by an inverted numeral.
others to speak the same way as himself, with humility, simplicity, and sincerity. In the meetings no one strove to present learned discourses or to be admired for his erudition. The honor and glory of God, the spiritual welfare of the audience, and their own humiliation was the sole motive of the speakers. He advised the clerics to prepare themselves for their talks, but by way of prayer rather than by study, if the subject did not demand a more detailed treatment, or did not require the reading of some good book, as for example when it was question of ecclesiastical offices or positions, or other similar topics.

To draw down greater blessings upon this ecclesiastical company, Mon­sieur Vincent thought it proper to set down a series of regulations for it. It began by a formal statement of its foundation:

To preserve the good dispositions it pleased God to give them during their ordination retreats, the priests concerned have resolved, with the blessing and approval of the archbishop of Paris, to come together, to attend conferences at the house of Saint Lazare, to honor the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, his eternal priesthood, his holy family, and his love for the poor. They propose to model their lives upon his, and to procure the glory of God in the ecclesiastical state, in their families, and among the poor, not only in the cities but in the countryside as well, as dictated by the devotion of each of them.

This company shall be composed only of clergy raised to sacred orders, who shall be received only after long scrutiny of their life and morals, and after a spiritual retreat, which they shall strive to make annually if possible.

They will gather on Tuesday of each week to confer on topics which shall be assigned, which ordinarily shall be the virtues, functions, and works proper to their ministry.

They shall recognize that our Lord has gathered them together with a new bond of love, to keep them perfectly united in himself, and for this purpose they shall cherish one another, visit and console each other in their difficulties and illnesses. They shall attend the funeral services of any of the members who die. The priests among them shall each offer three masses for the departed, while the others will offer their communions.7

Besides this document, he drew up a brief daily schedule, which prescribed the following, among other things:

They should set the time for rising daily after enough sleep. Each morning they should spend a half hour in mental prayer. They

7. *CED* XIII:128-32; the manuscript edition of this document differs in many details from that quoted by Abelly and it is much longer.
should celebrate mass, and then read a chapter of the New Testament, while kneeling and with head uncovered, all the while making three internal acts: (1) adoration of the truths contained in the chapter which had been read; (2) entering into the spirit of these same truths; and (3) the application in practice of the things taught by the passage. Next, they were to study something in keeping with their duties. Before dinner they were to make a particular examination of their conduct, and after dinner they were to read some good spiritual book. The time remaining was to be used in study or in other exercises suitable for their state.

SECTION TWO

The Progress of This Company, and the Successes It Enjoyed

This Company, begun so well under the wise guidance of Monsieur Vincent, continued to enjoy new blessings, which God conferred upon it through the hands of his faithful servant. Among the first fruits was the growth of the Company, which happened quickly, for more than two-hundred and fifty priests became members during the lifetime of Monsieur Vincent. Among the members were some notable persons, distinguished by their birth or by their learning, for there were more than forty doctors of the faculty of Paris. All this occurred contrary to the wish of Monsieur Vincent and its members not to make this happen, but rather to honor the hidden life of our Lord. They sought to remain unknown as much as possible. They worked humbly in the least esteemed positions, yet in those most useful and advantageous to the salvation of souls, particularly among the poor, catechizing and hearing confessions in the hospitals, prisons, and villages. God did not allow this little city, built on the mountain of charity by the hand of his servant, to remain hidden for long. On several occasions, as we shall see, he brought to light the works it accomplished. Besides, his Providence allowed twenty-two prelates to be members, both archbishops and bishops, for the benefit of their dioceses. We should add that the membership included vicars general, canonical judges of the dioceses, archdeacons, pastors, canons, seminary directors, superiors, and visitators and confessors of missions.

religious, all of whom as members of the Company spread everywhere the
good odor of Jesus Christ through the example of their virtues.

It should be remarked that it was due chiefly to the head of their Company,
Monsieur Vincent himself, that must be attributed many of the blessings
upon its members, for they shared in the salutary influence he exercised over
his own Congregation. From the beginning he had introduced this same
practice of holding periodic conferences to discuss the virtues and the duties
of the ecclesiastical life. After he had seen for himself the success these
spiritual conferences had for the interior advancement of the members of his
Congregation, he felt the same sort of conferences would be equally benefi­
cial for priests from elsewhere. This led him to establish the conferences,
as we have indicated above in Section One.

One day, speaking to his community at Saint Lazare, he said:

If anyone ought to attend and appreciate spiritual conferences,
surely it ought to be the priests of the Congregation of the Mission.
God has entrusted to this Congregation the introduction of such
conferences among clergy, in which the practice of virtue is dis­
cussed. When I came to Paris, I never saw such conferences, in
which the virtues proper to one’s state in life were discussed, and
how to live well in one’s own vocation. In the academies, of course,
points of doctrine were presented, and sometimes cases of con­
science were thrashed out. About fifty years ago, Cardinal de
Sourdis introduced into his diocese of Bordeaux this way of han­
dling some points of moral theology. He would assemble his
pastors and other priests to instruct them better on these points, and
he was quite successful at it. But concerning the virtues proper to
their state in life, for ecclesiastics or clergy like ourselves, nothing
was available at all, at least as far as I was aware, or had ever heard
of.

Some religious have this practice, just as the monks of former
times did. In our times, however, God has been pleased to entrust
to this miserable Congregation these conferences for priests, who
in their service to souls must live amid the corruption of the world.
We must help them to become better equipped for their ministry.
God has inspired the Congregation of the Mission with much
appreciation to begin these conferences which contribute to the
growth of virtue. In them we treat of the motives for acquiring them,
their nature, their practice, and the particular acts which relate to

9. Francois d’Escoubleau, Cardinal de Sourdis, archbishop of Bordeaux from 1598 to 1625. Saint
Vincent saw him and appreciated his work on his first trip to Bordeaux in 1605, and then in 1623
when he returned there to evangelize prisoners. The cardinal was considered one of the holiest
and most courageous prelates of his time.
them. We treat also of the obligations of our state in life, toward God and the neighbor. There you see the point of these conferences. What do you think, if we were to be the first to neglect them? What account would we give to God if we neglect such useful and efficacious means used so assiduously by the ancient fathers and anchorites, as reported in the book written by the monk Cassian? I must say from my personal experience nothing so touching, so moving, of all that I have heard, read, or seen, equals these conferences.

Besides these first results of the spiritual conferences, which were limited to the clergy who gathered at Saint Lazare, others became evident in a wider sphere. Chief among these was the effect of the good example of the priests of the Company that began to be noticed among others, for the members of the Company were significant in their positions, whether by their learning, or by the responsibilities and benefices they occupied in the Church. Their example influenced others greatly, leading them to imitation, either by their modesty in dress or in the way of wearing their hair, or in their avoidance of worldly gatherings and mannerisms. On the positive side, their devotion to works of charity or other functions proper to their calling attracted many to do and act the same, which in many places was a source of much edification.

As a second result Monsieur Vincent often asked the ablest and most pious of the priests to address the ordinands following the exercises at Saint Lazare. Their exhortations, joined to the example of their lives, were powerful influences on the ordinands, gathered in Paris from all the dioceses of France. On the one hand they saw the perfect models of what they should become, and on the other, heard from their own lips what they must know and do to imitate them. In this Monsieur Vincent imitated the God of nature, who uses the fruit of a tree to produce new trees of the same species, or like the children of their father who become in their turn fathers of other children. This Company of clergy was the result of the first ordination retreats, and now, in their turn, they were helping the participants in these same exercises.

As a third result the priests were often sent or called to other dioceses to help in the ordination retreats, or in spiritual retreats which the bishops had organized for their pastors, vicars, and other clergy of their dioceses. When some had to go into the country on business, they took the occasion to gather the priests of the region to help them organize conferences among themselves touching on their functions and duties, or to urge them to mental prayer, or to the practice of the virtues proper to their calling. Since one of

the aims of their Company was to do what they could for the spiritual good of priests, they often contributed to the education of poor priests, or those who were not fulfilling their office worthily. Many were helped to a true conversion, and so removed a source of scandal in the Church.

**SECTION THREE**

*Missions Given by the Priests of This Company in Several Hospitals and Other Places in Paris*

Among all the possible services which the ecclesiastics might render, the missions were always thought of as the most useful and advantageous for the salvation of souls. Monsieur Vincent willingly accepted the offer of some among them to join priests of his Congregation, with his approval, to aid in the work of the missions. Consequently, several of them received his permission and went with the priests of his Congregation to help in their missions. What is more, their Company requested several of their number to give missions in other dioceses, with the permission and approval of the bishops. This happened principally in the larger cities where the priests of the Mission did not go. In their humility they preferred the poorer places in the country, as we have earlier shown. It pleased God to give such blessings to these missions that conversions were often seen that both astonished and edified all, and were marked by restitutions, reconciliations, and other extraordinary effects which followed.

Besides these missions given over the course of thirty years in many cities and regions of the kingdom, others no less fruitful were given in Paris itself.

Before the general hospital was established for the poor beggars from the streets of Paris, many of these were brought together to receive some alms, and to be taught how to prepare themselves for making a good general confession, and how to lead a more Christian life than in the past. The priests of the Company were particularly successful in their work with refugees from Lorraine living in Paris, as described in Book One.12

The soldiers of the King’s Guard were also brought together in appropriate places, with the approval of their captains, for a mission. At various times and places in the city, missions were given for the workers in the factories

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12. Ch. 35.
and shops. These produced good results for the masons and unskilled workers. They for the most part never attended the instructions or catechism lessons in the parishes, and lived their lives in neglect of things conducive to their salvation. So as not to take them away from their work, instructions and efforts to prepare them for their general confession were given during their rest periods.

The members of the Company gave missions in several hospitals of the city. They began in 1633 in the hospital of Quinze-Vingts, then in the hospital for the blind and their families, and for people of the neighborhood who wanted to attend. Several times they gave missions to the poor of the hospital of La Pitié. They also gave missions at the Refuge, a prison for fallen women and girls, who were much in need of spiritual help. Monsieur Vincent himself had a great compassion for these poor miserable women. He not only urged the priests of the Company to give missions to them from time to time, but often went himself on Sundays and feasts to administer the sacraments and preach the word of God to them, always with the permission and approval of the archbishop.

A mission was given also in the hospital des Petites Maisons. Besides the mentally ill who could not be helped by the preaching, many poor families, together with some people of the neighborhood, took part. It was on this mission that a pamphlet called “Duties of a Christian” was drawn up and prepared on a single page in a succinct and familiar style, so that even the most untutored could read and understand. It pleased God to give it such a blessing that it was circulated quickly throughout France and elsewhere in the millions of copies, with unbelievable benefit to the poor and to other persons of whatever state.

Several missions were given in the hospital of the galleys in the Tournelle, the place [in Paris] where these poor criminals were kept until they were sent off to the galleys. Just as their spiritual needs were extreme, so the instructions and other spiritual helps they received from these priests were of great profit.

These same priests gave spiritual help to the sick poor of the Hotel Dieu of Paris, for one of the principles of their Company was to work for the spiritual good of the poor. Scarcely any could be found where they could be helped more than in this hospital, for the poor were there in large numbers. They first resolved to go there in a body to dispose the sick poor to make a good general confession. Then they appointed some of their number to visit each day to continue their charitable interest. Every Friday some of the...
priests would go to preach and conduct catechism lessons for the sick. Finally, with the advice and in cooperation with Monsieur Vincent, they gave an entire mission, in 1639, in keeping with the wishes of the superintendents of the hospital, the sick themselves, the officials and staff, and of the religious in service there, to whom the priests gave spiritual conferences three times a week.

The poor beggars of Paris had been confined to the General Hospital not only to put an end to begging and its attendant abuses, but also to see to the spiritual good of those confined and contribute to the salvation of their souls. The rector, himself a member of the Company, together with the administrators and directors appointed by the king, thought it useful from the beginning of this enterprise and even necessary to have missions given in all departments of the hospital. The priests of the Company worked at this with great zeal and much blessing. Since every day saw new poor brought to the hospital and others released, the missions were often repeated. Besides the help the priests of the Company gave during the year in all the parts of this hospital, they ordinarily went on Sundays and feasts to preach and hear confessions. On other occasions they were called by the successor to the original rector, likewise a member of their Company. As a result, scarcely a year passed that a mission was not given, according to the judgment of the rector about the needs of the poor people confined there.

SECTION FOUR

The Remarkable Results of Two Missions Given by Priests of this Company

As an example of the blessing God showered upon these priests, working under the direction and in the spirit of Monsieur Vincent, we will recall here only what occurred on two of their missions. We will leave aside the others, so as not to annoy the reader with the inevitable repetitions that would otherwise result.

Several years ago these priests gave a mission in a large market town, which for the most part housed either officers of the law or tavern keepers. They found the disorders shared by both groups. The tavern keepers were

15. Abelly himself.
in the habit of serving drink and promoting drunkenness, even on Sundays and feasts during the hours of divine service. The abuses of the officers of the law approached scandalous proportions. The judges ate and drank in the taverns with those to be tried before them. The attorneys would meet their clients only in the same setting, but still conscious of their rights of office. They employed all sorts of trickeries to prolong the legal process, so that a poor peasant often found all his funds exhausted there before his case ever came to judgment. Almost always these judgments were not given in open court, but were remanded to arbitrators to extract still more money from the plaintiffs and to use up the funds for their expenses.

The court attendants were no less a source of disorder and injustice. The officers of the courts were so venal the courts themselves were described in a common proverb of the region as a "pillar of hell."

The members of this Company, then, or rather God working through them, sought to remedy this sad state of affairs. They first preached strongly against the abuses and disorders in the taverns, especially on Sundays and feasts. Afterward, they persuaded the chief of police to issue a regulation and set fines appropriate for the case. He was to visit the tavern himself on these days, and punish by fines or other penalties the innkeepers, as well as those they met there while divine services were in progress.

Later they went to see the provost, the chief magistrate of the locality. They held several sessions with him, in which they pointed out that besides the glory of God and the dictates of his conscience, he owed it to his own reputation and to his own interest to bring an end to all these disorders and injustices, and to take strong measures to root them out. Finally they persuaded him to use his authority to impose fines or other penalties upon the attorneys, sergeants, or other officers of justice who failed in their duties. They were to be forbidden to frequent the taverns with their clients, nor were they to prolong cases through technicalities, and were to give judgment in open court whenever possible without more delays unless absolutely necessary. After this, since some of those working on this mission were related to presidents and counselors of Parlement, they saw to it that in case of appeal against the regulations or the penalties enacted, someone would be appointed to assure that these regulations would be maintained and supported by the higher courts. This person promised to see to this, and be firm and constant in the matter should it arise in the future.

The priests brought together all the attorneys of the locality, and in a conference, showed the necessity of bringing a remedy to the abuses and disorders which had been allowed to develop. They could not at all be sure of their own salvation if these things continued. Besides, the sacrament of penance could not be administered to them either licitly or validly if they
did not take a firm and complete resolution to change their customs and obey the regulations set down in these matters. Lastly, they exhorted the lawyers to do with good will and for the love of Jesus Christ what the provost had ordained by his authority. Those present acquiesced in these demands, and with good heart promised to comply.

A similar assembly was held for the sergeants of the courts, when a long list of some twenty-five or thirty articles set forth their principal duties and the way they should be carried out. The sergeants agreed to everything, and as a sign of this drew up a formal document, which each one signed.

After these meetings, and after they had agreed on the resolutions, these members of the court came to the sacrament of penance, to the great edification of the people. Since then, it has become known that they have well observed all these points, to the extent that the provost fined his own father, an attorney, for attempting to delay a case by some tricks and useless formalities.

The second mission of which we speak in this section has to do with the one given in the Saint Germain des Pres neighborhood of the city of Paris, in 1641, at which the priests of the Company worked with much success. This neighborhood at the time was the sewer of all Paris, even of all France, as the home of libertines, atheists, and others living in impiety and wantonness. The impossibility of remedying the situation, in the minds of many, led to all sorts of debauchery and vice, carried out with complete impunity.

A woman of great virtue,' moved at the sight of so many offenses against God, opened her heart to Monsieur Vincent. She was well aware of the good the missions had accomplished elsewhere, by the grace of God, and therefore proposed that a mission should be given in this neighborhood, as well. Monsieur Vincent had to explain that his Congregation was not to give missions in the episcopal cities. In addition, he saw almost insurmountable obstacles and difficulties in attempting such a project in this place where such disorder reigned and where the people were so poorly disposed toward religious matters. This lady was not put off by this, but redoubled her entreaties with such strong insistence that finally Monsieur Vincent felt it was God himself inspiring her to act. He spoke of it to the Company of priests gathered at Saint Lazare, with the proposal that they should undertake this mission.

This aroused much resistance and the Company represented to Monsieur Vincent the strong reasons that they should not attempt an enterprise which, to all human appearances, was doomed to failure. Nevertheless, Monsieur Vincent, after recommending this project to our Lord by long prayer, persisted in his own opinion. He said there was good reason to believe that

16. The duchess of Aiguillon.
God was asking this service of them, and that his grace and blessing would enable them to overcome all obstacles and draw much good from it, despite the efforts of the devil and evil men against them. Seeing that his earnestness hurt some of the opposite opinion, he dropped to his knees, and begged pardon of the entire Company, that he, so wretched and miserable, had spoken so strongly of what he felt. He then said that he had been forced to act by an interior light that God was asking this service of their piety and their zeal.

The great humility of this saintly man so affected them that even those once most opposed to the mission were now agreed it should be given. By a common agreement and in a spirit of submission, they resolved to undertake it. Before beginning, however, they discussed with Monsieur Vincent what exactly must be done, with the thought of being guided completely by his advice and orders. When he was asked about how to preach and teach catechism, seeing that the people of this section of the city were so different from those of the country, and that they would be subject to the criticisms of many, this great servant of God replied that the method and style they should use was the same simple direct method they used in their previous missions, which God had so blessed. The spirit of the world, which filled the neighborhood, could not be fought and conquered with greater success than by the spirit of Jesus Christ. They should try to enter into his sentiments, and seek, like him, not their own honor and glory but solely the glory of God. They must be prepared, like him, to suffer objection and contempt, and even contradiction and persecution, should this prove to be the will of God. They must preach and speak as he did, simply and familiarly with humility and charity. In this way they could be assured that it was not themselves, but Jesus Christ speaking through them. He would use them to serve as his instruments of mercy and grace, to touch the hardest hearts, and convert the most rebellious spirits.

These gentlemen received all this advice as though it were Jesus Christ speaking to them through the mouth of his servant. They began the mission, therefore, in perfect acceptance of the will of God, and with great confidence in his goodness. It pleased him to pour out his extraordinary blessings upon it, and to shower his graces in such abundance and so effectively that almost miraculous conversions took place. Even those who worked on this mission were astonished at them, seeing the disproportion between the means used and the results attained. Besides the large crowds at their sermons and catechism instructions which they presented in the simple and familiar style suggested by Monsieur Vincent, they were filled with admiration at their results. They saw inveterate sinners, hardened usurers, fallen women, libertines who had spent their entire lives in crime, in a word, people without
faith in God or anyone, throw themselves at their feet, their eyes bathed in tears, their hearts moved with sorrow for sins, begging mercy and forgiveness. It could rightly be said: *digitus Dei hic est* ["The finger of God is here"],\(^\text{17}\) or *Non manus nostra; sed Dominus fecit haec omnia* ["Not our hand, but the Lord has done all these things"]\(^\text{18}\). It is certain that if we had to report in detail all the good done on this mission, the conversions, the reconciliations, the restitutions, etc., it would require a whole volume all by itself. A single incident will suffice to recall what happened toward the end of the mission.

A merchant of Paris was devout enough to attend the various activities of the mission, and seeing the great good effected by God was moved by the experience. One day he came to the house where the priests took their meals, and asked to speak to the head of the band. He announced himself as a widower, having lost his wife and children. He was now coming to offer his temporal goods, amounting to over seven or eight thousand *livres* annual income, and himself, too, to serve for the remainder of his life. All this, if only the priests would remain together and continue to devote themselves in other places to the same work they had done in this neighborhood. He added that he knew of no way he could render greater service to God, or obtain a greater good for the Church, or better use his personal gifts and possessions. He was thanked graciously for his gesture of good will, but those who had worked on this mission were indeed resolved to serve God throughout their lives in similar activities, yet they for many good reasons were not called to live together in the way he hoped. They assured him that God was most pleased with his good will.

The Providence of God made use of this mission not only for the immediate good done by it, but as a preparation for the blessings and graces he wished to bestow upon that area in the immediate future by the ministry of Father Olier, who shortly afterward was called to be the pastor of Saint Sulpice, where with members of his community and his seminary, he not only conserved but increased and perfected the good accomplished through this mission.\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^\text{17}\) Exod 8:19.

\(^\text{18}\) Not a direct quotation from Scripture, but reminiscent of passages such as Isa 66:2 and Acts 7:50.

\(^\text{19}\) Olier accepted this parish in the following year, 1642. At the beginning of his ministry, he highly praised the missionaries who had preceded him, particularly Francois Perrochel, the future bishop of Boulogne, who had preached with a remarkable simplicity and effect.
The Company of Clergy Who Met at Saint Lazare Fostered Similar Companies in Other Dioceses

Since it is a quality of charity to diffuse itself, these good ecclesiastics were so animated with this virtue wherever they happened to find themselves, that they were moved to extend the same sentiments God had inspired in them, through Monsieur Vincent, to others whom they met. Several among their number had gone to other dioceses on personal business, or to work on one of the missions, or to fulfill some charge or benefice. They were anxious on all occasions to have the local clergy meet, with the permission and approval of their bishop, in assemblies like their own of Paris. These were to be formed to discuss the virtues and everything else about the duties proper to their calling. Some bishops were already aware of the great advantages these conferences might contribute in their own diocese. They established them not only in the episcopal city, but in various other places in their diocese for the pastors and vicars of the country places.

To have a brief sketch of the fruits these assemblies and conferences produced outside of Paris where they were established, we will give here some extracts from several letters written on this matter.

The late Father Olier, one of the first members of the conference at Saint Lazare, went to give missions in the regions depending upon his abbey of Pebrac, in Auvergne, together with several priests of the Congregation of the Mission and other members of the company in 1636 and with others of the company of priests. He convinced the canons of the cathedral church of Le Puy to form a similar company, and gave them the same regulations as those of Paris, but modified to suit their role as canons. He wrote of this to the company at Paris, telling the priests of the abbot of Pebrac learning of their company at Paris, and wishing to form a similar one for the priests of his area. The regulations of their association were modeled upon those of Paris, except for some modifications made necessary by their own conditions. He was sending along a copy which he asked the priests to read and to make appropriate changes, if they thought they were needed, and to associate this new group to their company, to share in their prayers and sacrifices.

The abbot of Pebrac wrote to the members of the Paris company about the newly-formed association in Le Puy:

Our Lord established you in Paris, as a light set upon a lampstand
to enlighten all the clergy of France. You will be encouraged to
learn the great fruit and spiritual profit the new company of clergy
of Le Puy has produced. The members display virtues which edify
the entire province. They give catechism lessons throughout the
city, frequently visit the prisons and hospitals, and prepare missions
for all the regions depending on this chapter. I am humbled by their
zeal, especially in their asking me to open their mission, even
though I am so poorly gifted to do so.

The canons of the cathedral church of Noyon also formed a similar
company through the efforts of Monsieur Bourdin, doctor of theology and
archdeacon of this church, and a member of the Paris company. They wrote
to the Paris group in November of 1637 as follows:

Gentlemen, here is a little stream returning to its source. We take
the liberty to speak thus, for our tiny assembly owes its birth, after
God, to no other source or being except your venerable company.
Its renown, practice of charity and piety, the gifts you have given
to the Church, and the incomparable benefits enjoyed by the priests
fortunate enough to be its members, have led us to establish a similar
association among ourselves. We have met several times, and have
drawn up the regulations we now send you. We have attempted to
model them after yours as closely as we could, taking into account
our obligations as canons, or our other duties. We would humbly
ask you do us the charity to examine these, to add, subtract, or
modify what you think proper. When it meets with your approval,
we shall follow it with greater assurance and security.

We do not know how to thank sufficiently the divine goodness
for inspiring us with such a helpful wish, and you, gentlemen, for
having provided us with such a beautiful example, and clearing the
way so favorably to enable us to fulfill the duties of our calling. We
shall bless his eternal Providence, with the help of God, and attempt
to recognize by our prayers the singular blessings we have received
from you. Permit us, gentlemen, to take the liberty of asking you
for a written report of one of your conferences, especially on the
spirit of your company, so that we might be clothed with this same
spirit, without which we surely will not succeed in our undertaking.
We ask one thing more of your charity to assure us of your union
with us, and to make us part of your holy prayers and sacrifices, ut
qui coepit in nobis opus bonum, ipse perficiat solidetque ["that he
who has begun the good work in us, will bring it to perfection and
make it firm"],\footnote{Based on Phil 1:6.} for which we will ever be much obliged.
The priests of the town of Pontoise organized a similar association. One of their principal members wrote to Monsieur Vincent, in May of 1642, as follows:

The assembly of the priests of Pontoise has asked me to write to you, to tell you of our satisfaction with our little group. I must confess that at first we did not appreciate fully what was involved, but now we realize more and more each day the grace and blessing God has poured upon us. We see clearly all the good that can come to each of us, and to the whole body of the Church. It is to you, Monsieur, after God, that we are obliged for all we have gained by our association with your good and virtuous company of Paris. Our company received its first instructions from you, a seed which has continued to grow, and to which God has given his blessings. We would ask one more favor, since we are as children in virtue and do not have enough strength to direct ourselves. Please allow some of your priests of Paris to visit us, to help us walk with greater surety in the path we have begun with such courage. We expose our weakness to you to encourage you to help us.21

A similar company was begun in the city of Angouleme. One of its members wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1644, in the name of all the others:

Our company feels we must not long delay in paying our respects, and in telling you it recognizes itself as unworthy of the honor you have done us in all that concerns our growth and development. This company begs you most humbly, Monsieur, that it may regard you as its grandfather, since it was one of your sons whom God used to bring us into existence. You would add another obligation of gratitude to the first, by looking upon us not as strangers, but as your grandchild. You have allowed the beautiful and illustrious company of Paris, which is like your elder daughter, to accept us as her sister, although we are so far beneath her in every respect.22

We will not quote from similar letters from Angers, Bordeaux, and other cities of the kingdom,23 and even from Italy, where similar associations and conferences were formed according to the example of the one in Paris. We will finish this chapter by relating the sentiments of Monsieur Godeau, then bishop of Grasse, now of Vence, which he wrote in 1637, shortly before he left his see:24

21. CED II:252.
22. CED II:455.
23. For example, Bossuet wrote from Metz to Monsieur Vincent telling him of the establishment of a Conference there. See CED VII:155-56.
24. Antoine Godeau, named bishop of Grasse in 1636, moved to the diocese of Vence in 1638. He was known both for his learning and piety. He died April 17, 1672.
Gentlemen, I had hoped even today to visit you to say adieu, but the press of business prevented my having this satisfaction. Please remember me in your sacrifices, for I regard it as a singular blessing to have been received among you. The memory of the good example I saw, and the excellent things I heard, will rekindle my zeal when it shall fade, and you shall be the model upon which I shall strive to form good priests. Continue, then, your activities in this same spirit, and respond faithfully to the designs of Jesus Christ upon you. He surely wills to renew the grace of the priesthood in his Church through you.
CHAPTER FOUR

Spiritual Retreats

SECTION ONE

The Utility of Spiritual Retreats

The perfection of clergy in their state of life is an undertaking which requires much help, both interior and exterior, because of the obstacles found in the world in which they have to live. Not only conversations and business affairs, but other dangerous occasions and the frequent temptations to which they are exposed, threaten too often and sometimes overcome the best resolutions they have taken, if priests are not sustained and affirmed by powerful reinforcements. Indeed, the ordination retreats help greatly in establishing them in the true spirit of their vocation, and spiritual conferences contribute much to their sustenance. Yet through his long experience, Monsieur Vincent knew only too well the feebleness and inconstancy of the human will. He felt that still another means was required to strengthen priests in their practice of the virtues. He thought of nothing so effective as spiritual retreats. They dispose the soul to receive a new increase of grace, and prepare it to be clothed by power from on high, as our Lord said to his apostles when he directed them to await the coming of the Holy Spirit after his ascension into heaven.

What inclined Monsieur Vincent to do all he possibly could to help spiritual retreats even more, was that he realized that their benefits could be extended even beyond the clergy to laity of all classes as well, as a help to them in leading a life in keeping with their obligations as Christians. Because so few give enough consideration to these obligations, or are guided by the truths and maxims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, largely because of insufficient reflection, he believed he would perform a service agreeable to God, advantageous to the Church, and helpful to souls if he were to encourage the practice of spiritual retreats. His efforts were directed toward reestablishing a true spirit of Christianity among the faithful, as we read in a note he left, written in his own hand:

By the expression spiritual retreat or spiritual exercise, we understand a separation from all temporal cares and occupations, to
consider seriously one's interior state, to examine one's conscience, to meditate, contemplate, and pray. In this way, we prepare the soul by purification from all sin and from evil attractions and habits, to be filled with the love of virtue, and ready to seek out the will of God, and once having discovered it, to submit to it, to embrace it, and by union with the plan of God move toward and finally attain one's own proper perfection.¹

By these few words we understand the mind of this great servant of God, that these spiritual retreats had no other end than the complete renovation of the interior self. One was to be purified from sins, from all evil habits, unlawful attractions, uncontrolled passions, and all other faults and imperfections, so that with the eyes of the soul being opened, the particular obligations of one's state in life might be more clearly seen, and the virtues needed would be appreciated and practiced. One could be grounded in true charity, which unites the heart and all the powers of the soul to God, that we might be ready to say with the holy apostle, "Now, it is no longer I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in me."²

Because of this the times and exercises of these spiritual retreats were established: the various meditations and spiritual readings, the examinations of conscience, and the making of a good general confession, if not of one's whole past life, at least one going back to the last general confession. Resolutions were taken, not only to avoid sin and the occasion which might lead to it, but more especially to put into practice the virtues and activities proper to one's particular calling. A plan of life was set out for the future, and if a person had not yet decided upon a state in life, God was consulted in fervent prayer to know his will. In a word, the retreatant strove to acquire the dispositions necessary to lead a truly Christian life, and to acquire the perfection of one's state.

Monsieur Vincent particularly advised his confreres that they have their retreatants well understand that the aim of the exercises they followed was to help each one become a perfect Christian, whatever his particular calling. One would be a perfect scholar if he were a student, a perfect soldier if his profession was a man of arms, a perfect member of the judiciary if his vocation was to serve in the courts of law. If the person was in holy orders, he was to strive to become a model ecclesiastic. Should he happen to be a member of the hierarchy, he was to become another Saint Charles Borromeo. If those coming to the retreat came to discern their calling, or to root out a vice, or acquire a certain virtue, or for any other purpose, they must, he used to say, direct all the exercises of the retreat to this end. Those thinking of

¹. CED XIII:143-44.
leaving the world must be helped, but the advice given must accord with the maxims of the Gospel and not the views of human prudence. When a question would arise of choosing a particular religious community, this should be done between the person and God alone, although it would be proper to give general advice as to choosing a reformed community.

It is commonly understood that most of those who are lost lack the necessary consideration and attention to those things concerning their salvation. The main reason for sin and disorders in which so many pass nearly their entire lives is that they seldom if ever consider the end for which God gave them being and life. These people do not reflect on his goodness, nor on the teachings and example given us by Jesus Christ, nor the graces of the sacraments he instituted. The pernicious effects of sin are not considered, nor the vanity of the world, the deceptions of the flesh, the malice and deceits of the devil, the incertitude of the moment of death, the fearsome judgments of God, eternal happiness or unhappiness, and other truths so fundamental to our salvation.

Monsieur Vincent felt that spiritual retreats supplied all these lacks by the serious reflection made on all these truths, considered and weighed in the light of the sanctuary. He rightly considered that of all the means put at the disposal of people to remedy the disorders of their lives, and aid them in their progress in virtue, nothing is more efficacious or more likely to produce as noticeable, as frequent, and as marvelous results than these spiritual retreats. Sinners who are not converted by them or who do not amend their ways, stand in need of true miracles for their conversion if these spiritual retreats do not bring it about.

SECTION TWO

The Zeal of Monsieur Vincent to Provide the Opportunity to All Sorts of Persons to Make a Spiritual Retreat

Since the spiritual retreat is such a salutary means for sanctification and perfection of souls, as we have said in the previous section, God so inspired his Church from the first centuries of Christianity, that great saints retired to the deserts of Egypt and elsewhere to participate in them. In recent times many saintly persons have revived this custom. Among others, Saint Ignatius made it possible for persons living in the world to find a place of retreat,
some in the cities and others in remote places, yet these places were not well attended since lay people rarely followed these retreat exercises. Moved by an ardent desire to procure the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, Monsieur Vincent strove to extend this opportunity to all sorts of persons, either lay or clergy, and he made this practice more common than ever before.

With a wholly impartial charity, he opened the doors of his heart and his home to all those who wished to share in this good work. He would receive them kindly and paternally, with no distinction of persons. In this he was imitating the father of the family in the Gospel who accepted to his banquet all those who came: the poor, blind, lame, and the crippled, and sending out to the streets and squares of the cities, and even to the fields and most isolated areas, to invite and even compel all to attend.

We must admit that in our day this great servant of God did something similar to the astonishment and edification of all. In the refectory at Saint Lazare many other persons could be seen among the missionaries. They were of all ages and conditions, from city and country, poor and rich, young and old, students and doctors, priests and holders of benefices, ecclesiastics and prelates, gentlemen, counts, marquis, attorneys, lawyers and councillors, presidents, receivers of petitions and other officers of justice, merchants, artisans, soldiers, pages, and lackeys. All were received, lodged, and fed in this great hospice of charity to make their retreat, to find the remedy for their spiritual infirmities, or the help necessary to set them securely on the path of salvation.

This one house of Saint Lazare of Paris received, lodged, and fed every year from seven to eight hundred persons for their spiritual retreat, not to mention the other houses of the Mission which accepted as many as they could, especially at Rome where great numbers were always received. With all this taken into account, from 1635 to the time of Monsieur Vincent’s death twenty-five years later, more than twenty thousand people participated in these retreats. Their general confessions and other exercises brought remedies to a countless number of disorders of family and conscience. A large number of public and secret sinners were reconciled to God. Those who had strayed from the path of salvation were returned to the right way. The just received an increase of blessings and grace, and all were given arms against their great enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil by the helpful advice they received, to repulse their attacks and so gain glorious victories over these enemies of their salvation.

In the beginning, in fact, not many people came to make the spiritual retreats. The numbers increased only little by little. The charity of Monsieur Vincent directed that all who came should be received with open arms, at
the expense of the house at Saint Lazare although there was no assured source of funds to support them. Among those who came, some who were better off left a donation which he did not refuse, since it had been freely offered. This did not happen often, because nothing was asked for, or possibly because it was simply overlooked. It was evident to all that retreatants were accepted with no thought of the expenses involved, solely through charity and zeal for their salvation and perfection.

Although the house of Saint Lazare experienced much inconvenience and accumulated a large debt on this score and by reason of the ordination retreats, they continued and will remain, God willing, as long as humanly possible. These good works for the glory of God and the consolation of the people shall always remain open for the spiritual advancement of those who wish to make their retreat there and renew their life. In this, the sons of Monsieur Vincent have shown themselves possessed of his spirit. His confrères spared no effort or expense when there was question of the salvation of souls, in consideration that our Lord had given his blood and his life for them. Monsieur Vincent was persuaded that his Congregation would never want for material support so long as they used their patrimony in works of charity.

He even felt at ease in seeing his confrères in real need on occasion, to give them an opportunity to display their absolute dependence on the Providence of God. They must have the experience of saying, amid their wants and financial difficulties, like Saint Peter in the storms and waves that threatened: “Lord, save us, we perish.” God preserved this tiny craft from foundering, as though by miracle, despite its being often threatened, but never enough to lessen the charity of Monsieur Vincent. In this connection, a brother of the Mission, seeing the huge number of those making the retreat, took the liberty of suggesting that perhaps too many retreatants had been accepted. Monsieur Vincent’s only reply to this was, “Brother, this is because they wish to be saved.”

On another occasion it was pointed out to him that the house was not able to cover the expense of all those who came to make the retreat, and was already running into debt because of this. He replied, “If we had thirty years to exist, but because of receiving so many retreatants would be able to manage only fifteen years, this must not concern us. The expense is truly great, but money cannot be used any better. If the Congregation of the Mission is in debt, God knows how to get us out. This is what we hope from his Providence and from his infinite bounty.”

He also said to the one in the house charged with receiving the guests: “Give them our rooms when all the others are taken.” When it was pointed

3. Matt 8:25.
out to him that the house could not take care of all who came to make their retreat, he offered to take over as receptionist, thinking perhaps that he might be able to cut down on the number accepted. The opposite happened, for his charity was such that he could not turn anyone away, causing the suspicion he might have taken the role of receptionist to increase the number of retreatants rather than lessen it.

One day someone said to him that among the large number of those who came, some seemed to gain nothing from the exercises. His reply was, “There is no loss if only one person gains from the retreat.” When some said that some came only through pressure or to receive the corporal nourishment offered rather than the spiritual, he responded, “Well, even this is an alms agreeable to God. If you make it too difficult to come, it will surely happen that you will turn away someone God has destined to be converted on this retreat. Too great an exactness in examining motives will make you lose some who would otherwise be led to give themselves to God.”

We shall finish this section by citing the opinion of a worthy priest who knew Monsieur Vincent well and who had made several retreats at Saint Lazare.

Although Paris is filled with all sorts of people, the downtrodden and afflicted of all ranks, they all could find an asylum. Monsieur Vincent and his confreres staffed a house of consolation and help. The door, the table, and the rooms of Saint Lazare, all give witness to this. I have also seen everyone made welcome: all ranks of ecclesiastics and religious, lords and magistrates, soldiers and scholars, hermits and peasants. Monsieur Vincent refused consolation and spiritual help to no one. His house was a perpetual mission, a succession of spiritual exercises, retreats, penances, general confessions for poor sinners who wished to be converted and change their lives. This was usually for all sorts of persons, lodged and fed during their retreat, one after another, continually throughout the year. Everything was done with such good grace and charity that the hardest hearts could not help being moved. They were touched and stirred by this hospitality, goodness, and meekness, and by all the other evidences of good they saw.
CHAPTER FOUR, SECTION THREE

SECTION THREE

Some Remarkable Comments of Monsieur Vincent About the Spiritual Retreats

This great servant of God recognized on the one hand the great fruits these retreats could produce for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, but he realized too the burden for his community in the expense as well as the difficulty in constantly caring for so many people of all different backgrounds and dispositions. He was apprehensive lest his confreres grow weary under such a heavy burden. This is why he often recommended to his community to be faithful to this responsibility with constancy and perseverance, and to take it to heart to serve and help those souls who came seeking God. He would say, "We must fear, gentlemen, that God will take this harvest from us to give his grace to others if we fail to use it as we ought."

On one occasion when he was recommending to the prayers of his community a person on retreat, he took the opportunity to exhort them to appreciate this holy enterprise.

Oh, gentlemen, how we ought to esteem the grace God gives us, to send us so many persons to be helped in attaining salvation. We even have many soldiers coming. Recently one of them said to me, "Monsieur, before I go into some situations I foresee, I want to be well prepared. I have had remorse of conscience and reason to doubt what might happen to me, but I have come to accept whatever God shall ask of me." Right now we have a good number of persons on retreat. Oh, gentlemen, what happy results that can produce if we work at it faithfully! But what a loss if this house would some day withdraw from this service. I declare to you, gentlemen and my brothers, I fear the day when we will no longer have the zeal which up to now let us receive these many people for retreats. And then what happens? We must fear that God will withdraw his grace for this particular work, and perhaps for others also.

Just the day before yesterday I was told of the Parlement humiliating a counsellor. He was brought in to the Grand'Chambre, dressed in the red robes of his office, but the president directed the marshals to strip him of his robes and cap, as being unfit to wear them and unequal to the duties of this office. The same thing could happen to us, gentlemen, should we abuse the graces of God in neglecting our duty. God will withdraw them from us because we
are unworthy of our vocation, and unfit for the work he has called us to. My God, what unhappiness! To convince you of the great evil this would be if God deprived us of the honor of serving him in this way, think of those who come to the retreat to discern the will of God in their thought of leaving the world. I recommend one such person to your prayers who has just finished his retreat and who is leaving here to join the Capuchins. Other communities send us their applicants to make their spiritual retreat here, to test their vocation before entering. Others come from ten, twenty or even fifty leagues away, not only to find a place for recollection and to make their general confession, but also to choose their vocation in the world, and take proper steps to assure their salvation.

We also receive many pastors and clergymen who come from everywhere to renew themselves in their calling and to advance in the spiritual life. They come with little thought of what it will cost, knowing they will be well received no matter what their financial condition. In this connection, someone told me recently what a great consolation it was for those without money to know there was some place in Paris always ready to receive them out of charity when they come, with the thought of putting themselves right with God.

In former days, gentlemen, this house was a hospital for lepers. They were accepted but not a single one was ever cured. Now it is used to receive sinners, afflicted with a spiritual leprosy, but they are cured by the grace of God. We can say more. Those who were dead are brought back to life. What happiness that the house of Saint Lazare has become a house of resurrection! This saint, after three days in the tomb, came forth alive. Our Lord who raised him from the dead does the same to others here who, after living like Lazarus in the tomb, come forth with a new life. Who would not rejoice at such a blessing? Who would not be moved to love and thank the goodness of God for such a great blessing? What a source of shame, if we make ourselves unworthy of such a grace! What confusion, gentlemen, and what regrets would we not experience one day if, by our own fault, we were degraded in shame before God and man!

What a source of sorrow it would be for a poor brother of the Company, who now sees so many people come from everywhere to spend a few days with us to amend their lives, to see this great work neglected. We would see no one else coming. We could come to that, gentlemen, not at once, but later on. What would bring this about? If you say to a poor lax missionary, Father, would you please see to the spiritual direction of this retreatant, he would see this as
a sort of torture from hell. If he does not excuse himself entirely, he does it only, as they say, with a lick and a promise. It is nearly impossible for him to give up a half hour after dinner or a half hour after supper of his usual recreation. Yet it is a question of the salvation of a soul and is the best possible use of time in the entire day.

Others complain of this work because it is so demanding and expensive. And so it is that the priests of the Mission who once gave life to the dead shall have but the name and appearance of what they once were. They will be but corpses, not true missionaries. They shall be the cadaver of Lazarus, not the resurrected Lazarus, and still less men who bring life to the dead. This house which is now a pool of healing in which everyone may come to bathe, will become a corrupt cistern brought about by the laziness and relaxation of those who live here. Let us pray God, gentlemen and my brothers, that this sad state of affairs never develop. Let us pray to the holy Virgin that by her intercession and by her interest in the conversion of sinners, she may prevent this from happening. Let us pray to the great Saint Lazarus that he may ever remain the protector of this house, and obtain for us the grace of perseverance in the good work which has begun.  

On another occasion he recommended a retreatant to the prayers of his community, then added:

Please thank God for inspiring so many persons to make their retreat here. So many priests of city and country leave all to come. So many apply each day to come, and some apply much ahead of time. This surely is a good reason to praise God! Some have just said to me, “Monsieur, so many times I have sought admission, but have had to be turned down.” Others say, “Monsieur, I must leave [my present position], I am in charge, my benefice calls me, I am about to take over these responsibilities. Please allow me to stay.” Another says he has just finished his studies and must decide what to do next. Still others say, “Monsieur, I have such great need of a retreat. If you, Monsieur, only knew how much I need one, you would surely allow me to stay.” Some older men even come to prepare themselves for death.

What a great favor for God to call so many to this house to follow these holy exercises, and to use this family of ours as an instrument for their conversion. What should we have in mind except to gain souls for God? This is so especially when they come to us, for we

4. CED XI:14-17.
should have nothing else in mind than living for that alone. Alas, they have cost the Son of God so dearly, and now he sends them to us to be returned to his favor. O Savior, take good care that we not become unworthy of this choice nor take away your helping hand from us.

I would like to believe that very few do not use the retreat well, and even so, just for the ones who do not profit from them, we must not deprive others from benefiting from what gives such good fruit. Yes, even wonderful fruit. I have spoken to you of this on other occasions, so today I will give you but one example. During the last trip I made to Brittany five years ago, an excellent man came to see me. He thanked me for the graces he had received during a spiritual retreat he made in this house. He said to me, "Oh, Monsieur, I would have been lost without it. I owe my salvation, after God, to you. The retreat brought peace to my troubled conscience. It enabled me to begin a new way of life which I have preserved since, by the grace of God, with great peace and satisfaction of mind. I am so obligated to your charity, Monsieur, that I do not hesitate to tell everyone everywhere that I would have been damned except for the retreat I made at Saint Lazare. How can I sufficiently value the grace you have secured for me? Please believe that I shall be mindful of it all the days of my life.”

After hearing this, gentlemen, would we not be most unfortunate if by our laziness we forced Ood to withdraw his graces from us? Indeed, not all who make their retreat here will profit from it like the man I just spoke of. But is not the kingdom of God on earth peopled with the good and the bad? Is it not a net that catches all sorts of fish? In the great abundance of grace that God showers upon everyone in the world, how many abuse it? And yet, though he knows who will not use it well, he does not withdraw his grace from them. How many there are who do not use the fruits of the passion and death of our Savior and who, as the apostle says, trample under foot the blood shed for their salvation. O sweet and merciful Savior! You knew well that the greater number of men would disregard your sacrifice, and yet you did not hesitate to suffer death for their salvation even considering the vast number of infidels who would mock you, and the great number of Christians who would abuse the grace you won for them.

Every pious work is profaned by someone, and nothing is so holy that some do not abuse it. This should not make us desist. We would be blameworthy before God if we relaxed in our works of charity
simply because all those who participate in them do not gain all the fruit we might wish. What a loss and what unhappiness for us, if we grew weary of this favor God has given us, of choosing us among so many other communities to provide this service, and depriving his divine majesty of the glory owed him!

Yes, I say it again, gentlemen and my brothers, how unfortunate would he be who, by his laziness or for fear of losing his ease or by a desire for rest when he should be working, would slacken in his fervor in this holy exercise. Even should this happen by the fault of some individual, this must never happen to us as a group. We must have courage and hope that God who has given us this grace will preserve it in us, and even increase it. Let us place our confidence more and more in him with a heart strong against inconstancy, and have courage in the face of difficulties. Only this cursed spirit of laziness allows us to be put off at the least inconvenience, or fears difficulties, or which seeks to avoid trouble and work so often. It prefers its own personal satisfaction. This is an effect of self-love, which spoils and ruins everything it touches. This is why we must mortify ourselves and submit ourselves to the love of God.

Let us ask that in his mercy he would conserve in us what he had so freely given us. Yes, my brothers, this is a great gift he has given our Company. We must pray that he, in his goodness, will not allow any of us to become unworthy of his gift. O Savior, raise up in us the spirit of the great Saint Lawrence, whose feast we celebrate today, which made him triumph in the midst of the flames over all the infernal hatred against him. Raise up in us this same divine fire, this ardent fervor, which will make us, too, triumph over all the wiles of the devil, and our own corrupt nature, so opposed to the good. Grant us an ardent zeal to obtain your glory in all our work, so that in imitation of the great saint we may remain faithful to death. We ask you this through his intercession.⁵

On another occasion he spoke as follows:

We must thank God a thousand thousand times, my brothers, for choosing the house of Saint Lazare as the place to bestow his mercy, where the Holy Spirit continually inspires so many souls. If we could see this with our bodily eyes, how marvelous would it be! What happiness for us missionaries, that Saint Lazare is the throne of his divine action! That Saint Lazare should be the place where the King of Kings lives in the souls of those who come here with good intention to make their retreat! Gentlemen, we must serve

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⁵. CED XI:229-32.
them, not as mere men, but as those sent by God. We show no preference for persons. The poor are as dear to us as the rich, even more so, for they live closer to the way Jesus Christ lived when he was among us. I recommend to your prayers one of our retreatants in special need. He no doubt can do much good if he gives himself wholly to God. On the other hand, it is to be feared that if he does not, he could do much harm. 6

On another occasion, he said:

A captain is staying with us, thinking of becoming a Carthusian. As is their custom, these good fathers have sent him here to test his vocation. I beseech you to recommend him to our Lord and also to admire his goodness in inspiring a man to a state in life so different from the one he is actually living. Let us adore this merciful Providence and appreciate that God does not regard the quality of person but chooses anyone, when in his goodness he thinks it proper to do so.

We have another retreatant here who is also a captain in the army, and whom we recommend also to your prayers. Include in your prayers, too, a man recently converted from Protestantism. He is working and writing sincerely for the defense of the truths of the faith to persuade others to follow his example. We thank God for him, and beg him to fill him more and more with his grace. 7

On still another occasion, he said:

We recently had a priest with us who came from a long way off to make his retreat. He said to me, “Monsieur, I am coming to you for my retreat and if you cannot receive me, I shall be lost.” When he left, he seemed so filled with the Spirit of God that I was astonished. Three others came from the limits of Champagne, mutually encouraging one another in coming to Saint Lazare for their retreat. 0 God, how many come from far and near by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Yet how strong this inspiration must be to bring men to such a crucifixion. A spiritual retreat is a sort of crucifixion of the flesh, as the holy apostle says: “I am crucified to the world and the world to me.” 8

Here then we have given some simple accounts of happenings which show the holy ardor which motivated the heart of Monsieur Vincent to bring about the reign of God in souls by the spiritual retreat. He strove to communicate this same divine fire that burned in him to his spiritual sons to

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enkindle in them an tireless charity and zeal for those who come to this house in search of the cure or salvation of their souls.

SECTION FOUR

The Opinions of Some Others Concerning These Retreats, and Several Examples of Happy Outcomes

A priest of Languedoc came to Paris in 1640 to make his retreat at Saint Lazare. Afterward he wrote to one of his priest friends:

I was welcomed with such graciousness in this house by all with whom I came in contact, that I was overwhelmed. Beyond all the others, Monsieur Vincent himself received me with such kindness that I was completely taken. My heart felt this, although I cannot find words to express what I experienced. What I can say is that during the retreat I was in paradise, and now that I am no longer there, Paris seems like a prison to me. Do not think I am saying this simply as a compliment; no, I speak of what I felt. I no longer know how to continue living in the world, so my resolve is to leave it, to give myself entirely to God.

Another priest, from Orleans, wrote to Monsieur Vincent on this same topic:

For the love of God and of the holy Virgin please allow me to make another retreat in your house. I sincerely desire this, and I hope when you realize why I ask this favor, I will receive your permission by the mercy of God and your goodness. Certainly, Monsieur, when I think of the good sentiments I had at Saint Lazare, I am carried away. My only desire is that it would please God to have every priest attend these exercises. If that were to come about, we would no longer have the bad example that some give to the great scandal of the Church.9

A pastor of a country parish not far from Paris wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1642:

The fruits which those who made their spiritual retreat with you spread such perfume wherever they went that they have aroused the

desire in others to gather the same fruit for themselves. One of my close relatives feels this way. I can do him no greater favor than to ask you most humbly to please receive him in your house to follow the exercises of the spiritual retreat. He hopes to receive from it the light and grace for the guidance of the remainder of his life.\textsuperscript{10}

The late baron of Renty, as noble in virtue as he was in birth, had tried every way he knew to persuade a pastor of his acquaintance to mend his disastrous ways, but without success. He had the thought of writing to Monsieur Vincent in the hope that he would make a retreat at Saint Lazare. In the letter he wrote, he told Monsieur Vincent that he was confident that under his charitable guidance a retreat might convince this pastor to change the deplorable life he had led into one of blessing.

The superior of a reformed order in a house in Paris had the same thought about one of his religious, who held the office of pastor at a parish, but who had fallen into similar disorders in his personal life. He wrote the following letter to Monsieur Vincent:

This good religious has a great need, as he may tell you, to amend his life, which currently gives great scandal to the souls under his direction. He has been advised to make a retreat with you as a place where he can receive help and be directed back to the path of duty. I beg of you most earnestly to take him and do all in your power what you judge proper to regain him for God.\textsuperscript{11}

Another religious of one of the more celebrated monasteries in Paris felt he could do nothing better for a servant boy who wished to be converted than to put him in Monsieur Vincent’s hands. He requested him to take the boy into his house for several days of spiritual retreat. In a letter he wrote in 1644, he said:

I pray that God will prolong your days and years for his glory and for the good of the neighbor, for whom you work so hard. I send you a person fit for your charity, a page of the Prince de Talmont, who has been raised in the false religion of Calvin but has come to me to ask for instruction leading to his conversion. I do not think of myself as capable of this good office. Therefore I take the liberty of writing to you as the one God has given his special grace for his glory and the salvation of those in sin or who have gone astray. Please have the charity, then, my most honored father in our Lord, to accept and welcome him as a poor straying sheep but who now seeks to return and be saved from the fangs of the wolf.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10. CED} II:257.
\textsuperscript{11. CED} II:437.
\textsuperscript{12. CED} II:451.
If we had to recount here in detail all those who had recourse to the charity of this great servant of God and to list the infirmities, miseries, and spiritual necessities he was asked to attend to through the ministry of these spiritual retreats in the house of Saint Lazare alone, we would certainly need several volumes for this. We could in some sense say of the servant what the Gospel said of the Master, that people were brought to him from all sides, suffering from all illnesses and maladies, but that a power went out from him which delivered each one from his trouble and cured all.

Since it was not only in the house of Saint Lazare that the effects of the charity of Monsieur Vincent were felt but in several other places as well, we will report here the testimony and examples from some other of these spiritual retreats given by the sons of this father of missionaries.

A priest of Paris of some standing and virtue had worked on the missions with the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, and had made several retreats at Saint Lazare. He was eventually named a bishop. He immediately went into seclusion to prepare himself for his consecration and for all the various duties of his charge. Accompanied by some priests of the Mission, he then went to his own diocese. He began to put into practice there what he had observed of Monsieur Vincent and his confreres. Recognizing from his own experience the usefulness of the spiritual retreat, he convoked his pastors and other clergy to his episcopal palace, of which he consecrated a part for these exercises. In 1644 he wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

As to news, I must tell you we continue to assemble the priests of the diocese, together with some others from neighboring places who have asked us. About thirty priests here are following their spiritual retreat in the episcopal palace with much fruit and blessing. 13

Another great prelate, an archbishop, had for several years visited the house of Saint Lazare, and taken part in the retreats given by the Congregation. He considered that he could do nothing better for his clergy than to have them come to his palace in groups to follow the exercises of a spiritual retreat, under the guidance of a priest of the Congregation of the Mission. This priest wrote to him to give an account of these events in the following letter:

At the beginning there was much fear and murmuring. The more timorous did not know what to think. But God, through your direction and mostly working in secret so changed hearts that they could all say: *Vere Deus est in loco isto, et ego nesciebam* ["Truly, the Lord is in this spot, although I did not know it"]; 14 as time went

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13. *CED* II:491. The writer was Nicolas Pavillon, bishop of Alet.
on and the exercises unfolded, the dark and cold gradually dissipated. They then said: *Quam bonum, et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum* ["How good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one"],\(^{15}\) and by the end of the retreat, *faciamus hic tria tabernacula* ["Let us erect three booths here"].\(^{16}\) These good gentlemen, some forty pastors and vicars, seemed not to have lived except these last ten days. They wept openly, remembering their past lives and the ignorance in which they lived. The oldest among them hastened to the exercises. I can assure you that I have never before seen such fervor, nor such tangible evidence of the presence of the Spirit of God. He holds in his hand not only the kings of this world, to bend to his will as he sees fit, but kings of heaven, and priests, whose hardness of heart often resists his grace.

Each one made his general confession, most of them of their entire past life, in the belief they had done little up to now. All took strong resolutions to work at their own salvation and that of their people, saying with the prophet-king: *Dixi, nunc coepi, haec mutatio dexterae excelsi* ["This is my sorrow, that the right hand of the Most High is changed"].\(^{17}\) To show you how grace changes hearts, one person came to tell me that the devil had blinded him to believe the retreat was an intolerable burden, a prison, and a kind of hell. Others told me: "Monsieur, how indebted we are to our bishop, and how we ought to pray for him and for his return. If we had the lights we now enjoy, we would never have done what we did."

In a word, Monsieur, they acted as little children. I was astonished that people who could have been my grandparents put so much trust in such a feeble instrument. *Vitulus et leo, lupus et ovis, simul accubabunt, puer parvulus minabit eos* ["The calf and the lion, the wolf and the sheep, shall lie down together, with a little child to guide them"].\(^{18}\) These good retreatants have encouraged your entire city, not only by their words but more so by their modesty of demeanor. Priests who ridiculed these exercises have been surprised to see their friends and confreres change their way of speaking, and some of your chapter have asked when their turn would come. I hope, Your Excellency, that your prayers will obtain from God the fulfillment of so many holy resolutions and that in this way, your diocese will be transformed, your leaders influencing the rest of the body.

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15. Ps 133:1.
17. Ps 77:11.
We add here the extract of another letter written to the same archbishop. It discussed further the blessings God had bestowed upon the clergy of his diocese in other retreats. In this letter the same priest of the Mission wrote:

Neither place nor time make men holy, although both may contribute significantly. Grace has its time, just as nature does. The Church calls the days of Lent days of salvation and propitiation. The experiences of this last retreat do not let us doubt this. I can assure you, Your Excellency, that if God showed himself liberal with his graces in the preceding retreats, he has shown himself prodigal in this one, which finished on the eve of Palm Sunday. Besides noticing the influence of grace in the souls of these gentlemen which softened the hardest hearts and brought light to darkness, I often heard it said they were beginning to open their eyes to the eminent dignity of the priesthood. If they had fully understood it before, they would never have embraced it so casually.

Some offered their financial help for the continuation of these retreats each year, while others wished to resign their benefices to have greater freedom to attend similar retreats. Others wanted to spend some time in the seminary, as long as their parishes could be taken care of. Each one left with such regret they were in tears, but with a total dependence upon you and your vicars general, ready to do anything or go anywhere you would be pleased to send them. In this way, Your Excellency, you can have missionaries in each parish to water what the missions have planted.

The laity praise the divine goodness and appreciate in their pastor the heart of a father in both spiritual and temporal things. I can assure you that if you had seen the marvels of the mercy of God, your joy would have been as perfect as it ever can be in this world. I almost forgot to tell you, Your Excellency, about one of the retreatants, who has not lived as a priest for several years, although he lived in several places in the diocese. He came to the exercises only to mock and to save appearances, as he later admitted, but little by little his heart was touched. He still did not want to be caught in my net, preferring to make his confession to another priest in whom he would have greater confidence. God denied him the opportunity to do so, for the night before the general communion, bothered by his conscience, he could not sleep. *Quis enim ei restitit et pacem habuit*? ["Who has withstood him and remained unscathed?"]

He broke out in a sweat, and a trembling in his whole body seized him. He heard an inner voice saying to him, "This is the hour of grace."

You are about to die. You resist the grace of God.” He called to one of his confreres sleeping in the same room to say he was dying, and asking that I be summoned. I came at once, and between midnight and four o’clock in the morning I heard his confession. He made it tearfully and full of thanks to his divine bounty for his favors known to God alone. He communicated with the others, but with such remorse, I feared both that he might lose his mind, and that the devil might be transforming himself into an angel of light to deprive him of his senses. In fact, this good gentleman was beside himself for a time. When he gained possession of himself again, he told me it was a just judgment of God, who wished his reparation to be public, just as his faults had been known to all. He left satisfied, saying, *Misericordia tua magna est super me, qui eruisti animam meam ex inferno inferi ori* [“Great has been your kindness toward me; you have rescued me from the depths of the nether world”].

Let us now turn to Italy where these same retreats were given, and let us begin with Genoa. The superior of the Mission of that city wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1646, as follows:

We wrote in the name of Cardinal Durazzo, archbishop of the city, to all the places where missions had been given to advise the clergy that the exercises of the spiritual retreat would be given on such a day in our mission. All those who wished to attend should present themselves at such an hour. Several came, and have now departed, after attending the retreat. I cannot tell you adequately of the consolation they received or the abundance of graces the Lord gave, or the modesty and silence they observed, or the humility and sincerity with which they reported on their mental prayer. The same can be said of the admirable, almost miraculous, conversions that took place. Among others, one pastor said, almost publicly, that he had come to mock, by hypocrisy rather than devotion, to get a higher stipend from the cardinal for his attendance. He told me the Congregation of the Mission had no greater enemy than himself. He spoke every kind of evil against it and against His Eminence. He was given to vice, he had obtained his benefice by simony, receiving orders only to have the benefice. He had performed clerical duties, administered the sacraments, served in the Curia, all for several years. He was a man of schemes and intrigue, but God touched his heart and touched it effectively. He was converted, he wept, he humbled himself, and gave every evidence of having changed. Those who saw him at the exercises, or heard about his altered

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attitude, were very edified. We were too, but no less so for the others who benefited from the exercises, each one according to his needs.

I must tell you, Monsieur, of the joy and consolation of His Eminence. The tears which filled his eyes as he heard his priests tell him of their feelings would give you a better understanding of this than my poor words. All this became public knowledge in the city, and even in the surrounding areas, such that several other priests came to make their retreat with us.21

From time to time, this same superior wrote to Monsieur Vincent of the success of similar retreats, but it would take too much space to speak of them all. We will recount here the events of only this one retreat.

The pastors left here Friday, fervent and edified, marveling at the graces God had given them, which were great indeed. I must say I have never seen better disposed retreatants, nor have I seen more tears shed. I cannot even think of this without wonder and admiration. One said we were here in the Valley of Josaphat, because of the freedom each one showed in opening his heart, and as I said, this was done tearfully, in public and in private.

This was the result of God's all-powerful grace, but what a marvel that God showed himself so generous toward those who were faithful to our simple rule for a retreat, especially silence. I have seen thirty gathered together in a room, awaiting my appearance, with no one daring to say a single word, one to another. We currently have four retreatants, one of whom is a Jew who wishes to become a Christian, and whom the cardinal sent to us from Pisa.

A senator here wants to prepare for a good general confession but cannot find time from his duties to make the exercises of the spiritual retreat. He has taken the three days of the feast to come twice a day to confer with me. He has begun with much fervor. I trust he will finish the same way.

We expect six or seven priests this evening to come for the retreat. They are planning to give a mission in the city such as we gave in the country. In your charity please remember this intention in your prayers.22

The cardinal of Genoa himself made the spiritual exercises several times with the priests of the Mission, not with the pastors, but with the missionaries themselves, who make an annual retreat. The superior wrote about this in a letter to Monsieur Vincent, in 1649:

His Eminence the cardinal spent eight days with us in making

22. CED IV:591.
the retreat with the ten priests of the Mission who are here. What a great servant of God! It is hard to believe the exactitude and punctuality with which he followed the order of the exercises, despite having a weak constitution. Although only fifty-six years of age, his spiritual and temporal concerns make him look older. He makes his mental prayer in the morning with the others, kneeling without moving from beginning to end, although some others sit down. For other meditations made in private in the sleeping rooms, he makes these kneeling or if he happens to be too fatigued, he comes for permission to sit, to have the merit of obedience, even though I have suggested that he remain seated when he feels tired.

When he reports on the thoughts and sentiments of his mental prayer, he does so with the simplicity, humility, and devotion of any one of us. No sooner does he hear the bell for the office or other exercises of the community, than he leaves all, and is the first in the chapel. At table he insists on being treated just like the others. After my insistence, he finally allowed some preference be shown him. He is pained to have his own bathroom, preferring to be treated like everyone else. At the end of the retreat I asked him to give us his blessing to ask perseverance of God. He refused, insisting instead that I give this blessing, but finally, after much entreaty, he relented. Oh, my dear father, what an example of virtue we have before our eyes.23

23. CED III:505-06.
CHAPTER FIVE

Seminaries

The Holy Council of Trent was aware of how important it was for the glory of God and the edification of the faithful that those promoted to sacred orders have the requisite dispositions and qualities of that state in the Church. It recognized that if virtues were not cultivated early in the hearts of the young there was good reason to fear they would never develop the deep roots required by a life of priestly service. Rather, if the necessary virtues were not cultivated, the candidates would accept benefices or ecclesiastical offices, and receive holy orders without the required dispositions. Instead of building up the Church they would serve as stumbling blocks by the evil example of their lives. For these and other considerations, the council directed seminaries to be established in each diocese. In them, young men with an aptitude and inclination to the clerical state could be trained in piety and the appropriate branches of knowledge. The poor were to be preferred, but others would not be excluded. In either case their minds and spirits were to be carefully cultivated, to make it possible for them one day to give fruitful service to the Church.

Although this decree had been most wisely adopted by the council, the corruption and evil spirit of the times prevented it from being carried out as completely as had been hoped. Many of the great prelates of the kingdom who had attended the council, did set up these seminaries in their dioceses upon their return to France. Unfortunately, as time went on, instead of the choice of students being limited to those inclined to the ecclesiastical state, and the staff being selected from among the most learned, pious, and those distinguished by their sacerdotal spirit, the opposite happened. Temporal and personal interest prevailed and all the good planning degenerated. On the one hand, the townspeople in those places where the seminaries were established saw they could avoid paying for the education of their sons by having them trained in these seminaries. This would exclude the poor, with no thought of their possible calling to the ecclesiastical state. On the other hand, the directors and teaching staff of the seminaries were not put in the hands of the most capable, but in those most able to scheme for personal advantage. All this resulted in the Church in France being deprived of the benefits envisioned by the fathers of the council.

Monsieur Vincent was aware of this abuse and it displeased him greatly. He attempted to bring some relief by setting up a seminary as the council
suggested, in the College des Bons Enfants at Paris,\(^1\) for the instruction and training in virtue and knowledge of those young men in whom some inclination and disposition to the ecclesiastical state had been noticed. His experience with this kind of seminary convinced him it was too slow in producing tangible results. It took a long time for a young boy to complete his training and enter into holy orders and the ministry of the Church. Monsieur Vincent foresaw, too, that those educated in the seminaries would not always fulfill the hopes placed in them, and that several of them would not have a vocation to the ecclesiastical state. As a result, the Church would not receive any help in the great need it had for good holy priests.

For these reasons Monsieur Vincent judged it useful and in some way even necessary to establish other seminaries for those clerics already ordained, or who were soon about to receive holy orders. They were to be taught over a long time the theology they needed, principally moral theology, the administration of the sacraments, and the various functions they were expected to know, such as plain chant, the rites of the Church, how to catechize, and how to preach. Above all, they were to be guided in the virtues proper to their state, in leading a well-regulated life, conformable to the character they bore, to be ready for whatever assignment given them by their bishop, and prepared to render useful service to the Church. He began this seminary at the College des Bons Enfants, as we mentioned in Book One,\(^2\) but without closing the minor seminary. He moved it to a building near Saint Lazare and then renamed it the Seminary of Saint Charles. He continued this minor seminary to fulfill the wishes of the council and to use this as one more means of securing good priests for the Church.\(^3\)

It pleased God to bestow such blessings to this seminary established by Monsieur Vincent for clerics already promoted to sacred orders, or for those about to be, that besides the fruit they produced and continued to produce, they served as models for many others in various other dioceses.

For good reason another zealous servant of God worked strenuously together with his community for the reform of the ecclesiastical state.\(^4\) He had deplored that, whereas academies for the nobility prepared young gentlemen for their position in life, and that every occupation, no matter how humble, had its system of apprentices before allowing them to practice their trade, yet in the clerical state alone was it possible to enter the profession

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1. In 1637.
2. Ch. 31.
3. Vincent supported making a clear distinction between what would later be called "minor" and "major" seminaries. The college of Bons Enfants became in effect a major seminary, under the name of Saint Firmin. The younger students were transferred to the newly established "Petit Saint Lazare," (Seminary of Saint Charles) in order to continue their studies in the humanities, thus in effect constituting a minor seminary.
with little or no preparation. This was a more grievous failing in that these priests were destined for most important functions and for a ministry of divine service. At length it pleased God to remedy this serious deficiency through the seminaries, which served as schools of virtue and sanctity, where the candidates for the priesthood learned the science of the saints. So it is that in these latter days God raised up Monsieur Vincent and his Congregation to answer this holy and pressing need, and to it he gave his special blessing.

On one occasion Monsieur Vincent spoke to the priests of his community on the topic of seminaries:

God has particularly sent the Missionaries to work for the sanctification of priests. One of the purposes of our institute is to teach them not only the subjects they must know, but also the virtues they must practice. To show them the one without the other is to do little or almost nothing. They must be able to understand how to lead a good life. Otherwise, they would serve no purpose, and even be dangerous. We must do both, then, as a duty asked of us by God.

In the beginning we gave scarcely a thought to serving the clergy. Our concern was ourselves and the poor. How did the Son of God begin? He remained hidden. He seemed to think only of himself, he prayed, and did nothing special. Only later did he announce the Gospel to the poor. He finally chose his apostles, and took pains to teach them and form them to virtue. Lastly he sent his Spirit upon them, not for themselves alone but for all people upon earth. He also taught them all they needed to know to become priests, to administer the sacraments, and to acquit themselves worthily of their ministry.

So it was at the beginning of our little Company. Our first concern was our own spiritual development, and then the evangelization of the poor. At times we were preoccupied with ourselves, and at other times we would go to the people in the countryside. God allowed us to begin like that, but in the fullness of time he has called us to contribute to the formation of good priests, to provide pastors for the people, and to show them what they must know and do. How elevated is this work! How sublime! How far above us is this calling! Who among us would ever have thought of the ordination retreats or of the seminaries? This thought never entered our heads, until God made known to us that we were to undertake this work. The Company has been brought to this with no choice on our part, but God expects us now to apply ourselves seriously, humbly, devoutly, constantly, corresponding to the excellence of this call.
Some might say that they came to the Congregation to work in the country in favor of the poor, and not to be shut up in the cities in a seminary. Each one of us should know, however, that what we do for the clergy, especially in the seminaries, must not be neglected under the pretext of caring for the missions. We must do both, not slight either, for we are obliged to do both by our institute. Long experience has taught us that it is difficult to preserve the fruits of the missions we give if we are not supported by the pastors whom we seek to serve by our Company. This is why we ought to do willingly what we can for their welfare.

To work for the instruction of poor people is truly a great work, but it is even better to help the clergy, for if they are ill-formed the people they lead are bound to be the same. We could ask the Son of God, why did you come upon earth? Was it not to evangelize the poor, in obedience to your Father’s will? Why then did you consecrate priests? Why did you take such care to train and teach them? Why did you give them the power to consecrate, the power to bind and to loose? The Savior would respond that he came not only to teach truths necessary for salvation, but to prepare a priesthood superior to the priesthood of the Old Law. You are aware that in ancient times God rejected priests who dishonored their office, who profaned sacred things. He looked upon their sacrifices with horror, and said that he would raise up other priests. From the rising of the sun to its setting, and from south to north, they would make their voices heard: *In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum* ["Through all the earth their voice resounds"].

How did he accomplish this? By his Son, our Savior, who chose priests, instructed and formed them, and gave his Church the power, through them, to make other priests. *Sicut misit me Pater, et ego mitto vos* ["As the Father has sent me, so I send you"]. He did this to act through them in the centuries to come, to do what he had done in his own lifetime, to save all peoples by their teachings and by their administration of the sacraments.

It would be a mistake, a great mistake, for a Missionary not to help as best he can in the work of forming good priests, for there is nothing better than a good priest. Think as long as we like, we will not find anything better than to help in forming a good priest, to whom our Lord gives power over his body, both corporal and mystical. He gives the priest the power of consecration, and the power to forgive sins. O God, what power! What a dignity! These

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5. Ps 19:5.
considerations ought to lead us to serve the ecclesiastical state, which is so holy and so exalted. This is all the more true because of the need of the Church for good priests, to attend to the ignorance and vice with which the world is so filled, for which good people should shed tears of blood.

We may wonder if all the disorders we see in the world might not be laid at the feet of priests. It may scandalize some even to suggest this, but the subject demands that I show the extent of the evil, to point out the importance of supplying a remedy. Several meetings have recently been held on this, to seek the causes of such ills, the result of which is that the Church has no worse enemy than the bad priest. Heresies have come from them, as for example the recent great initiators of heresy, Luther and Calvin, both of whom were priests. Because of priests, heresies gained a foothold, vice reigned, and ignorance set up its throne among the poor people. This came about because of their own misconduct, their failure to combat with all their strength, as they were obliged, these three torrents which now have engulfed the whole world. What sacrifice, then, gentlemen, should we not make to help them live in keeping with the sanctity of their state, so the Church might be delivered from the sad desolate state in which she is.\(^7\)

On another occasion, he said:

The character of the priest is a participation in the priesthood of the Son of God. He gives them the power to offer the sacrifice of his body, and to give it as food for eternal life to those who receive it. It is a divine and incomparable character, a power over the body of Jesus Christ whom the angels adore, and a power to forgive sins, a subject of astonishment and thanksgiving to them. Is there anything more admirable or greater? Oh, gentlemen, how great a good priest is! What can a good priest not accomplish? How many conversions can he not secure? Look at Monsieur Bourdoise, this excellent priest, what he does, and what he can do in the future! The well-being of Christianity depends on the priest, for when parishioners see in him a good ecclesiastic, a charitable pastor, they respect and follow his voice, striving to imitate him. How we should strive to do good for them, since this is our duty, and the priesthood is such an elevated state!

But, O Lord, if a good priest can do so much, how much evil can a bad one do if he sets himself to it! How difficult to put him on the right way! O my Savior, how we poor Missionaries should devote

\(^7\) CED XII:83-86.
ourselves to you, to contribute to the formation of good priests. This is the most difficult, the most elevated, the most important for the salvation of souls and for the advancement of Christianity.

If Saint Vincent Ferrer strove for sanctification so that God would one day raise up good priests and apostolic workers for the reform of the ecclesiastical state and for readying men for the last judgment, how much stronger reason we have in our day for working for our perfection to cooperate in such a happy restoration when we see the ecclesiastical state now returning to what it should be.⁸

These were the sentiments of this holy priest, with which he passed on to his Company the zeal God had inspired in him to restore the ecclesiastical state to its original purity and splendor. This is how he encouraged them to work in the seminaries to encourage those called to orders and to charges and dignities in the Church, to receive the spirit of Jesus Christ, so necessary for them to fulfill its obligations worthily.

The zeal of Monsieur Vincent was seasoned with a great prudence, and his various occupations and long experience had given him much light. He judged that to profit from seminary training the clerics who followed the program would require a long time if it was to be fruitful. He thought those who aspired to orders ought to spend at least a year in the seminary to purge from their spirits all bad habits they may have contracted in the world, and to strip from their hearts all undue attachment to creatures. They would thereby progress in the knowledge and love of God, to whose service they wished to dedicate themselves. This time would be required to penetrate deeply the truths of Christianity, the maxims of the Gospel which God revealed to us by his Son, and to establish solidly in their hearts the principles of sanctity and perfection through solid resolutions to follow the example of the life and virtues of Jesus Christ.

He believed this extended time was necessary to learn how to make mental prayer well, saying in this regard: “What the sword is to the soldier, mental prayer is to the one dedicated to the service of the altar.” This was all the more true, since one of the main functions of the priest was to offer prayer and sacrifice to God.

He thought it best not to exempt any from this seminary experience, even the most virtuous and learned. Besides increasing both these qualities, and so making themselves more worthy of their calling, their presence among the others was most helpful, since generally the example of the strong encourages the weak, and they follow the path of virtue more easily when they see others walking it. He was convinced, too, that by making the rule

⁸. CED XI:7-8.
universal he would be saved from the importunities of those seeking exemp-
tions, to their own disadvantage. He referred to the example of the late bishop
of Cahors, a perfect model for prelates. He took it as a principle to dispense
no one of his diocese from the obligation of attending the seminary before
receiving holy orders, and remaining a full year before receiving the subdia-
conate, then remaining until they were ordained to the priesthood. This firm
policy contributed much to putting his diocese in good condition, as he wrote
to Monsieur Vincent some years before his death:

You would be pleased to see my clergy, and you would bless
God a thousand times over if you could realize the good your priests
have done in my seminary. Its effects have been felt in the entire
province.  

To appreciate more fully the great utility of the seminaries by the nature
and diversity of the benefits they produced, and the powerful motives
Monsieur Vincent had to exhort the priests of the Congregation of the
Mission to work at this task with love and fidelity, we give here two
summaries. They were written by the directors of seminaries in Paris and in
Brittany. From these, we may form a judgment of what occurred in others,
as well.

The report from Paris stated:

(1) The seminary is run like a continuous mission, and we see
the same fruits as those we have come to expect in the country places
and cities in which the missions are given. For example, those
holding benefices and other responsibilities, after leading a disor-
derly life for a long time in their home territory, now seem to be
converted. They shed tears of regret and they ask us to be allowed
to admit their sins publicly, and humble themselves on all occa-
sions. When they speak in the conferences, they admit their past
blindness, and congratulate their confreres on the opportunity they
have to profit from their seminary training. If some longstanding
animosities trouble them, they attempt reconciliations by most
humble letters to the parties concerned. They restore large sums to
the Church when this is called for. In canon law, the fathers of the
earliest and even the present centuries often refer to clerics as
incorrigible. By the grace of God their amendment, if it occurs,
ordinarily happens in the seminary.

(2) Some who have held conflicting benefices for a long time,
following the custom in their province, have voluntarily stepped
down.

10. CED III:343.
(3) Some priests, even elderly ones, have held significant offices, such as abbots, canons, priors, and pastors, or as counselors to Parliament or to presidents. Now, however, they serve willingly as porter, acolyte, thurifer, or cantors, happy to fulfill these humble charges, or regretting not having previously served out of disdain for these lowly offices.

(4) Several who never before bothered to instruct their parishioners, now catechize. When they return home they declare openly, even from the pulpit, and to everyone's amazement, that they have come to recognize their obligations and mean to put them into practice.

(5) Several priests, upon leaving the seminary, have formed small groups of clergy to live in common, and leave their family home, even their birthplaces. They wish thereby to continue their spiritual exercises together, the better to gain others to Jesus Christ and his Church.

(6) We have had several canons of cathedral or collegiate churches, who upon their return home, have succeeded with little fanfare to work with others in restoring or sustaining discipline in their churches. We hear of the zeal and prudence with which they speak in open chapter, or in private, of ecclesiastical discipline and the obligations it entails.

(7) Some others have realized the importance of elementary schools, and have undertaken from their own pockets to help them out of pure charity. This has resulted in the great blessing and edification of the villages where this has been done.

(8) We should not fail to mention that God has given the grace to most, nearly all, of persevering in piety and in the worthy fulfillment of their obligations. We have reports of this from all sides.

(9) What is most touching is the innocence of life in the seminary, which has ordinarily made it difficult for the confessors to find enough matter for absolution.\footnote{11. This report came from Jean Dehorgny, the director of the seminary at Bons Enfants in Paris.}

Another priest of the Mission, in charge of a seminary in Brittany,\footnote{12. Treguier.} discussed in these words the successes he had seen:

Among the fruits of the seminary training for ecclesiastics has been increased care for the instruction of the people, to which those who were here now apply themselves most seriously. Since they were taught how to preach practically and directly, preachers have
multiplied in some dioceses to the extent that where formerly a single one might be available to preach the Lenten sermons to five or six parishes together, three or four preachers are now available. Also, after the sermons the priests are available for confessions, to the great benefit of the country people. Previously, in some places they were fortunate if they had three or four sermons the whole of Lent.

Besides, the clergy devoted to preaching, (1) are more inclined to lead an exemplary life, and (2) are more given to study as a preparation. In this way they save themselves from laziness and a host of other disorders.

Because they preach simply and directly to the people, as they were taught in the seminary, people from five or six of the neighboring parishes come to hear them.

We observe priests acquiring the spirit of zeal in the seminary for the salvation of souls. Not only do they hear confessions assiduously on Sundays and feast-days, but also on weekdays too, something almost unheard of before. The great number of the pastors of the country parishes who had been in the seminary, try to have a priest with them. They hope to continue with greater facility the exercises of piety they observed in the seminary, and so preserve more easily the good resolves they have taken.

There are entire dioceses in which before the establishment of the seminaries it was hard to find a single priest in the country places who dressed in black. Most wore gray, and after their morning mass went to work just like the usual lay person. Since the institution of the seminary, almost all wear at least a short cassock. A large number are in full cassock, with their hair cut short, and their general appearance befitting a priest.

We have seen good benefices given up to allow the priests greater freedom to catechize and hear confessions in the country parishes, where the need is greatest.

There are others who upon leaving the seminary worked chiefly at inspiring this same zeal in rural priests. Sometimes, up to fifty of these priests live in a single parish, apart from one another, a league or more from the church. An attempt was made to bring them together gently once a week for a spiritual conference, not only for these poorly prepared priests, but also for the sick poor whom they help in their illnesses.

We have seen many rural priests much taken with the good example of those who came from the seminary. They made many
changes in their own lives, and this edified the entire diocese. Some came from as far away as twenty-five leagues to make a retreat, to solidify their good resolutions.

Ordinarily, the clergy of the country assemble now on the vigil of a feast to plan the liturgy, so it will be celebrated with greater devotion and edification for the people. They write to us for suggestions about this, showing the appreciation they have had for the divine offices since the establishment of the seminary.

In some nearby dioceses, catechism never used to be taught, but now there is practically none in which it not taught well, and most devotedly.

Before finishing this chapter we should not fail to mention that Monsieur Vincent was not satisfied to give instructions and all possible spiritual help to those in the seminary of the Bons Enfants which was the responsibility of his Congregation. Besides that, he saw to it during these first years that some who were unable to pay their board but who gave promise of profiting from the exercises there, were supported by the Congregation, aided by gifts and alms from others.

Monsieur Vincent’s goodness inspired other pious persons to contribute to other seminaries as a help to needy students. Among others, a noted and pious priest sent over the space of ten or twelve years a large sum each year to the seminary of Troyes in Champagne, and to Annecy in Savoy, for the support of poor students. This enabled them to be prepared for useful service to the Church in their dioceses. No doubt such alms were agreeable to God, especially because such good results could be hoped for from them, for the glory of God and the good of his Church. A good priest is capable of doing such good that this led Monsieur Vincent to say several times: “What a great thing to be a priest! What can he not accomplish! But, with the grace of God, who can say what he can do?!”

13. Monsieur Chomel, the vicar general of the diocese of Saint Flour. He came from Lyons, and was a councillor at the Paris Parlement. He had been a student of Monsieur Vincent at Bons Enfants, and he later supported with his zeal and fortune the works of the saint, and several houses of the Congregation, particularly those at Lyons, Troyes, Annecy, Angers, and Saint Flour.

CHAPTER SIX

Delinquents and Disturbed Persons at Saint Lazare

AFTER DISCUSSING the missions in Chapter One of Book Two, we spoke in the four following chapters of the four great works which Monsieur Vincent, fortified by the spirit of God, labored at with such zeal and blessing for the service of the ecclesiastical state. We refer to the ordination exercises, the clerical conferences, spiritual retreats, and the seminaries. We may call them four mystic rivers. They flow from the same source and continue flowing to water and nourish the garden of the Church. We will now turn to those other activities he undertook, moved by this same Spirit, who extended his influence far and wide.

We will begin with one that might seem the least esteemed in the eyes of men, but very useful to the general welfare of society. Also, it is most precious in the sight of God, since humility and charity are virtues most pleasing to him. In this work they shine forth in a special way. This humble and charitable work of which we speak, adopted by Monsieur Vincent from his first days at Saint Lazare, was to receive at Saint Lazare two special sorts of persons. The first concerned delinquents who had become the sorrow of their parents by their unruly behavior, the disgrace and ruin of their families by their association with bad company. They were often given to all sorts of vice, licentiousness, and debauchery, and ended miserably.

Their families used every effort to bring them back to reason, but finally decided the only recourse was to deprive them of the liberty they had used so poorly. They were shut up in Saint Lazare, with the consent of the local magistrates at the charge of their parents. They were not allowed to see anyone from outside, except with the consent of those who had committed them. Their fate was not divulged to anyone, except to those obliged to look after them. The brothers of the Congregation took charge of their physical needs, while the priests cared for their spiritual needs. The brothers took care of their meals and other exterior wants. The priests visited, consoled, and exhorted them to change their way of acting, to abandon vice, and to give themselves to good and to virtue.

The priests pointed out the evil consequences of a disorderly life, both in this life and the next, and the corresponding advantages of honor and salvation to obedient sons, of wise men who feared the Lord. Their isolated and humble condition helped to open their eyes to their state, as did the good spiritual reading given them.
These delinquents were usually confined until some signs of a true conversion appeared in them, such as a disposition to live better and behave themselves more reasonably in the future. Even so, before leaving they had to attend spiritual exercises, to prepare themselves for making a good general confession, and to receive worthily the sacred body of Jesus Christ in communion. Several managed to lead a good Christian life, and employed their time well. Some profited from this stay at Saint Lazare so much that upon their release they rose in the legal profession to judgeships or other offices of importance, and with the grace of God, succeeded well.

Let us hear a priest of singular piety, well informed on these matters:

I have always considered it as an illustration of the great graces given by God to this saintly man that the late Monsieur Vincent in his zeal opened the doors of his house at Saint Lazare to all sorts of persons, to win them for God. This included debauched and incorrigible young men, to the great relief of their parents, who otherwise would have had no place to send them. He received them and treated them with such respect and consideration that they were soon living almost like religious, in a building of their own, following a regular program of activities. Some profited so much that upon leaving, they went to monasteries to embrace the religious life.

Besides these delinquent youths, others at Saint Lazare were mentally deranged. These were a burden on their parents and a shame to their families, but Saint Lazare was without doubt doing a great service to the public. At a reasonable cost, these delinquents could be housed, fed, and cared for with great charity. Monsieur Vincent took special care of the delinquents and for the mentally disturbed who were in his care as superior of Saint Lazare. This is how he once spoke to his community on this matter:

I recommend to the prayers of the Company the boarders we have here, both those troubled in mind, and those not. Among others, there is a priest who was in some mental difficulty, but recovered. Unfortunately, he has relapsed once again. This difficulty comes from an excess of black bile, which sends acrid vapors to his brain. He is so weak that he falls victim to this disorder. This poor man feels his sickness coming on (as he told me himself). It begins always with a deep depression which he finds he cannot overcome. Those in this condition surely deserve our compassion. They are certainly not capable of sinning, for they are not in command of themselves, and have neither judgment or freedom. They should be happy if they are stricken while in the state of grace. If on the contrary they should happen to be in a state of mortal sin, they are greatly to be pitied.
CHAPTER SIX

The others here, who have their faculties but who use them poorly, give me the opportunity to remark there are many rebellious and debauched youth in the world today. A short while ago an official of a sovereign court\(^1\) complained to me of a nephew of his. He is an unruly young man who several times threatened to kill him if he did not give him some money. When a judge in the city suggested he be sent to Saint Lazare, where he would be taught his duty, he stated he had no idea we took such people here. He thought there ought to be four such places in Paris like Saint Lazare to take care of all who should be confined.

We must thank God, gentlemen, for confiding the care of the mentally ill and the delinquents to the care of this Community. We did not seek this service. It was given us by God in his Providence, just as he has given us everything else in our Company. I must tell you that when we first came here, the prior was caring for two or three mentally disturbed people. As we took over the house, these persons became our responsibility. In those days there was a lawsuit that would decide whether we would have to leave Saint Lazare or not. I remember wondering what, if we had to leave here, would most bother me about it and what would most displease me. It seemed to me then, it would be losing the opportunity to care for and serve these poor unfortunate people whom we had inherited when we came.

My brothers, it is no small thing, as some think, to take care of the afflicted, for this is pleasing to God. Yes, it is one of those services most pleasing to him, this taking care of the mentally deranged, because there is little natural satisfaction in it. It is done quietly, for even those we serve are hardly aware of what we do for them. Let us pray God to give the priests of the Company a taste for this sort of work when they are assigned to it, and that he strengthen our poor brothers and help them by his grace in the work and care they expend for our boarders. Some are sick in body, the others sick in mind; some are dull, and others flighty; some are insane, and others vicious. In a word, all have needs, but the one group through infirmity, the other through vice. The one group of boarders come here in the hope of a bodily cure. The other group is sent here to amend their evil ways.

Have courage then, my brothers. Did you know that in former times there were popes who cared for animals? Yes, in the times of the emperors who persecuted the Christians in their head and in the

\(^{1}\) A general name for a court of last resort.
members, they forced the pope to look after the lions, leopards, and other such beasts kept for the amusement of the unbelieving princes. These beasts were fitting images of their own cruelty! The popes took care of these beasts. The men you have charge of are certainly not animals, but in a way they are worse than animals because of their debauchery.

God willed these saintly persons, the fathers of all Christians, to experience these humble and extraordinary trials to make them sympathetic to the abject sufferings of their spiritual sons and daughters. When anyone has endured weaknesses or suffering himself, he is so much more sensitive to the troubles of others. Those who have lost their belongings, their health, or their honor, are much better prepared to console others in trouble than those who have not experienced these losses themselves.

I recall someone telling me once of a great and saintly person, a man of a strong and steady disposition. He was gifted in mind, feared no one, and was hardly ever tempted. For all that, however, he found it difficult to support the weak, console the sorrowful, and help the sick, for he had never experienced these things himself.

You are aware that our Savior took all miseries upon himself. "We have a high priest," Saint Paul says, "who knows how to sympathize with our weaknesses, for he has experienced them himself." Yes, O Eternal Wisdom, you took all our poverty upon your innocent self! You must know, gentlemen, that he did that to sanctify all the afflictions to which we are subject, and to serve as the prototype of all states and conditions of humankind.

O my Savior, you who are Wisdom uncreated, you have accepted and welcomed our miseries, our confusions, our humiliations, our infirmities, save only ignorance and sin. You willed to be a scandal to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles. You even allowed yourself to appear as a fool, yes, our Lord permitted himself to be regarded as insane, for it is reported in the Gospel that some felt he had become mad. Exierunt tenere eum; et dicebant quoniam in furorem versus est ["They came to take charge of him, saying, He is out of his mind"]. The apostles themselves sometimes looked upon him as giving way to anger, for he appeared so to them, leading them to declare he had compassion on all our infirmities, and sanctified all our afflictions and weaknesses. He thus taught them, and us also, to be compassionate toward those who suffer these same afflictions.

Let us bless God, gentlemen and my brothers, and thank him for having called us to care for these poor people, deprived of sense or of right conduct. In serving them we become abundantly aware of the extent and variety of human misery. We become better able to serve our neighbor, for we will better fulfill our obligations to them if we know from personal experience what they suffer. I beg of those in this service to our boarders to continue with much care for them. I beg the Company to pray often to God for them, and to appreciate any occasion you have to exercise your patience and charity toward these poor people.4

Perhaps some would say, Monsieur, we have plenty of other work without taking on this. Indeed, we have nothing in our rule about receiving the mentally deranged at Saint Lazare, or those other troubled spirits who can be such little devils.

To this I would reply that our rule must be the example of our Lord, who willed to be surrounded by lunatics, demoniacs, the crazy, the tempted, and the possessed. These people were brought to him from everywhere to be delivered and cured, which he did with great goodness. Why then would we be blamed if we attempted to do the same thing that he found so fitting? If he received the outcasts and possessed, why should we not do so too? We do not go out looking for these people, they are brought to us. Who knows whether his Providence might not wish to use us to cure the ills of these poor people. The Savior was so sympathetic that he seemed to be numbered among them, as I just mentioned. O my Savior and my God, give us the grace to look on these things in the same light in which you saw them.5

A priest, an official of the house, one day reported to Monsieur Vincent that one of the delinquents seemed to be making no progress in reformation, although he had been in the house a long time. He felt it would be better if the boy were returned to his parents, rather than that he be kept any longer. He was threatening to do harm, and he was bound to do something bad, sooner or later.

Monsieur Vincent quickly silenced the priest:

You must recall, Monsieur, that the main reason we have taken these boarders into our house is to exercise our charity toward them. Now will you tell me, is it not a great charity to keep this man? If he were let go, he would simply cause trouble to his parents all over again. He was sent here with permission of the courts, for he is a

5. CED XII:88.
bad influence they could do nothing with. He was sent here to give a bit of peace in their family, and to see if God would use us to bring about his conversion. To release him now, in his present disposition, would be to cause trouble in his family all over again. For the moment they are enjoying some respite from his evil ways. His threats must not be taken too seriously, for by the grace of God no harm has come to the Company because of him, and we hope none will come in the future. Remember, Monsieur, this boy blames his father and mother for his being here. He knows they sent him, and not us.

Monsieur Vincent often asked his community to pray to God for this undertaking, and for those who worked in caring for the boarders. One day he said, “Otherwise, God will punish us. Yes, we could expect his curse to fall upon the house of Saint Lazare if we neglected the care we should show to these poor people. I recommend above all that we should feed them well, at least as well as we do our own community.”

The prayers and charitable concern of this gentle priest for these men lacking in either their behavior or their judgment gained the consolation of seeing many happy results of his care. The public noticed the improvements in a certain number of these boarders. Besides the relief enjoyed by the families in seeing these persons cared for at Saint Lazare, protected from the dangers or the temptations of the world, some were converted from their evil passions, such as drunkenness, impurity, or other serious failings. After a certain time at Saint Lazare, some acquired an abhorrence of these vices, chose to renounce their life of debauchery, and began to live wisely and circumspectly. Several joined the more austere religious orders to lead a life of penance as reparation for past failings. Others joined other communities devoted to the service of God and the neighbor. Still others became secular priests, or undertook public service as laymen. Lastly, some entered the business world or other secular pursuits, where they began and continue to live exemplary lives.

Some left off their stealing, their assaults, their blasphemies or other horrible crimes, and by the mercy of God were converted, and have since lived virtuously. Among others, one, who became a religious, returned often to Saint Lazare to express his appreciation for what had been done for him.

Others had stolen from their own homes, and hidden their spoils in a secluded spot. These had freely and frankly revealed where they had hidden their ill-gotten goods, out of sorrow for the trouble they had caused their parents, and with a resolve to amend themselves.

Some so forgot themselves as to have struck their parents, both father and

mother. Some others had even attacked their parents, or had threatened to kill them. Upon leaving Saint Lazare they appeared in tears before them, begging forgiveness for their crime, and in future lived up to their good resolutions.

Several young men who had forsaken their schoolbooks for a life of debauchery were committed to this school of penance. Afterward, they returned to their regular classes with much success.

It is extraordinary that several had almost a complete change of heart when they were sent to Saint Lazare. The charitable care they experienced enabled them to leave in an entirely different frame of mind, as good as new. They are today good members of society.

All these good things happened with a large number of people, most of whom came from the upper classes of society, and this over thirty years or more. It seemed that God was pleased, and is still pleased, to grant his mercy and grace through the mediation and charity of his servant, Vincent de Paul. In imitation of Jesus Christ he consorted with sinners and the weak to hasten their cure of both soul and body. Monsieur Vincent could well be called, as a distinguished person once did, the “refuge of sinners.” But at this the humble priest protested that this name belonged to the Son of God alone, and to his merciful mother.  

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7. As in the Litany of Loreto, recited in honor of Mary.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Help Given by Monsieur Vincent to the Convents of the Religious of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Diocese of Paris While He Was Their Superior and Father

The help and services which the religious of the order of the Visitation of Saint Mary of the diocese of Paris received from Monsieur Vincent for the thirty-eight years he was their superior and spiritual father deserve to have a place in this second book. This work not only shows the extent of his charity but also how enlightened he was from on high in discerning spiritual matters, and what prudence, meekness, firmness and other excellent virtues he possessed for the guidance of others.

We do not intend to give more space to this than it deserves, but simply to report what we have garnered from some reports furnished us, mostly from religious of this holy order.

Blessed Francis de Sales, bishop of Geneva, founder of this order of the Visitation of Saint Mary, and the Venerable Jane Frances Fremiot, foundress and first superior of this order, and superior of the first convent of the Visitation in the city of Paris, learned and recognized the rare qualities of Monsieur Vincent as a wise and saintly director. They earnestly besought him to accept the office as superior and spiritual father of the houses of this holy institute in Paris.\(^1\) Also in 1622 the late Cardinal de Retz, then bishop of Paris, asked him to accept this office and take over the direction of these virtuous women.\(^2\)

The venerable mother, their foundress, soon realized the gift God had given in the person of this worthy superior. She developed such an appreciation for him that she turned nowhere else for advice in the management and progress of her institute. Her successors in office did the same, not seeking guidance elsewhere except from him. This resulted in great blessings from God, for preserving union and regularity for the community, and for the progress of the individual religious and the spread of their houses.

A second convent opened soon after, and a third soon followed. The one

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1. In 1619, Saint Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal arrived in Paris from Bourges with three sisters to found the first monastery of the Visitation in Paris. Saint Vincent's relationship with the Order of the Visitation began then and continued until his death. The first monastery was established in the Hotel du Petit Bourbon on the rue de la Cerisaie. In 1628, the sisters purchased another residence, on the rue Saint Antoine, not far from their first monastery. Saint Vincent served as the director of these houses in Paris.
2. See \textit{CED} XIII:84-85.
was situated in the faubourg Saint Jacques, and the other in the village of Saint Denis. Monsieur Vincent, directed them both, and God funneled his graces as abundantly through him as he had done for the first convent. After some time the convent of Saint Jacques led to yet another convent in Paris, situated on the rue Montorgueil. It too came under Monsieur Vincent’s direction with equally happy results. In this way, he was responsible for these four convents up to the time of his death, in all thirty-eight years of service to this institute. He acted with so many blessings and successes that from the first two of the houses in Paris about twenty others have come in various cities of the kingdom. The daughters of this wise superior spread the good odor of their virtues and testify to the spirit of their blessed founder. They thereby attract many other women to the service of their divine Spouse.

Blessed Francis de Sales had met Monsieur Vincent in Paris several times. He said he had met no one so wise and virtuous as Monsieur Vincent. The late Monsieur Coqueret, doctor of theology of the faculty of Paris, at the college of Navarre, reported that he had heard this judgment himself from the lips of the bishop. This blessed prelate was called to heaven soon after he had confided the direction of the daughters of the Visitation in Paris to Monsieur Vincent. He was happy to have put in his capable hands the pious enterprise he valued more than any other he had accomplished.

The venerable mother superior survived Blessed Francis by nearly twenty years. Because she was obliged to travel on business affairs and for the general good of her Congregation, she often wrote to Monsieur Vincent. She placed herself and her institute under his guidance, and received great light and consolation from him. In November 1627, while he was away working on a mission, she wrote him about her interior state. This shows the confidence she had in this wise counselor, and we report it here for the edification of the Christian reader:

You are working, my dear father, in the province of Lyons and so we will be deprived for a long time of seeing you. We have nothing to say when God acts, except to bless him in everything, which I do, my dear father. I take the liberty you have given me to speak my confidences to you, and I do so simply. I made four days of the retreat, not more, because of some business matters which came up. I recognized that I must work at the virtues of humility, and of care for the neighbor. These are virtues I chose last year; and our Lord has given me the grace to practice them to some extent, but I owe all to him. He will help me again, if it pleases him, since he provides me so many opportunities to practice them.

As to my inner state, I think I am in the frame of mind to accept

whatever God will ask of me. I have no desires or goals. Nothing matters but to let God direct my steps. I do not yet see where I am being led, but in the depths of my soul I am ready. I have no agenda or plan. I do at the moment what seems needed, without troubling myself about the future.

Often, in the lower part of my soul there is revolt, which causes me much suffering, but I realize that in patience I shall possess my soul. Also, I have much annoyance in my responsibilities, for my spirit is not adapted to action, and being compelled to act in necessities, my body and spirit are beaten down. On the other hand, my imagination troubles me greatly during the spiritual exercises, to my chagrin. God also allows many exterior difficulties so that nothing in this life pleases me except the will of God who wants me here. I ask you most earnestly to beg that God may have mercy on me. On my part I shall pray, as I do with all my heart, that he will strengthen you in the role he has assigned to you. 4

In another letter, written about several matters, she began in this way:

May I never experience any other emotion but sorrow if I forget the charity you showed me the day of your departure. My heart is consoled in difficulties and strengthened in the troubles it meets, coming from whatever quarter. I prostrate myself in spirit at your feet, asking pardon for the pain I caused you by my lack of mortification, now embracing lovingly the humiliations which come to me. To whom can I reveal my weaknesses but to you, my dear father, who understands so well? I hope that in your goodness you will not grow weary of me. 5

During her visit to Annecy, in some hope of seeing Monsieur Vincent, she write to him as follows:

Alas, my true and dear father, would it be possible for God to give me the grace to meet you in this region? This would be the greatest consolation I could receive in this world. This would be for me, I dare say, a special gift of God’s mercy for my soul. It would be greatly consoled in relief of an interior trial I have borne for more than four years, in a sort of martyrdom. 6

Monsieur Vincent visited the houses in Paris and Saint Denis from time

4. CED 1:34-35.
5. CED 1:313-14.
6. CED II:53. This took place in 1640. The complications which arose in the work with the foundlings made it impossible for Vincent to make the trip mentioned in the letter. In the following year, Jane de Chantal visited Paris. She saw Vincent for spiritual direction for the last time during this visit. This visit restored the inner peace of Jane Frances, who had been experiencing a long period of spiritual suffering. She died in December 1641.
to time to look to their general progress, and to the welfare of each individual religious. He sought to lift them up from falls common to humanity, and to encourage them in perfection. He displayed such humility, recollection, prudence, and charity that he was evidently led by the spirit of God. He acted so prudently among the sisters that they would clearly see that his ardent zeal was a fruit of the Holy Spirit working in him. This made his visits profitable and successful. The community seemed anointed with his devotion, filled with the desire to strive for perfection, but an effective and firm desire appeared in the various spiritual exercises of these religious. He stimulated their love of their vocation, and led them to embrace the spirit of their holy institute. He inspired them especially with the maxims of the Gospel and the precepts of their blessed founder contained in their rules and constitutions. He drew from this source the good advice he gave, and the practices he recommended, knowing that this fidelity to rule was the secret of the perfection of their state.

He strongly recommended the other writings of their blessed founder and of their worthy mother foundress, for which he had such a high opinion. His esteem for these writings was so marked that he could never read them without being moved. He was seen to be in tears while reading the book *Responses* by the venerable foundress, from which we cite the extract of a letter written to her devoted superior in September 1631.7

You are always admirable in your humility, from which I always receive such special consolation. I am especially pleased to hear of your satisfaction in your visit to our house in the faubourg. The superior has written also, saying she and the sisters were most pleased with your visit. Blessed be God, praised and glorified always. May he give our dear father a glorious crown for his troubles and the charity he shows in dealing with our sisters. Alas, my dear father, how good you are. I was convinced of this in seeing the tears you shed in reading our recent *Responses*.8

After citing these letters of the venerable mother foundress, we will turn to others written by the older and principal religious of the convents of this holy order at Paris. They knew Monsieur Vincent particularly well.

We can say with assurance that several times almost miraculous things occurred during his visits or immediately after. From the first time he came, he set free one of our sisters from a troubled mind that was so strong it affected her whole body, making it impossible for her to give any service to the convent. She aroused the sympathy

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of all who saw her, but since her cure she has been able to exercise various offices for several years, including that of mistress of novices, and even superior. At length, by the grace of God she died peacefully.

Several other religious troubled by pains and serious temptations found they were entirely delivered in speaking of their difficulties to this charitable father. Others had a decided change in conduct by the help of the abundant grace which flowed from him. In fact, all were renewed at each of his visits, and walked more joyfully on the road to perfection than ever before. We might add that his blessings extended even to temporal things following his visits.

The special graces this humble servant of God had received to enlighten, console, and strengthen souls was seen on several occasions, especially in regard to the late Mother Helene Angelique Lhuillier. She was led to God through the severe interior trials she endured. She was severely troubled by various extreme ailments of body and soul, but she found no relief, after God, except in this dear father, who had such a gift of consoling tortured souls. On one occasion, when it was thought that perhaps he was being bothered too much, he said that he deemed nothing more important than to be of service to someone in this sad state. He spoke agreeably to these suffering ones, often using light and joyous expressions to divert them from their sadness and sorrow.

His charity for the consolation of his neighbor was a source of much suffering for him, when his own infirmities prevented him from attending the sick religious who asked him to visit. He was not satisfied to offer some words of consolation to those in difficulty. He did all he could to alleviate their sufferings. One day a domestic sister, whose virtue he much appreciated, took sick and developed a high fever. She said she was at peace and ready to die. "O my sister," he replied, "your time has not yet come." He made the sign of the cross upon her forehead, and at the instant the fever left her, and she later experienced neither fever nor pains.

As he had experienced all the facets of human existence himself, infirmities, humiliations, and temptations, he would console those in similar circumstances by saying he had come through the same, and God had delivered him, and would do the same for them. "Have patience," he would say, "accept whatever is the good pleasure of God, and meanwhile, use this or that remedy." Once a good domestic sister mentioned she was too rustic to apply herself to spiritual

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9. 1592-1655, several times superior of the Visitation in Paris and Chaillot.
things, because in her own region she had looked after the animals on her father's farm. He said to her, "My sister, this is the first thing I did myself—I looked after the pigs. But if this serves to humble us, we will be all the better prepared for the service of God: Courage!"

Another sister spoke of a temptation which troubled her. He took the occasion to tell her that he had experienced a similar temptation for several years, but this never gave him matter to confess. He thereby made her realize the distinction between temptation and sin, and that she should not be concerned, for she had not consented in any way. He spoke of this about himself despite his great care never to speak of the graces God conferred upon himself, unless it clearly benefited someone else, as in this instance.

He did not think it useful or expedient that the religious should have too frequent or too familiar communications with superiors. If some wished to speak with him and he saw no great necessity, he would make them wait a long time to oblige them to weigh well what they were to say.

He used to say one thing to be avoided at all costs was for the religious to instigate petty intrigues against the rule of the mother superiors. This had harmed many, and ruined many houses. If one or several religious complained of the superior, he would look into the matter carefully, and judge prudently if it was a natural impulse or motivated by a true zeal. If he found the complaint justified, he would provide a remedy and speak to the superior about it. He would never align himself with malcontents against their superior, but would seek to excuse her, if he could do so in justice, to maintain her reputation and authority, knowing that this was necessary for the smooth running of the community.

He was most concerned that the houses in Paris and the others founded by them be careful of the clergy who visited, lest they be infected with the new opinions prevalent in clerical circles. "For," he said, "those who have adopted a false doctrine strive to spread it everywhere. They do not immediately show their hand. They are wolves which come meekly into the sheepfold to ravage and destroy."

On his advice the late Mother Helene Angelique Lhuillier, superior of the first convent in Paris, refused a large sum of money from a noble lady. She had offered it to the community for her retirement, but on condition that on occasion several Jansenists would be allowed to come visit her at the grille. 10

10. Anne Hurault de Chevigny, a widow from the second marriage of the marquis of Aumont.
When a religious or a group of religious would request his blessing, he would fall to his knees, recollect himself, and convey the sense of his own unworthiness and the majesty of God. He would say a devout and touching word or two, invoking a blessing upon the work and their person, always with some word of encouragement.

Despite his incomparable meekness, he still was firm in facing up to serious failings, but his prudence dictated that he await the proper moment for his corrections to be well received. Once he was asked to rebuke a young woman for some fault she had. He responded: "You give medicine to those with a fever only in cases of great necessity," for she was not yet disposed to accept this remedy. He taught the superiors to use their admonitions with much circumspection and charity if they were to be helpful. For himself, he acted so when he had to give penances, for evidently it would have been easier for him to do the penance himself than to impose it on others.

He once met a group of religious, who, in a spirit of holy liberty, criticized those more exact in their observance of the rule. He quickly put an end to their pretensions. He made them see that only in the mastery of their passions found in perfect mortification would they attain the perfect liberty they sought.

He had a marvelous facility to bring down the haughty without their being aware of what was happening. His zeal was reserved even more for those who disobeyed in something serious. He would reprimand them so severely they would be humbled, and would think of what it would be like before God on the day of his fearsome judgment, since the word of a mere man abased and humiliated them so severely.

He was beyond compare in supporting the weaknesses of others, whether of soul or body. His very presence commanded respect, but rather than repel, hearts opened up to him. No one inspired greater confidence than he, or received the most secret thoughts or the weaknesses most difficult to disclose. He supported and excused everyone, like a tender mother making excuses for her child.

One of the most enlightened and capable of the mother superiors of the entire order excused herself from speaking of Monsieur Vincent, for her house had already sent several reports from the other sisters.\(^\text{11}\) She added this:

Since what has already been written says what I had in mind, I

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\(^{11}\) Probably Marie Henriette de Rochechouart.
find I can add little. I would not want to speak in generalities, however admirable, and only of what his profound humility could not hide. As to certain particular events, I am sure you have already received accounts of those. I prefer to honor the silence I observed in him on a thousand occasions, to our great admiration. I often marveled at the depth of his mind, hardly ever leaving his presence without sensing my own superficiality, seeing him penetrate to depths I could scarcely follow. By the grandeur of the lights I saw in him, which he revealed only by degrees, I felt the poorest and most incapable person in the world.

He inspired in hearts a confidence that led people to speak to him of the most painful things, but this confidence was coupled with a most profound respect for him. His words had a marvelous effect upon the soul, whether to calm those in trouble or put others at peace.

His tolerance for the failings of others was extreme, but this did not detract from his firmness. He held to the exact balance when forced to correct someone. If he could be said to lean to one side more than the other, it was always on the side of those two great virtues, humility and charity, which he held so dear. I have fallen into the very pit I wanted to avoid, for I speak from the abundance of my heart, which preserved for this saintly man greater esteem, love, and respect than can be expressed or imagined.

Monsieur Vincent was without human respect. He stood firm for the interests of God and for the spiritual good of the religious houses he was responsible for, despite any objections or temporal disadvantages he was threatened with. This was particularly shown by the way he handled requests for visitation rights, often from noble women, even from princesses. Some of these were curious about what went on in these communities, or out of devotion wished to pass some hours with the sisters. Some, whether of high or low estate, who had run into some misfortune, felt they had a right to be received. He generally but politely refused all such unjustified requests, explaining the reasons he could not accord this permission, sometimes using conscience as his argument. Some ladies were granted this privilege. Occasionally he gathered the superiors and principal sisters of the convents to see which ones were founders or major benefactors of the religious, and who had a right to such visitations. Once they established this list, he had it put in writing and made it a rule to exclude all others. The religious were forbidden to go against this list, because when they made exceptions, the grand ladies refused entrance complained. He feared greatly that the spirit of the world would penetrate the convents. He feared that after these ladies
left they would leave the religious less devoted for having seen and spoken with secular persons, who often displayed their vanity in the cloister and even during the exercises of piety.

He was firm even in dealing with the queen mother of the king, while still respecting the honor due Her Majesty. She wanted one of her ladies of honor to be received in the original Paris convent. When he had to refuse such requests, he never hid behind the religious, but spoke up himself in their place and for them.12 A noblewoman to whom he had refused entrance to the Saint Denis monastery in turn refused him permission to conduct missions on her lands. In 1658 he received word that Madame Payen, the mother-in-law of Monsieur de Lyonne was at the gate of the monastery on the rue Saint Antoine demanding that she be allowed to enter to see the dying granddaughter of the minister. Vincent responded: “I am the very humble servant of Madame Payen, and I very much desire to be at her service, but my rule is to permit no such visits. I have refused Madame de Nemours, Madame de Longueville, and the Princess de la Carignan. They have never forgiven me and what would they say if they were to learn I had made an exception? To do anything else would go against my conscience."13 On other matters, he preferred that nothing extraordinary be done if it were a matter of some consequence, without first seeking the advice of the superiors and councillors, so as to act in union with them and with a common understanding. Even then, his chief recourse was the oracle of truth, for before responding to any proposition he would seek the guidance of the Spirit of God within himself. In seeing his evident recollection the sisters accepted his advice as a light from heaven. His frequent practice of beginning his remarks by his customary words In nomine Domini ["In the name of the Lord"] emphasized this view.

If we put down here in detail everything written in the reports of these good sisters in praise of their superior, this chapter would be far too long. We will simply append to what we have already said some remarks sent by the religious of the convent at Saint Denis.

His behavior always seemed to us to be so unselfish, looking always to the glory of God alone, in everything he did.

From the moment he recognized something as the will of God he would be thoroughly committed to it, saying with a marvelous serenity, “In all things we must believe in his divine Providence.”

In the advice he gave upon matters presented to him, he acted with great prudence and with a judgment so profound and enlightened that no circumstance escaped his notice. This became evident

12. Vincent’s refusal to allow these visits resulted in some rancor and opposition.
in several complicated matters referred to several enlightened persons, and even to some learned doctors, but the questions remained unresolved. After Monsieur Vincent had recourse to this worthy father, he wrote with such clarity and justice, penetrating to the heart of the question, that we were able to arrange the solution without harming the community or failing in charity for our neighbors. This caused several people to remark that only the Spirit of God could provide such an equitable discernment to satisfy all parties. Also whatever the question, he would never give an answer before entering into himself, seemingly invoking the grace of the Holy Spirit.

We were always pleased with his way of acting, recognizing the fullness of God in him, and the evangelical spirit in his calm yet persistent zeal, on fire for the glory of God. He had a mild persistence in maintaining the observance of our rule. He often asked if we had failed in any one of them, and spoke of our blessed founder and worthy mother to encourage us to their faithful practice. He gave as much attention to the smallest observance as to those of greater moment. He never used his own authority to introduce any change in the rule. On the contrary, he attempted to confirm and maintain it.

We had a good example of his edifying firmness in his efforts to preserve the exact observance of the cloister, despite any human consideration or selfish interest. He refused entry even to influential people whose position and wealth could have benefited both him and us financially. He preferred the incomparable good of our solitude to all the vain hopes of the world.

In his own visitations he spared no pain to make them useful, doing everything with thoroughness, serenity, and attention. He had a kindness reflecting the spirit of God, listening to the newest novice of the house with the same patience as he did for the oldest religious. When he reproved any faults, he prepared and disposed the minds of those concerned with such charity and meekness that the grace of his words was remembered long after the sting of the correction, so great was his gift of leading souls to God.

To know and recognize our faults, he used to have us enter into judgment with God (to use his way of speaking) and with ourselves. He used to say the lightest faults were serious, considering the designs of God and his expectations of us.

We noticed that although extreme charity and understanding always accompanied his admonitions, when it was a question of
failings in reciting the divine office he seemed to take on a new personality. His holy zeal moved him to speak with such vigor and strength that it impressed on our hearts the fear and respect for the majesty of God, as one who dwelt in unspeakable glory. He wanted even the least ceremonial directives to be observed, saying that God directed his people to preserve his rites and his commands. He threatened those who failed to observe the rites just as he did against those who disobeyed the law. He suggested that we read our rule and directories often, as well as what pertained to our institute. He wanted us to imitate the Israelites, who after their captivity, wept tears of contrition while reading the law, at the remembrance of their failures in observing it.

During his visits he recommended union with our superiors, but it should be, he said, union of hearts, deferring to their wishes even in indifferent matters. He recommended respect and cordiality among us, especially for the older sisters, in whom we were to honor the Ancient of Days. When reproving us for any failure in charity, he would recall the spirit of meekness of our founder. He taught us to honor the silence of the divine Word upon earth by our own silence. He said we were to give ourselves to God by a perfect practice of obedience to God, to our rule and to our superiors. Since we had vowed obedience, we had surrendered our own personal direction.

He wanted an account of the visit to be composed, which should be read from time to time in chapter. "This reading will attract the grace of God upon you," and in fact it did give us the blessing of renewing the dispositions of fervor, exactitude, and recollection that we had experienced in the visits.

He led the houses he directed to a great simplicity and perfect self-denial. He taught us to avoid all show, all love of creatures, and everything that would lead the religious to have communication with lay persons. He made us see the blessing it was to be located outside Paris, separated from high society. He urged us to shun all curiosities, such as books and meetings with spiritual persons possibly tainted with the dangerous opinions of the day. He counseled us to confine our reading to the writings of our blessed father, for whom he had a special veneration.

In this spirit of self-denial he respectfully refused the request of the Ursuline sisters who lived next door to break through the wall separating the two communities. The reason for the request, which had been approved by their ecclesiastical superior, was blood sisters
in the two communities, and the communities themselves, might visit. He told us “Religious are dead to the world, and should no longer even recognize their own relatives.”

He spoke little, but we realized that one of his words had greater effect than entire sermons, through the spirit of God which spoke through him and the respect we had for his holiness. A sister told us that when she made her confession to him, he said in four words just what she needed to hear in her troubled state. That astonished her as much as it satisfied her.

To another sister he counseled the exercise of the presence of God. He mentioned that since adopting this practice he had never done anything in secret he would not have wanted to be known on the public square. He said, “The presence of God ought to have greater influence over our minds than the presence of every living creature of the whole world, assembled together.”

From a large number of examples of his charity from which we might choose, we select one from when time was so valuable to him, near the end of his life, when he was weighed down with infirmities and cares. He came here several times to speak with the poor extern sister who was asking to be dispensed from her vows so she could marry. This holy man felt in making the change she would put her salvation in danger. He presented reasons why she should remain in such a touching way it could have softened a heart of steel.

He treated matters of charity with such care that there never was the least hint of self-interest. When it became necessary to reveal a fault of someone in the interests of truth, he made a special effort to seek out the good qualities of the person, to erase any bad impression that had been formed.

He was most serene in handling business matters, to which he gave all the time necessary to understand them thoroughly. His equanimity of disposition made him accessible to all, even allowing him to amuse the sick and afflicted persons he dealt with, for whom he had an incomparable charity. His generous nature accommodated itself to their weaknesses whether of body or mind. It could be said of him, with Saint Paul, that he made himself all to all, to gain all to God.

His deference and respect for all sorts of persons was admirable. His efforts to speak only good of everyone was equaled only by his habit of speaking poorly of himself as a sinner and lowering himself in the sight of all, for the greater glory of God and the edification of the neighbor.
These are the testimonials about their superior from the religious of the Visitation, or at least the principal ones they sent. For the sake of brevity we have left out some others containing some spiritual advice Monsieur Vincent gave to these religious on various occasions, either in general or in particular cases. These generally dealt with the virtues most suitable for them. They were, especially, the union and charity that should reign among them, obedience to their superiors, fidelity to the observances of the community, interior recollection, mental prayer, preparation for reception of the sacraments, purity of intention, love of poverty, the necessity of mortification, perseverance, and other similar topics.

Monsieur Vincent had a heart totally inflamed with charity toward the neighbor. Consequently, it was only natural that he should communicate some spark of this ardor to his dear daughters and that he should lead them to give themselves to the salvation of souls as much as their situation would allow. They hoped to do this, not only by their prayers, but also by some more practical help, which they believed to be in the spirit of their institute and conformable to the intentions of their blessed father and founder. They felt that it was not enough to exercise their charity among themselves, but that this divine light and fire should extend to others outside, to help them achieve good order, regularity, union, and all sorts of other spiritual goods. These ideals had inspired the superior, Monsieur Vincent, to agree that the religious of the Visitation should work with other convents in need of reform. We will give here but a single example. It will suffice to show the saintly dispositions of this charitable spiritual father, and of his virtuous daughters also, in extending their charity to those outside their convent.

Several years previously the piety and good will of the late Marquise de Maignelay, whose memory is held in benediction, and with the help of many other like-minded persons, founded the convent of Sainte Madeleine, near the Temple in Paris. It was to serve as a sort of refuge for girls and women who wanted to leave their lives of vice and become converted to God. From its first days, the management of the convent was recognized as its greatest weakness. Those who came had no experience in directing a house, nor the other qualities necessary for such a position. After thinking about how to remedy this problem, it was suggested that the religious of the Visitation might be asked to take over the administration of this new convent, since they seemed to be more capable than any others. The spirit of their institute, which obliged them to the twin virtues of charity and meekness, seemed most suitable to win the affection of the poor souls and to bind them with bands of love to Jesus Christ.

This had been discussed with the blessed bishop of Geneva. He agreed

14. The Temple was the former headquarters of the Knights Templars, a military order.
that it might well be undertaken one day, but for the moment the time was
not yet ripe. Some years later, when the suggestion was made to Monsieur
Vincent, he considered before God the importance and necessity of this
venture. He was persuaded that the religious of the Visitation ought to
undertake it. He spoke with Mother Helene Angelique Lhuillier, superior of
the first convent, and she in turn discussed it with her community. Notwith­
standing the apprehensions she and her sisters felt at such a difficult
undertaking, they agreed to do so. They were encouraged by the great good
to be effected in this work and by the help they hoped for from God.

In 1629 Monsieur Vincent chose four religious of the first convent of the
Visitation to move to the convent of Sainte Madeleine as prioress, director,
and porter, with the blessing of the archbishop of Paris. From time to time
these sisters were replaced because of the trying nature of the work. Their
direction was so successful that soon good order reigned in this large house.
For more than thirty years all has gone well, even to the extent that this
convent led to two others, in Rouen and in Bordeaux. Monsieur Vincent
contributed much by his wise counsel and charitable care, either going to
visit it in person or by writing often to the sisters there. He helped especially
in obtaining good confessors who could maintain peace, obedience, and
good order in all that concerned the worship of God.

Since the beginning, many obstacles to its realization marked this work.
Because many regulations had to be adopted, Monsieur Vincent, with his
usual prudence, held several meetings with doctors or other pious people to
discuss ways of meeting the difficulties of the enterprise and to resolve
doubts which arose. This enabled him to act with greater assurance in a
matter of this importance, affecting the relief and edification of the public
and the spiritual good of so many poor creatures who found in this new
enterprise a safe harbor amid their stormy lives.

Ordinarily around a hundred or a hundred and twenty girls lived in the
house. Some of them took the three vows of religion, others not, but they
remained of their own free will, and all lived a regulated and well-ordered
life. Some others were there under duress, but God who is rich in mercy gave
the grace to some of these to pass from this third group to the second, and
some even to the first. They were helped in this by the charitable care they
received from the sisters of the Visitation, who undoubtedly found much
difficulty in guiding this house. God gave them the grace to surmount all
these sufferings by their humility, patience, and meekness. By these virtues
they were able to overcome the contradictions, persecutions, and calumnies
raised by the devil and the world against them. Monsieur Vincent helped
them greatly. He encouraged them to persevere, showing them how much
their patience and their charity redounded to the glory of God. They merited
grace and attracted blessings for the entire order by their devotion. It was a great honor for them to do what the apostles did, and what Jesus Christ himself came upon earth to do, to convert souls to God. This is what he wrote to Mother Anne Marie Bollain, the first superior sent to the convent of Sainte Madeleine, where she worked successfully for several years.

Our Lord who always calls us to what is most perfect would prefer you to continue your services to Sainte Madeleine than to do anything else. The grace of perseverance is the most important of all, the crown of all the others. Death that would find us arms in hand for the service of our divine Master would be the most glorious and the most desirable. Our Lord ended his life as he lived. His life had been hard and painful, his death severe and agonizing with no human consolation. For this reason some of the saints wanted to die alone, totally abandoned by all, in the hope of having God alone as their comfort. I am convinced, my dear sister, that you seek him alone, and when presented with a choice you always prefer what is for his greater glory, and not your own personal interest.15

Among all the other considerations referred to, which Monsieur Vincent extended with such affection to the sisters of the Visitation in this undertaking, and which have continued to this day despite all the difficulties that have arisen, he dwelt on one subject more than on any other. He feared that if these religious withdrew from this enterprise, the venom of novel errors would enter this house, for it had a way of spreading everywhere. He would say that besides the harm it did to faith and religion, it introduced dangerous seeds of ill feeling into the community. It was a source of division which the enemy sowed secretly to destroy it if great care were not taken, as experience only too well confirmed.

Before ending this chapter, we have felt that for the edification of the reader, it would be well to include two accounts written in Monsieur Vincent's own hand about the two great servants of God who founded the saintly institute of the Visitation. These show the extraordinary and remarkable graces it pleased God to bestow on his faithful servant. They also manifest the sanctity of Blessed Francis de Sales, founder of the order, and of the Venerable Mother Jane Frances Fremiot, its foundress. Here is what he wrote, in the first of these pieces:

It pleases the goodness of God to work miracles through the saints, to show forth their sanctification. I write of one, of which I was witness, in the person of sister M. M. of the Visitation of Saint Mary, in the convent in the faubourg Saint Jacques, in Paris.

About six years ago this religious was seized with a horrible

15. CED VIII:252.
temptation of aversion against God, the blessed sacrament, and all the exercises of our holy religion. She blasphemed against God, and cursed him as often as she praised him, or rather as often as she heard the other sisters praise him in the divine office. In choir, she blasphemed and cursed aloud, in the hearing of all those around her. When her superior asked her to make an act of devotion toward God, she replied that she had no God but the devil. She had such anger and fury against God's divine majesty she was on the verge of killing herself, the better to be in hell, as she herself said, where she could curse God eternally. This is what she wanted.

The reverend mother superior had her see various persons who might help, such as bishops, priests, and others familiar with such internal matters. In keeping with their advice she was sent to medical doctors. They prescribed various remedies, but all without effect. Finally, the superior thought if she would apply a piece of the surplice of the blessed bishop of Geneva she would be cured. She did this, and a short time later the cure followed instantly. She lost the troubled spirit which so bothered her, and became completely at peace. Her weakened body regained its strength, and her appetite and sleep returned to normal. All this happened in an instant, and all has remained well in both mind and body ever since. She recovered so completely that she was able to take on some of the principal responsibilities of the house, and is now serving as mistress of novices.

What makes me believe in the miraculous nature of this cure is that it followed the application of the surplice of the blessed bishop of Geneva, and this only after all human remedies had failed. Her ailments increased at the moment of application of the surplice, something that usually happens in miraculous cures, but the cure came suddenly, justifying the faith of the mother superior. She is as convinced as if she had seen and touched him that our Lord did this miracle in favor of the blessed bishop, and by the application of his surplice. I write these things after talking to the sister during her illness and after her cure. I learned all the circumstances from the mother superior and from the religious herself immediately after her cure, which happened on the day I went to make my visitation of the convent, on the authority of the most illustrious and most reverend archbishop of Paris.16

After this account by the humble servant of God, there is no room to doubt this extraordinary and miraculous cure. It came about through the merits of

the blessed bishop of Geneva, founder of the order of the Visitation, source of so many miracles since that time. This holy bishop should rightly be regarded as its true author, after God, who will be all the more honored and glorified in his saint. Nevertheless, some circumstances which accompanied or followed this miraculous cure involving Monsieur Vincent, make us think God wished him to play some part in this event.

We must remark, in the first place, that it pleased God to give this grace to the worthy superior whose visits to the house of the Visitation sisters usually produced such striking graces. Among others is the case of several of the religious suffering great pains or enduring most grievous temptations, who were entirely freed from them after he had spoken with them.

Second, the visit of which he speaks in this account was the first he made in the second convent of the Visitation at Paris, around 1623. He was still in the service of the late general of the galleys, some years before the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission.

Third, having seen in this visit this good religious obsessed as she was and tormented with such pain, he was moved with much compassion. In an effort to be of help, he prayed for her. Afterward the religious was suddenly delivered. As we have already said, the glory of this cure belongs, after God, to Blessed Francis de Sales, bishop of Geneva. By his intercession we believe God delivered this good religious from such horrible pains and temptations. However, without taking away anything from the honor due this holy prelate, may we not say it was also at the intervention of Monsieur Vincent, whom he greatly respected and loved in life, that he was moved to intercede before God in favor of him who was rendering him such faithful and helpful service in the person of his dear daughters?

The second document contains the following words:

We, Vincent de Paul, most unworthy superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, certify that for twenty years God has given us the grace to know the deceased, our very worthy Mother de Chantal, foundress of the holy order of the Visitation of Saint Mary. I had frequent contact with her by word and by letter. It pleased God that I met with her from the time she first came to this city, twenty years ago. I have met her other times, during which she did me the honor to put herself under my spiritual direction. It appeared to me she was gifted with many virtues, especially faith, although she was tempted her whole life long by contrary thoughts. She had great trust in God, and a generous love of his divine bounty. Her spirit was just, prudent, temperate, and strong, to an eminent degree. She possessed humility, mortification, obedience, zeal for

17. The date should be 1626 or later since the house was not founded until 1626.
the sanctification of her order and for the salvation of the souls of
the poor, all in a superlative degree.

In a word, I never saw in her any imperfection, but rather the
constant exercise of all the virtues. Although she appeared calm and
peaceful, characteristic of souls who have reached a high degree of
virtue, she truly suffered great interior pains. Several times she
wrote or told me directly that she was so troubled by all sorts of
temptations and obsessions that she could scarcely
look into her
own interior. She could not bear the sight of her own soul, filled
with horror to such an extent that it was the image of hell for her.
Despite these pains, she never lost her serenity of countenance, nor
did she relax in the fidelity due God in the exercise of the Christian
and religious virtues, nor in the prodigious solicitude she had for
the welfare of her own order. I can say without hesitation that she
was one of the most saintly souls I ever met on the face of the earth
and that surely she is now among the blessed in heaven. I have no
doubt that some day God will bring her sanctity to light, as I hear
he has already done in some parts of this kingdom in various ways.
I will recount one example of this. I learned it from a person worthy
of belief, who would rather die, I assure you, than to report a
falsehood.

This person,18 having heard of the serious illness of our dear
departed, fell to his knees to pray to God for her.19 The first thought
which came to him was to make an act of contrition for any sins she
may have committed, or was in the habit of committing. Immedi­
ately after, there appeared before him a globe of fire which raised
itself above the earth. This was joined by another, more luminous
and larger. It united with the first, rising still higher, until this was
absorbed into still another globe, infinitely greater and more lumi­
nous than the others. He heard an interior voice which told him the
first globe of fire was the soul of our worthy mother; the second,
that of our blessed founder, and the third the divine essence itself.
The two souls were united, and together were absorbed into God,
their sovereign principle.

Moreover, this same person, a priest, offered holy mass for our
worthy mother, overwhelmed with sadness after hearing the news
of her passing. When he was at the second Memento, the prayer for
the dead, he thought it would be good to pray for her, since she
might be in purgatory for some light words she may have said that

18. Vincent himself; see CED II:212.
19. Jane Frances de Chantal died at Moulins on Friday, December 13, 1641, at age sixty-nine.
possibly were venial sins. At that moment he again saw the same vision as before, the same globes and the same union. He preserves an interior conviction that this soul was truly among the blessed, and had no need of prayers. This thought has remained imprinted on his mind, so much so that he cannot think of her without recalling it.

What might lead to some doubts about this vision is this priest has such a high regard for the sanctity of this blessed soul that he could never read her book, Responses, without weeping, so convinced is he that God had inspired her with its contents. Perhaps this vision was an effect of his too vivid imagination. What makes me think it was a true vision is that he was never known to have others, except the one related here.

As proof of this, I have signed this with my own hand, and affixed my seal.20

Monsieur Vincent made this declaration in 1642. He speaks of himself in the third person when he speaks of the vision of the globes. God revealed to him the blessedness of the holy foundress of the devout institute of the Visitation, but before he wrote or spoke to anyone he went to see the late archbishop of Paris, to whom he related what had occurred. He told him simply and exactly what had happened, so as not to be deceived. He spoke also to Dom Maurice, a Barnabite, whom he met at the convent of Saint Mary in the faubourg Saint Jacques, on the day following the death of Madame de Chantal, to have an assurance that the devil was not deceiving him. Both these advisers told him the vision had all the marks of a vision coming from God. They advised that he might safely relate this event to certain members of the order, who were so deeply moved by the loss of their dear mother. He did so, describing the details of the vision, and later put them into writing to preserve the memory.

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20. CED XIII:125-28. The testimony of Vincent de Paul and Francis de Sales was considered to be of such importance in the process for the beatification of Jane Frances that at the ceremony for her beatification, November 21, 1751, her image was placed between those of Francis and Vincent, “her two fathers and her two witnesses.”
CHAPTER EIGHT

The Confraternities of Charity in the Parishes

Among the signs our Lord gave of his divine mission and his role as messiah and redeemer of the world, when the holy precursor John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to him, the last and principal one was Pauperes evangelizantur, that the poor would have the Gospel preached to them. As he said in another part of the Gospel, all his works gave testimony to who he was. The marvelous cures he wrought by his word were undeniable proofs of his identity as Son of God and savior. Nevertheless, after referring to giving sight to the blind, speech to the mute, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead, he added one more proof, more compelling than the others: Pauperes evangelizantur, the poor would have the Gospel preached to them.

Beyond any doubt charity is the true mark of the children of God, but the surest sign of the presence of true and perfect charity, free from all self-interest and personal satisfaction, is its exercise in favor of the poor. If it be permitted to extend this thought, added luster is given to the precious pearl of this virtue when it is given in service to the sick poor. In the double handicap which they suffer, poverty and sickness, their corporal and spiritual needs are tended to; their body is given the food and medicine it requires, and their souls the consolation they need. In these conditions charity shines forth even more than usual, because of the benefits it confers, the efforts it demands, and the natural repugnances which ordinarily have to be overcome in these situations.

The corporal and spiritual help to the poor, especially to the sick and afflicted among them, allows us to appreciate the degree to which Monsieur Vincent possessed this virtue of charity. We have already seen this in Book One and in Chapter One of Book Two. We spoke there about the missions and the great results they produced, especially for the poor. Besides all these benefits there is still another that we have put off until this chapter, the establishment of the Confraternities of Charity for the help of the sick poor, a creation of Monsieur Vincent. God used him for the creation of this great work, which cannot be praised enough, not only for the bodily relief of a multitude of the sick poor, but even more for the salvation of their souls. Were it not for him, in many places they would have lived and died abandoned. They were often in danger of being lost were it not for the

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1. Matt 11:5.
2. Ch. 8.
spiritual help he gave them, especially in preparing them to die a happy death.

We appreciate the charity of those who contributed to the support of the hospital for receiving and treating the sick poor. If some rich person were to use part of his wealth to found one, this would undoubtedly be approved and applauded by everyone. What do we think then of a poor priest, working alone, who was able to do what the richest and most powerful with all their resources were not able to accomplish? I do not speak of the founding of one hospital, or of ten, or of a hundred, but of a thousand and more. Making something out of nothing, with five small loaves feeding thousands of people, this is something that only God could do. Surely this would be seen as an undertaking beyond human power. We can say that Monsieur Vincent was this poor priest whom God used to work this marvel, not in building hospitals to receive the sick poor, but in establishing the Confraternities of Charity for their care. This was something even more advantageous for them than the hospitals would have been, as they themselves agree.

If, for example, fifty or sixty sick poor of a parish in Paris, helped by the Confraternity of Charity, were asked if they would have preferred to be taken to the Hotel Dieu, the answer would have been unanimous: they appreciated being left in their poor homes under the constant care of the members of the Confraternity of Charity.

We saw in Book One the origin of these Confraternities of Charity, in 1617 when Monsieur Vincent was at Chatillon in Bresse. It was there he began for the first time to gather some good and virtuous women to help the sick poor of the parish, to provide the food and medicines and spiritual help for them in their own homes, without separating husband and wife, or mothers and children.

This great servant of God had never heard anyone speak of this way of helping the sick poor, as he himself has told us. The thought came to him only on the occasion of finding some sick persons in his parish deprived of every resource, and he wondered how he might help out. His charity was so cordial and tender toward the poor that his ingenuity suggested this novel and saintly innovation. He started it as an experiment but its immediate success showed decidedly that the inspiration had come from God. He blessed this first Confraternity of Charity so manifestly that it has continued for more than fifty years, even though Monsieur Vincent was called away to other duties and occupations and could not give it his personal attention.

Since the beginning of this first confraternity, it pleased the bounty of God to shower so many graces upon the father of the poor that he was able to spread this holy institution in innumerable parishes throughout France,

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3. Ch. 10.
Italy and elsewhere. His spiritual sons continue to this day in the parishes where missions are given, inside and outside the kingdom, to organize these Confraternities of Charity with the approbation of the Holy See, and the permission of the prelates and pastors of the locality.

Someone may ask how these Confraternities of Charity are supported, since most have no source of fixed income. It would have to be admitted that indeed they are founded, but only on the Providence of God. He has not allowed any one of these confraternities which has faithfully followed the regulations to be cited shortly, to lack what was needed to serve the sick. Generally, a collection would be taken up in the parish on the occasion of the establishment of the first confraternity. From this a small income, smaller or larger depending on the place, would be generated. Also, a collection of furniture, clothing, and household utensils was organized. Collections were taken up in the churches on Sundays and feasts. This proved enough to support the work, above all when the officers followed the directions they had received for the good government of the confraternity, and when the pastors of the parishes supported the undertaking.

Since good order preserves things as they should be, and since as the apostle says, all that comes from God is well ordered, Monsieur Vincent felt it desirable from the very beginning of these confraternities that some organization of them was necessary. He drew up a set of regulations, therefore, which we append to this chapter. They were followed wherever the confraternities were established. It is written in simple and direct language, in few articles, but enough to show the truly Christian prudence of its author.

Monsieur Vincent planned originally to set up these confraternities in the villages of the countryside, for the care of the sick poor where the need was usually most pressing. However, some noble ladies with lands in the diocese of Paris or elsewhere, and who had hosted the missions, saw the Confraternity of Charity established with happy results for the sick poor. They realized that many similar cases existed in Paris, and believed these same Confraternities of Charity should be formed in the parishes of Paris and in the outlying districts. Many of the poorer families could barely manage on the wages from their work. When sickness overtook the breadwinner, the family fell into great distress. Many, through shame or for some other reason, did not want to go to the Hotel Dieu, but this left them and their families in utter desolation.

These women spoke to the pastors, and they in turn consulted Monsieur Vincent. He agreed to help in setting up these confraternities in the parishes which needed them. They have continued there to our own day, greatly blessed by God. The Ladies of Charity of each parish were independent of
the others, but for twenty-five or thirty years have provided the same care and concern for the sick poor as was done in the Confraternities of Charity in the country places, and sometimes even more. At their own expense the women took turns in preparing soup and meat and other needed items for the sick of the parish.

Since that time, in imitation of those of Paris, these confraternities have spread to many other cities of the kingdom, and even into the villages and to foreign countries, so that today their number can hardly be counted. We can well imagine how thousands of poor people are helped every day, in body and soul. After God, they owe so much of this charitable help, and for many the healthy state of their souls and perhaps even their eternal salvation, to the charity of this great servant of God. By this alone, not considering all his other activities, he has earned a glorious crown in heaven, ever increasing because of those who are saved daily because of him. On earth he merited the title of Father of the Poor, and this will draw down upon all his enterprises an infinity of graces and blessings.

**REGULATIONS OF THE CONFRATERNITIES OF CHARITY**

The Confraternity of Charity is established to honor our lord Jesus Christ and his holy mother, to help in body and in soul the sick poor of the place where it is established, by providing food and drink and medicines in time of sickness. Spiritually, these persons are helped to receive the sacraments of penance, holy eucharist, and extreme unction. Those about to die are helped to leave this world in good conscience. Those who are cured are helped to resolve to lead a good life in the future.

The confraternity shall be composed of a certain limited number of women and girls, with the consent of their husbands or of their fathers and mothers, as the case may be. They shall hold an election, in the presence of the pastor, for three officers, every two years. This shall take place on the day after Pentecost. The first of these officers shall be called the superior or director; the second, treasurer or first assistant; the third, the storekeeper, or second assistant. These three officers shall have the complete direction of the confraternity.

With the advice of the pastor, a pious and charitable layman of the parish shall be elected to serve as procurator.

The superior shall take care to see that the present regulations are observed and that all members of the confraternity do their duty well. She shall accept the sick poor of the parish for treatment, and shall discharge them with the advice of the other officers.

The second person shall serve as a counselor to the superior. She
shall keep the funds of the confraternity in a safe, locked with a lock having two different keys, of which she shall hold one, and the other shall be held by the superior. She shall keep no money on her person, except a single ecu, for current expenses. She shall give an account at the end of two years to the newly elected officers, to the other members of the confraternity, in the presence of the pastor and interested parishioners.

The storekeeper shall also be a member of the council of the superior. She shall keep the linens of the confraternity, wash and mend them, and shall supply the sick poor with needed items upon orders of the superior. Like the treasurer, she shall give an account of her services at the end of the two years.

The procurator shall hold the funds raised in the collections in the parish and the gifts from individuals. He shall furnish receipts for gifts. He shall provide for a storehouse and see that it be well supplied with needed items. He shall aid in drawing up the treasurer’s report as needed. He shall keep a record book in which these present regulations will be copied, and the act of foundation of the confraternity shall be included. This same record should hold the names of the women and girls accepted as members of the confraternity, the day of their joining, and the day of their death; the election of officers shall be recorded; the summary of the reports of the officers shall be included; the names of the sick poor helped by the confraternity, the day of their reception, the day of their death or discharge, and in general, all that has happened that is most significant or remarkable.

Each day the sisters of the confraternity shall serve the sick poor accepted by the superior, bringing to their homes the food and drink prepared for them. They shall all take their turn at seeking alms at church and in the homes of the people, on Sundays and the main solemn feasts. They shall deposit these alms with the treasurer, and give a report to the procurator of what was collected. They shall gather for a mass at the altar of the confraternity the first or third Sunday of the month, at which they shall communicate, after going to confession, if this is convenient. On this same day they shall attend the procession held between vespers and compline, when the litanies of our Lord or of our Blessed Mother are chanted. They shall do the same each year on January 14, feast of the name of Jesus, their patron.

They shall mutually cherish each other as those called and bound by the love of our savior, often visiting and consoling one another.
in their afflictions and sicknesses. They shall attend as a group the wake of anyone who shall have died, and receive communion for her intention at a high mass to be celebrated for her.

They shall do the same for the pastor and for their procurator, if they should die. In the same way they should attend in a body the funeral services for any of the sick poor they had cared for, and have a low mass said for the repose of their soul. All the above shall not bind under pain of sin, either mortal or venial.

At each meal for the poor they shall give the sick enough bread to eat, and five ounces of veal or lamb, a soup and a demi-setier of wine in the Paris measure.

On fast days, besides bread, the sick should also be given wine, and soup, two eggs, and a bit of butter. For those unable to eat solid food, they should be given some bouillon, and some fresh eggs, four times a day. When death approaches, if there are no relatives to help, the sisters of the confraternity should offer this service. 

4. CED XIII:419-22. This rule served as the model for all the other charities founded by Vincent de Paul, although he made modifications if necessary to adapt it to the particular circumstances of a new confraternity.
CHAPTER NINE

The Founding of the Daughters of Charity,
Servants of the Sick Poor

WE WILL NOT repeat here what has already been said in Book One about the origins of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor, and the circumstances which brought about their foundation. We will not develop further the thought that Monsieur Vincent brought to this enterprise only his fidelity to the designs of God's providence. This led him to become, almost without conscious effort on his part, the originator of this charitable organization, and the spiritual father of these virtuous women.

We will speak here only of some things worthy of remark not reported in Book One about this devoted community, since raised to the status of a congregation by the late archbishop of Paris by the following letter of incorporation:

Because of the blessings God has bestowed on the work of our beloved Vincent de Paul to further this pious enterprise, we have confided to him and commissioned him by these present letters to undertake the guidance and direction of this society and community for as long as he shall live. We extend this commission to those who, after his death, shall succeed him as superior general of the Congregation of the Mission.2

Later, the king confirmed this appointment, and the Parlement of Paris confirmed and registered it.

Seeing himself thus charged so providentially with the care of this work, he gave it his full attention and concern to perfect it as much as he could.

1. Ch. 24.
2. CED XIII:572. The first approbation of the Daughters of Charity, given by the archbishop of Paris in 1646, was somehow lost, together with the royal letters patent. Vincent thus had to present a second request in 1655. This approval is the one Abelly cites here. An important modification was introduced in this new request: that the Daughters of Charity be placed under the perpetual direction of Vincent de Paul and his successors as superiors general of the Congregation of the Mission. Vincent, who characteristically had feared anticipating divine Providence, had himself been reluctant to agree to this provision. Louise de Marillac perceived that leaving the choice of director after Vincent to the authority of the archbishop of Paris would eventually lead to the community's withdrawal from Vincent's spiritual family. She was unshakeable in this conviction, and worked long and hard to convince Vincent. See CED III:254-55; IV:220-22. He finally agreed at her continued insistence, and Cardinal de Retz, the archbishop of Paris, gave his approval on January 18, 1655. See CED XIII, 569-72, 572-77. The somewhat revised statutes, approved by the archbishop, were confirmed in the name of the pope by his legate, Cardinal de Vendome, June 8, 1668.
His first thought was to propose to these virtuous women that they should regard as their primary objective the service of Jesus Christ spiritually and corporally in the persons of the sick poor, whether men or women, despite their shyness or the urgency of their needs. To make themselves worthy servants of their Lord in such a holy service they must work strenuously at their own sanctification. They should give all their service in the spirit of humility, simplicity, charity, and in union with our Lord Jesus Christ, excluding all vanity, human respect, self-love, and natural satisfactions.

He strongly recommended several other virtues he judged most necessary in their condition, such as obedience to their superiors and to the pastors of the parishes; indifference about the place, work, and persons with whom they worked; poverty, as a means to acquire a love for the poor as their servants; patience, to bear willingly and for the love of God the inconveniences, contradictions, mockeries, calumnies, and other mortifications which would surely befall them, even for having tried to do good, regarding all this as a sharing of the cross of Christ upon earth, so as to live gloriously one day with him in heaven.

It will not be necessary to go into much detail about their rule. It sought to encourage mental prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, annual retreats, spiritual conferences, union and mutual charity among themselves, common life in dress and activities, and a most careful modesty.

Besides the rules common to all, Monsieur Vincent left others written for each particular office. These pointed out what should be done in whatever place they happened to be, in the cities or in the villages, or in their contacts with the ladies, or others for whom they worked, and in regard to the poor themselves whom they sought to serve and teach. There were six of these special rules, the first for the sisters who served the sick in the parishes; the second was for those who taught school; the third for those who took care of abandoned children; the fourth for those who helped the ladies who served the poor in the Hotel Dieu in Paris; the fifth for the sisters who served in the hospital reserved for convicts condemned to the galleys; the sixth for those who served the sick in other hospitals of the kingdom. These rules stressed the dangerous situations they should avoid, the precautions they must take, and the attitudes they must have so as to do and say, even in the least circumstances, whatever would help them do their duties well: feeding, bandaging, dosing, cleaning, edifying, consoling, and reprimanding the poor of all sorts, old and young, well or sick.

It could be said these rules of Monsieur Vincent were definitive, for he was in no hurry to produce them. He wanted God alone to be their author, and human considerations to have no importance, except in their observance.
They were the fruit of long experience, aided by the most enlightened advice of Mademoiselle le Gras and always with service to all sorts of poor people as the primary objective.

These rules assured that the Daughters of Charity served the poor to the satisfaction of everyone, and they were soon being requested from all sides. Several cities among the major ones of the kingdom asked for them, as did many lords and ladies who wanted them to come to their lands. These requests were satisfied as much as the growth of this Company allowed, which was great, by God’s mercy. The Congregation provided an excellent opportunity for widows or other women who wished to withdraw from the world, to assure their own salvation by these works of charity for others. This was chiefly so for those who wished to become religious, but who did not have a dowry. The Daughters of Charity had no such requirement. The only thing asked of them, besides their first dress, was a worthy disposition of body and soul to respond to such a holy calling. This calling cannot be appreciated by those lacking in charity, but Monsieur Vincent extolled it in these words:

A Daughter of Charity has greater need of virtue than even the most austere religious. No other congregation asks more of their members than does theirs. They must work at their own perfection like the Carmelites and other similar orders. In the care of the sick they serve like the religious of the Hotel Dieu of Paris, or of other nursing communities. In the education of poor girls they are as devoted as the Ursulines.  

We cite here several sections of the rule of Monsieur Vincent for sisters working for the sick poor in the parishes:

They must remember that, although they are not properly called religious, because this state is not suitable for their particular calling, they are much more exposed to dangers than cloistered religious living behind their grilles. Their convents are the houses of the sick. Their cells are the sickrooms of the poor, and even these are often rented. Their chapel is the parish church. Their cloister is the street of the town. Their enclosure is holy obedience. Their grille is the fear of God and their veil, holy modesty. For all these reasons they must have greater virtue than if they were professed religious in one of the orders. This is why they must try to act wherever they are with such reserve, recollection, and edification as true religious do in their own convents. To obtain this grace from God they must strive to attain all the virtues recommended and stipulated in their rules. This is particularly true of the virtue of profound humility, perfect obedience, and a great detachment from creatures. Above

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all else, they must use every precaution to preserve perfect chastity of body and heart.

They should think often of why God has sent them to this parish, which is to serve the sick poor, not only in body by feeding them and giving them their medicines, but spiritually as well, seeing that they receive the sacraments in time. Those about to die should be helped to die in good grace, while those who recover should be helped to resolve firmly to lead a good life in the future. To help them attain these spiritual benefits, the sisters should do what they can in the little time they have, depending on the condition of the sick persons they serve. They should strive to console, encourage, and teach the sick what is required for salvation, helping them make acts of faith, hope, and charity toward God and the neighbor, and of contrition, urging them to forgive their enemies and to ask pardon of those they have offended. They should help the sick to resign themselves to God's will whether it be to suffer or to recover, to live or to die, and other similar acts, not all at once, but a few each day, and as concisely as possible so as not to weary the sick ones.

Above all else the Daughters should help their patients make a good general confession of their entire lives, especially if there is danger they will die from their illness. They should point out the importance of making this general confession and how to make it. Among other things they should tell them to confess not only their sins committed since their last confession, but those of their entire lives, even though they may have been confessed before. If they are not in a condition to make this confession of all their past, they should at least have a sorrow for all their sins, with a firm purpose of preferring death to sinning again, helped by the grace of God.

If the sick recover but then suffer a relapse, they should be urged to receive the sacraments again, even extreme unction, and the sisters should help them do so. If they are about to die, the Daughters should help them to die well, using some of the acts mentioned before, and praying to God for them.

Should the sick be cured, the Daughters should urge them to profit from their sickness and their cure. They will point out that God allowed their sickness of body to bring health to their souls, and has restored them to well-being to enable them to do penance and lead a good Christian life. Good resolutions are required to do all this, so they should help them make strong ones or renew those they made when they first recovered. They should suggest some practices to help them, depending on their dispositions, such as
praying to God while kneeling morning and evening, confession and communion several times a year, avoiding the occasions of sin, and so forth. All this should be done briefly, simply, and humbly.

To avoid any difficulty which these spiritual ministrations might cause by delaying the bringing of food or medicine to the other sick, they should be careful to regulate their time and exercises according to the number and needs of the sick. Since their duties are usually less pressing in the evening than in the morning they might use this time in teaching their patients or in exhorting them to the spiritual exercises spoken of, particularly when bringing them some medicine.

In serving the sick they should have God alone in view, accepting praise and blame with the same equanimity. They should interiorly reject the praise, but accept the blame in honor of the abuse heaped on the Son of God upon the cross, even from those he had so blessed and favored.

They should accept no present from the poor they serve, no matter how small it might be, remembering they are obligated to this service to the poor. They owe them still more, for the small services they render must be given with affection, rejoicing the angels of heaven, who one day will receive them into the eternal kingdom. Even in this life they receive more honor and true happiness than they could ever have dared hope for, especially because of their own unworthiness.

These were the main regulations Monsieur Vincent gave these virtuous women, from which we can judge the spirit he engendered in them and the high degree of perfection to which he called them. We see, too, the spirit with which he himself was filled, and how abundant were the lights and graces given him by God for the direction of others.

He gave the Daughters some good advice also in regard to their contacts with certain other persons in particular, as for example, the priests in the parishes where they lived. He recommended they have a great respect for them, but not to visit with them or speak with them outside the confessional, except out of necessity. They were never to go alone to their houses nor receive them in their own houses. They were not to tend to them in their sicknesses nor provide medicines for them. They were not to take care of washing the surplices, albs or other altar linens, nor to clean or decorate the church and altars or other similar things. Although these were good and holy services, they were not in keeping with the goals of their institute and would detract from their care of the poor.

In regard to laity of whatever rank, he recommended that the Daughters
not visit them unless it were necessary, nor to waste time or become too familiar with them. If they fell sick, the Daughters were not to tend to them or care for their children, servants, and domestics. They were not to become involved in their affairs, their household, or in giving them medicine. All this was contrary to the spirit of their institute, which was to be devoted to the poor and not to the rich. All these recommendations were more important than they first appeared, because the occupations he forbade were ordinarily easier, more agreeable, and more honorable in the sight of others, and were more attractive to the natural inclinations of the Daughters. If the Daughters followed them, they would little by little depart from what our Lord was asking of them, and for which their little Company was founded.

Besides the parishes in which these good women worked for the sick poor, five hospitals in Paris gave the same services: (1) The Hotel Dieu, where they helped the ladies who visited the sick. (2) The foundling hospital, where there was much opportunity for them to show their charity, for each year three or four hundred of these children were cared for admirably. (3) The hospital for those condemned to the galleys, where they had occasion to practice the works of mercy most abundantly, for the patients were as miserable in soul and body as could be imagined. The sisters sent to work there required extraordinary graces of God to succeed in this attempt. Monsieur Vincent wrote a set of suggestions for them to help in this difficult assignment. (4) The hospital of the Petites Maisons, where they looked after, cleaned and fed those poor who were unsound in mind. These were numerous, both men and women, some of whom were sick, but all were treated most considerately and charitably. The administrators of this hospital acknowledged that the Daughters had put an end to many disorders, including the serious financial loss of the institution, but especially the lack of care of the patients themselves. The administrators were most edified and satisfied with their contribution to the welfare of the hospital. (5) The hospital of Name of Jesus, where these charitable women housed and cared for aged men and women.

Besides these hospitals in the city of Paris and all the parishes where they worked either in Paris or in other places in France, they served the poor in many other hospitals, such as those of Angers, Chartres, Chateaudun, Hennebont, Saint Fargeau, Ussel, Cahors, Gex, etc., and in Poland, in the city of Warsaw. In all these places they served the poor with much blessing from the hands of God. We will give here only one letter from Monsieur Vincent to Mademoiselle le Gras, discussing sending three Daughters to work in Poitou:

I pray that our Lord will bless our three dear sisters, and make them share the spirit he has given the saintly ladies who accompany
them, and who cooperate in his solicitude for the sick poor and for the instruction of children. O good God, what happiness for these good Daughters to go where they are sent, to continue the charity which our Lord displayed when he was on earth! How the heavens must rejoice at this! The praises they shall receive in the next life are admirable! With what holy confidence they will appear before the throne of judgment after so many holy works of charity! It seems to me the crowns and empires of the earth are but of clay in comparison with the merit and glory we confidently expect they will receive one day as their crown.

It remains only that, in the spirit of the holy Virgin, they travel and do their work, having her ever before their eyes and doing always what this most blessed Lady would have done in their place. I hope they will reflect above all on her love and humility. I hope they will be humble toward God, cordial among themselves, agreeable to all, and edifying to all who meet them. I trust they will be faithful to their morning prayers, if they can do so before the stage leaves, or along the way, if not. They must say their rosary, and carry some book of piety they might read. They should contribute to conversations which refer to God, but have nothing to do with worldly talk, especially with those who are too free. They must be adamant against any men who would strive to be too familiar with them.

After arriving at their destination, they should first visit the blessed sacrament, and then see the pastor to receive his directions in regard to the sick and the children of the school. They will do what they can to benefit the souls of the sick poor while they are treating their illnesses. They shall follow the orders of the charity officials, and be careful to esteem and practice their own regulations. They should go to confession every eight days. Following all these suggestions, they will see they have led a saintly life, and although they are but poor women upon earth, they shall become great queens in heaven. This is what I pray for to God.

Since in all the hospitals in which they served there were often a great number of sick and usually there were only a few sisters in each, the sisters were often overburdened. One of them wrote of this in a letter to Monsieur Vincent:

Monsieur, the work is overwhelming us, and we surely will succumb if we are not relieved. I am writing to you in the evening

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4. The original text of this sentence is shorter: "How they will go, with head raised, to the day of judgment."
5. CED 1:513-14.
while looking after two dying persons, because I have no opportunity to do so during the day. While watching at their bedside I am attempting to write. I say to one, "My dear friend, raise your heart to God, and beg his mercy." Then, I write a line or two of my letter, then go to the bedside of the other to say, "Jesus, Mary, My God, I trust in you." Then I return to my letter, and so I come and go, writing snatches to you, divided in spirit. I write to ask you most humbly to send us another sister to help us. 6

Monsieur Vincent, reading this letter, admired the spirit of this woman, who in her natural eloquence expressed her need so forcefully that she persuaded him to send some help.

What put the finishing touches to the charity of these good women was the work they undertook in obedience and with sincere affection, not only in the places of which we have spoken, but also in the hospitals of the armies to which their charitable and zealous superior sent them. There they took care of the wounded soldiers and other sick, such as at Rethel during its siege, and later at Calais during the siege at Dunkirk, where two of the sisters gave up their lives in their dedication to charity.

Monsieur Vincent recommended these good women to the prayers of his community on one occasion:

I recommend to your prayers the Daughters of Charity whom we have sent to Calais to care for the wounded soldiers. Four of them went, but two have died, the two most robust and strongest of the group have fallen under the burden. Imagine if you can, gentlemen, these four poor women among the five or six hundred wounded or sick soldiers. You can see something of the goodness of God and his providence, that in these times he has raised up such a congregation. Why? To help the poor in body and spirit, by saying a word or two to bring them to think of their own salvation, particularly the dying, to help them die well by making acts of contrition and trust in God. In truth, gentlemen, this is touching. Does it not seem to you to be a great thing that these women with such courage and resolution go among the soldiers to relieve them in their needs and contribute to their salvation? They go in face of enormous obstacles and despite such dangerous illnesses, and even in the face of death, for the benefit of these men exposed to all the dangers of war, for the good of the state.

We can see how much these poor women are filled with zeal for the glory of God and for assistance to their neighbor. The queen has done us the honor to write us to ask us to send others to Calais to

6. CED IV:389.
help the poor soldiers. Today, we sent four to help out. One of them,
about fifty years of age, came to see me last Friday at the Hotel Dieu
to tell me she had just heard of the death of two of her sisters at
Calais. She offered to go in their place, if I would agree. I told her
I would think about it. Yesterday she came to learn what I had
decided.

You see, gentlemen and my brothers, the courage of these
women, to offer themselves this way, and to offer their very lives
as victims for the love of Jesus Christ and the good of their neighbor.
Is that not admirable? As for myself, I do not know what to say,
except that on the day of judgment these women will be my judges.
Yes, these women shall be our judges, if we like them are not willing
to risk our lives for God. Since our own Congregation has a
connection with theirs, in that God used the Congregation of the
Mission to begin their congregation, we must thank God for all the
graces he has given them. We should pray that in his infinite
goodness he will continue his blessings in the future.

You can hardly believe how greatly God has blessed these good
Daughters, and how many places have asked for their help. A bishop
asked for sisters to staff three hospitals, another for two, and a third
asked also only three days ago, pressuring me to send some. But
how? We cannot, for we do not have enough. Just the other day I
asked a pastor with some sisters in his parish how they were doing.
I dare not report to you the good things he said about the sisters.
Some are better than others. It is not that they have no faults. Alas!
Who does not have some? But that does not prevent them from
showing mercy, that beautiful virtue of which it is said that it is the
nature of God to be merciful.

We too exhibit mercy, and we should do so for our entire lives,
corporal mercy, spiritual mercy, mercy in the countryside on our
missions, serving the needs of our neighbor, mercy in the house for
those on retreat here, and in regard to the poor, and on all other
occasions God presents us the opportunity. In a word, we should be
men of mercy if we wish to do the will of God, in all and by all.7

We should not omit mentioning something of importance here. Just as

7. CED XII:39-40. In 1654 and 1656, the queen appealed to the Daughters of Charity to care for
wounded and sick soldiers. After the Battle of the Dunes, June 14, 1658, which accompanied
the siege at Dunkirk, six or seven hundred wounded or sick soldiers were sent to Calais. Anne
of Austria who was present at these places was touched by what she saw, and she requested that
the Daughters of Charity be sent to help them. Saint Vincent chose four sisters for this mission.
See CED X:548-56. These events serve as the background to the saint's comments as reported
by Abelly.
the first missions given by Monsieur Vincent in the parishes of the villages gave birth to the Congregation of the Mission, so too the Confraternities of Charity which he organized in the parishes developed into the Company of the Daughters of Charity. These came about by no previous design but by the secret order of divine Providence. After God, the founding of these two congregations, their development, their usefulness, their regulations, and their customs, all came from the zeal, prudence, and piety of this wise founder. He saw them come to light from his own work, and developed them by his careful guidance in the sure ways of the holy Gospel. He consecrated both to the love of God and neighbor in an effective and practical way, embracing all the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. This is the road he himself walked. This is the path he traced out for the men and women he guided if they were to acquire the perfection of their state.

To see the relationship between these two congregations, recalling the spirit of the first Christians of the early Church, we will cite here a letter he wrote to a priest of his Congregation. The priest had wondered why the missionaries, with their rule of not taking on the direction of women religious, still accepted the guidance of the Daughters of Charity. Monsieur Vincent answered at some length, in a letter of February 7, 1660:

I thank God for the reactions he has inspired in you to my letter about religious. I am much consoled in seeing that you appreciate the reasons the Congregation has for not taking on this service, to be free to serve the poor more fully.

Since you are anxious to know why we undertake the care of the Daughters of Charity, even though by rule we do not accept the direction of women religious, I reply:

(1) I must say, Monsieur, that we do not have anything to do with the direction of religious. On the contrary, we praise those who give themselves to this service of these spouses of Christ who have renounced the world and its vanities to unite themselves to their sovereign lord. But what is praiseworthy for other priests is not expedient for us.

(2) The Daughters of Charity are not religious but lay women. They are members of their parishes under the care of the pastor where they have been established. If we have the direction of their houses, it is because God used our Company to help bring theirs to life. You are aware that the same causes which God uses to give being to things he uses to preserve them.

(3) Our little Congregation is consecrated to God to serve the poor, corporally and spiritually, and this from its very beginning. Also as it strives to work for the salvation of souls by the missions,
it has tried to help the sick by the Confraternities of Charity. The Holy See has approved this way of acting by its bull of confirmation of our Congregation.

Since the virtue of mercy has different aspects, the Congregation has exercised it in various ways for helping the poor. Think of the dedication to the convicts in the galleys or the Christian slaves in Barbary. Consider what was done in Lorraine at the time of its great trial, and later, in the ruined areas of the provinces of Champagne and Picardy, where we still have one of our members distributing alms. You yourself are witness, Monsieur, to the help we gave to the people near Paris, stricken by famine and the plague following the invasion of the armies. You played your part in this great work, and you were at the point of death. Many gave their own lives to conserve the lives of the suffering members of Jesus Christ, who is now their reward and one day will be yours as well. The Ladies of Charity of Paris are also witnesses to the grace of our vocation, in our working with them in the many good works they do, inside and outside the city.

All this being understood, Providence brought the Daughters of Charity into being to enable us to do by their hands what we could not otherwise do in serving the bodily needs of the sick poor, and saying a word or two of instruction and encouragement as helps to their salvation. We have the obligation to help them advance in virtue that they may carry out well their charitable services.

There is a difference between them and religious, in that most religious have as their goal their own perfection, but these women, like ourselves, are committed to the salvation and relief of the neighbor. In saying this I am not saying anything contrary to the Gospel, but in keeping with the practice of the early Church. Our Lord looked after some women who followed him on his journeys. We see in the Acts of the Apostles that they administered the distribution of food to the faithful and were regarded as an integral part of the Church structure.

If it should be said that it is dangerous for us to speak with these women, I would reply that we have taken care of that as best we can, by the directive not to visit them in their houses in the parishes without necessity and without the express permission of the superior. They too have a rule to make their cell a cloister and never allow men to enter.

I trust, Monsieur, that the way I have responded to your difficulties will satisfy you. 8

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Monsieur Vincent gave spiritual conferences to these eighty or a hundred women who served in the hospitals and parishes of Paris. He called them together to the house of their superior, and alerted them in writing of the topic to be discussed so they could make their mental prayer on this same subject. He ordinarily would ask several to speak, to prepare their minds for the spiritual message he was to give, and to share with the others the good thoughts God had given them. This helped these women see better the importance of a Christian and perfect life to which he hoped to lead them. He would end by speaking for a half hour, or sometimes for an hour or more. His talk was so suited to their needs and condition, so clear and persuasive that they retained most of what he said and became more interior and spiritual by practicing what he taught. The sisters collected more than a hundred of these talks of their good father which they read and reread, awaiting the day when they could be published for the benefit of those living far from the motherhouse.
CHAPTER TEN

The Assemblies of the Ladies of Charity of Paris

WE HAVE ALREADY spoken enough in Book One of the origins and progress of this devout assembly of Ladies of Charity of Paris. They have always recognized Monsieur Vincent, after God, as their founder and most prudent director. This chapter will serve merely to supplement what has already been said and will include some things that we feel should not be omitted.

We should remark first that these ladies came together to help the poor of the Hotel Dieu, but their charity was not limited solely to that work. By a singular grace from God, and through the help of their director, he led them to undertake several other important services for the glory of God, the service of his Church, and the salvation of souls. Besides what they did for the sick of the Hotel Dieu and for the orderly running of the hospital, they took in hand the feeding and education of the poor abandoned children of the city and suburbs of Paris. Previously, these children were utterly abandoned. Now they owed their lives and spiritual growth, and the possibility of leading a good Christian life and so their salvation, to the charity of these ladies.

They established the house of the Daughters of Providence to receive, educate, train and protect some young women. Were it not for this refuge they would have been in great danger, since there was nowhere else for them to go in the city of Paris.

God used these same noble ladies to lay the foundation stones of the General Hospital, as described in Book One. It was established at Sainte Reine, where the works of mercy owed their origin to the charity of these ladies.

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1. Ch. 29.
2. The Daughters of Providence were founded by Marie de Pollalion for the reform of wayward girls, and to provide a refuge for those whose virtue was threatened. Marie was the wife of Francis Pollalion, a gentleman of the king’s chamber. Widowed after only a few years of marriage, she then resigned her position as a lady of honor to the queen, and under the direction of Vincent de Paul, adopted a simple style of life, and dedicated herself to charitable works. She was one of the most active Ladies of Charity. Dressed as a simple peasant serving girl, she accompanied Louise de Marillac to serve the poor country people. With Vincent’s encouragement and help, she finally founded the work with the repentant girls. After her death on September 4, 1657, Vincent continued to help the work she had begun.
3. Ch. 45.
4. Sainte Reine, then in the diocese of Autun, but now in the diocese of Dijon. A popular place of pilgrimage at the home of Sainte Reine, virgin and martyr. A gentleman from Paris had the desire of establishing a hospital there, and asked for Saint Vincent’s support. Vincent successfully
They also contributed notably to the establishment and maintenance of several missions in foreign countries, in the isles of the distant Hebrides and in Madagascar. Their zeal extended even to the Indies, where they supported the sending of several missionaries. Besides, they contributed to paying the expenses of the bishops of Heliopolis, Beirut, and Metellopolis. With the blessing of the Apostolic See, these bishops set out for China and the Far East to work for the conversion of infidels and the building up of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

They worked with tireless charity at unbelievable expense during the recent wars, helping those afflicted by the scourge of war in the provinces of Lorraine, Champagne, Picardy, and many other places, as we shall see in the next chapter.

These virtuous ladies did all these vast projects and holy works with order, humility, discretion, zeal, and admirable perseverance, under the wise guidance of Monsieur Vincent. He conveyed his own spirit to this devout company and inspired in them the same fervor and charity with which he was so filled. We shall report here, as a permanent record of his direction, what he said in a meeting with these women in an extraordinary general assembly held in the home of the duchess of Aiguillon, their superior at the time. It was taken down in secret by one of the Missionaries who accompanied him on this occasion. The reader will be consoled to see the prudence and piety of Monsieur Vincent and his way of convincing the women of the assembly. In addition, the diversity and quantity of items covered by him show how much good he was able to do for and with them.

After invoking while kneeling the Holy Spirit by the hymn *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, he spoke to them as follows:

Ladies, there are three things we would like to speak about in this assembly. The first concerns the election of new officers, if you judge it appropriate. The second, a report on the works God has accomplished through the Company. The third, ladies, will be to consider the reasons we must surrender to the goodness of God so he may give us the grace to support and continue the good works we have begun.

The elections were discussed in the ordinary assembly last Friday, attended by the officers and some other ladies. The officers were of the opinion there should be new elections, but the others thought the officers should continue to serve until Easter. Since you, ladies, have the deliberative voice in this matter, we will vote at the
end of this conference to see if you prefer to keep your present officers or if we should proceed to a new election.

Concerning our present state of affairs, let us begin with the Hotel Dieu, if we may. We began our Company there and it is the foundation upon which it has pleased God to establish the other good works we are involved with. It is the source of all the other good we have done.

With these words he took in hand a report of the receipts and expenses, which he read aloud. It showed that the expenses of the food brought to the poor every day for the past year since the last general assembly amounted to 5000 livres, while the income was 3500 livres, leaving a deficit of 1500 livres. Then, resuming his talk, he continued:

This comes from the death of several of our members who have not been replaced by others. We have come together, ladies, to see if there are some ways we can assure the continuance of this work. It has now lasted for several years through the efforts of many, but mainly of God. He blessed it so that we have great reason to thank him.

Oh, ladies, how we should thank God for inspiring you to care for the bodily needs of these poor sick. The help you have given them has had this effect of God's grace in you, that you have thought of their eternal salvation. Most of them would otherwise never have done so, and so you have prepared them for a happy death. Those who have recovered would never even have thought of amending their lives, were it not for your efforts.

He then read the expenses of the help sent to Champagne and Picardy. From July 15, 1650 to the day of their last general assembly, 348,000 livres was sent and distributed to the poor. Since then, from the general assembly till today, 19,500 livres were sent, about the same as preceding years. He then continued:

This money was sent to feed the sick poor and to support around eight hundred orphan children, boys and girls, from the devastated towns. They were instructed in a trade, after having been clothed and educated, or taught how to serve some function in a household. Many pastors were supported in their ruined parishes who otherwise they would have had to leave for want of food. Lastly, the money was used to renovate to some degree several churches which were in such a ruined state you cannot even speak of them without shuddering in horror.

This money has been distributed to places in the towns and regions of Reims, Rethel, Laon, Saint Quentin, Ham, Marle, Sedan and Arras.
If you add to that the clothes, linens, blankets, shirts, albs, chasubles, missals, ciboria, etc., it comes to a large sum.

Certainly, ladies, we can only admire the great number of these items of clothing for men, women, and children, and even for the priests, not to mention the items for the pillaged churches. They were so damaged and reduced to such a poverty that the sacred mysteries could not have been celebrated in them without this aid. Without it, sacred places would have been suited for profane uses alone. If you had visited the homes of the ladies responsible for collecting used clothing you would have thought you were in a storehouse or in the shop of a prosperous merchant.

Blessed be God, ladies, for having given you the grace to clothe our Lord in his poor members, most of whom were in rags, and some children were as bare as my hand. The clothes of some women and girls were so scanty that no one with even the least bit of decency would have looked at them. All were threatened with death from the cold during the winter. How much you are obligated to God for having inspired you and given you the means to meet such pressing needs! How many of the sick have you saved from death! They were left by everyone, sleeping on the ground, exposed to the elements, and reduced to the last extremity by the soldiers and by the scarcity of the harvest. It is true their misery is not so great now as it was several years ago, and yet we continue to send about 16,000 livres a month.

Even now, in view of the danger the poor run of dying if something is not done promptly, encourage one another in your efforts to help them. However, because the times have improved this last year or two, the alms for their support have greatly fallen off. We still have nearly eighty churches in ruins, and the poor have to travel far to hear mass. Do you see where we are? We have to begin to work at this, trusting in God’s Providence for our Company.

Ladies, does not the recounting of these things wring your hearts? Are you not moved to thanksgiving to God for his goodness to you and to the poor afflicted ones? His Providence spoke to some ladies of Paris to help two desolated provinces. Does that not seem strange to you? History does not tell us of anything similar happening to the ladies of Spain, or Italy, or other countries. This has been reserved for you, ladies, who are here now, and to several others who have gone to God, where they have found a full reward for such perfect charity. Eight of your number have died in the past year.
And concerning these deceased members, O Savior, who would have told them the last time they came together that God would call them before the next general assembly? What reflections would they not have made upon the brevity of this life and the importance of spending it well? How much they would have appreciated the practice of their good deeds! And what resolutions they would have taken to give themselves more than ever before, to the love of God and neighbor, with greater fervor and greater effort! Let us give ourselves to God, in keeping with these sentiments. They are now in glory, as we devoutly hope. They realize how good it is to serve God and to help the poor. At the judgment they will hear the comforting words of the Son of God: “Come you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you, because when I was hungry you gave me to eat; when I was naked, you clothed me; when I was sick, you visited and served me.”

It is a fine thing, ladies, and for me too, to offer ourselves to God, to make ourselves worthy, as often as we have the occasion, of being among that happy number, and of having decided to do the good we would wish to have done, were this to be our last assembly. Just think, eight in one year! If you subtract the same number for each of the past years you would find the number remaining in the Company greatly reduced. At the beginning we had two or three hundred, but now we are reduced to a hundred and fifty. I recommend to your prayers these dear departed ones.

We turn now to the abandoned children, taken under your care. I see by the account of Madame de Bragelogne, your treasurer, that the receipts for the past year came to 16,248 livres, while the expenses were 17,221 livres. Looking at the number of these children in the care of nurses in the country or in the city, those who have been weaned, the older ones in trades or in domestic service, and those who remain in the hospital, it comes in all to 395.

It seems the number abandoned each year remains about the same, on the average about one a day. If you will, ladies, look at the order in this disorder. What great good you do in taking care of these little deserted creatures, abandoned by their own mothers to be brought up, educated, taught how to earn their livelihood, and to work out their salvation. Before you took up this work the canons of Notre Dame pressured you. Since this work was so complicated, you thought it out carefully and finally you took it up, recognizing it would be most pleasing to God, as has been borne out since.

Before that, it had never been known in the previous fifty years that a single one of these abandoned children survived, dying from one cause or another. It was to you, ladies, that God reserved the grace to save a large number and to enable them to live well. You taught them to speak and to pray to God. You kept them busy, each one according to each one’s own age or abilities. You looked after them, and guided them, correcting them in good time when required by their evil inclinations. They were happy to have fallen into your hands, and they would have been miserable with their own parents, who for the most part were either very poor or possibly vicious. You only have to see how they spend their day to see the fruits of your care. It is of such importance you have every reason in the world, ladies, to thank God for having confided it to you.

It remains for me to say a few words about renewing our dedication to these works of charity the mercy of God has brought to their present state. We will see their results only in heaven. We are obliged, I say, all of us here, enrolled in this holy militia, to continue and even augment our first fervor. Those not yet members of the Company should do what they can to support and develop these projects so much in keeping with what our Lord did, and recommended in favor of the poor.

The first motive for this is that your Company is a work of God and is not of human making. I have said before that others do not know how to achieve what you have done. God is involved, and in fact all good comes from God. He is the author of all these good works. Everything must be referred to the God of Virtue and the Father of Mercies. To what do we attribute the light of the stars but to the sun from which it comes? To whom do we attribute the idea of your Company but to the Father of Mercies and the God of all Consolation, who has chosen you as persons of consolation and mercy? God never calls anyone to a position if he does not see in her the qualities needed to fulfill the calling or if he does not plan to give her these qualities. God, then, by his grace has called you and brought you together. His grace brought you to these three types of service, and not your own will, but the goodness he put in you. We surely then must stir up by every means the charity within us. What? God honored me by calling me, and I must hear his voice. God has destined me for these charitable enterprises and I must devote myself to them.

He did not will, ladies, that you should, like Simeon, see the Savior, but he does will that you hear his voice when he calls, if not blindly,
like Saint Paul, at least with joy and tenderness. To hear the call and not respond would be most unworthy of the grace of your vocation. I have seen the beginning of the work, I have seen God bless it. I have seen it begin by a simple meal brought to the sick, and now I have seen how it has grown in a way so mightily for his glory and for the advantage of the poor. Ha! Now I must support it. What hardness of heart, should there be anyone who would not contribute to the development of such great works as these.

The second motive is the fear that these works of charity might come to ruin at your hands. This would be, beyond doubt, a great disaster, ladies, all the greater because the grace of God has called you to this service which is something rare and extraordinary. It has been eight hundred years or thereabouts, since women have had any public office in the Church. There used to be what were called deaconesses. They preserved order among women in the churches and taught them the rites then in use. At the time of Charlemagne, by a secret decree of Providence, this custom stopped, and from that time women were allowed no public service in the Church. This same Providence today spoke to some women among us to serve the sick poor in the Hotel Dieu. You responded to this invitation, and soon other women joined the first ones. God then led them to become the mothers of abandoned children, the directors of their hospital, and the distributors of the alms of Paris for the needy in the provinces. These good souls have answered with ardor and constancy, by the grace of God. Ah, ladies, if all these works were now to fail in your hands, this would be a great sorrow. What desolation! What shame! What must we think of such a tragedy? How could it come about? Let each of you ask herself the question, is it I who have helped bring about the failure of this work? What is there in me that has made me unworthy to sustain it? Am I the cause of God withdrawing his graces? Without doubt, ladies, if we examine ourselves well, we fear we may not have done all we could to support this enterprise.

If you consider well its importance, you will cherish it as the apple of your eye or as the instrument of your salvation, and you will work for its advancement and perfection with the help of God. You will bring other women of your acquaintance too, for otherwise you will earn the reproach made to the man in the Gospel who began to build but was not able to finish. You will have laid the foundation of a work but you will have left it at that. This is all the more important if you consider your building as an ornament of the Church, and an asylum for the forsaken. If by your fault it were to
fail, you would remove from the public a source of much edification and from the poor a great comfort.

The brother assigned to distribute your charitable alms told me, “Monsieur, the grain you sent to the frontiers has saved the lives of a large number of poor families. They had no seed saved for sowing and no one would lend them any. The fields were lying fallow, with many regions deserted because the people had either died or had fled away.” Twenty-two thousand livres worth of grain have been distributed during a single year to get them through the summer and the following winter. You can see, ladies, from the good you have accomplished how great would be the suffering should you allow your project to fail.

The third motive you should have for continuing these holy works is the honor they give to our Lord. How is this? Because we honor him by entering into his sentiments, appreciating them, doing what he did, and carrying out what he has ordained. His most cherished wish was to care for the poor: he cured them, consoled them, helped them, and urged others to do the same. This was his delight. He himself willed to be born poor, to live among the poor, serve the poor, take the place of the poor, up to the point of saying that the good and evil we do to them he considers as done to his divine Person. How could he show more tender love for the poor? What love could we have for him if we did not love those he loved so tenderly? So much so, ladies, that to love him well we must love the poor. To serve him well we must serve them. To honor him as we should, we must imitate him in his care for the poor. Considering all this, what motives there are to inspire us to continue these good works, and to say from the bottom of our hearts, yes, I commit myself to God to care for the poor and to support the charitable enterprises established in their favor. I will help them, love them, and recommend them to others. After the example of our Lord, I will love those who are consoled, and will cherish those who are visited and helped. If their gracious savior is honored by our imitation of him, how much greater is our honor for being likened to him? Does it not seem to you, ladies, that this is a powerful motive to renew in yourselves your first fervor? For myself I think that we ought to offer ourselves today to his divine majesty that he would inspire us with his charity, so that henceforth we could say of us all that it is the charity of Jesus Christ that compels us.

These are motives enough for those who love God. It seems you might say to me, Monsieur, we are indeed persuaded of the impor-
tance of continuing what we have begun, for it is the end that crowns the work. We understand that we must not only serve God and help the poor, we must do so as best we possibly can. We now are seeking the means to do this, for we are resolved to do what we can to support these works and to continue our assemblies.

The first means I would present to you, ladies, is to have an interior and continuous desire to work at your own spiritual advancement and to live in as great perfection as possible. You must always have the lamp within you burning brightly, by which I mean the ardent desire to please the Lord and to obey him, or in a word, to live as true servants of God. Those in these dispositions will surely attract the grace of God, and our Lord himself, into their hearts and actions. Living this way, you will persevere in good works, because the Lord of mercy will continue to live in you. The maxims of the world are not in keeping with these thoughts. Nothing can so deprive you of the spirit of God as to live worldly lives, and the more a person does so, the more unworthy she makes herself to possess Jesus Christ. The Ladies of Charity ought to avoid this spirit of the world like they do the plague. They must declare themselves as members of the party of God and of charity. I say they must be entirely committed to God. Were someone just a bit given to this other spirit, it would not work out. God will not suffer a divided heart, he demands all. Yes, he demands all. My consolation is to be talking to souls that are fully given to him, separated from all that could harm them in his eyes.

Formerly, when we had to choose among those who wanted to enter our Company, we selected those who avoided games, the theater, or other dangerous pastimes, and who were not vain, but wished to be devoted to the service of God. We must have the faith to know that God will give his grace only to those who avoid high society and are united to him in their aspirations, prayers, and good works in such a way that everyone can see they are committed to serving God.

O Lord, are there many to be saved? There are two doors which open to the other life, one straight and narrow, the other wide open. Few go by the first, but many by the second. The saints tell us the large number refers to the worldly who follow their own uncontrolled appetites. These earn the anger and curse of God, according to what Saint Paul says: “If you live according the flesh you shall die.” O Lord, what a threat! We have reason to fear that we will

be of that number, and be condemned. Yes, if we do not walk the narrow way.

The ladies who give themselves to God to live as true Christians by the observance of the commandments of God and who keep the rules of justice; the married, who live in obedience to their husbands; widows who live as widows; mothers who take care of their children; governesses who look after the serving boys and girls; all these, and those besides who do what the blessed bishop of Geneva advised, joining those companies and confraternities who strive to practice virtue, and do some exterior works of mercy or piety, leading to the mortification of the passions and to the love of God: these are the women who walk the way that leads to life. Join this company or confraternity, then, ladies, if you are not already enrolled, for it is committed to God alone to do only his will, and to serve him. If one’s concern is the husband, do it for God; care of the children, do it for God; working at some business, do it for God. This is the way to pass by the narrow gate that leads to salvation.

Our Lord dealt with three groups, his apostles, disciples, and the people. These last heard him for a while, but after a time returned to their homes. This forced our Lord to ask his disciples: “And you, do you want to abandon me too?” There are those, ladies, who see you following our Lord by the narrow way of the love of God and neighbor, and wish to imitate you. It seems such a beautiful way of life, but they find it difficult and turn away. Among those who followed our Lord, there were both women and men. They were faithful even to the cross. They were not apostles but in a middle state, and they later began caring for the temporal needs of the apostles, and contributing to their ministry. It is desirable that the Ladies of Charity take these devout women as their model.

There is no position in the world that equals the calling you have. You support the workers of the Gospel but also the needy faithful. This is your office, ladies, your portion. Bless God for his having called you to this work, and live as holy women. Have the tenderness and devotion of the blessed Joanna, the wife of Chuza, and the others of whom Saint Luke speaks. This is how you will enter the narrow gate that leads to life. You all will be saved, for as Saint Thomas says, no one can ever be lost in doing works of charity.

Let us put ourselves within the enclosure of this virtue, coming to the feet of our Lord, praying him to expand in our hearts his light and warmth that we may bring to a happy conclusion the work we

have begun. Not to do tomorrow what we have done today is to slip back. In the spiritual life we must always go forward, and we do so by not putting aside the good we have been doing. May it please God to preserve you in your good deeds, to live as true mothers who never abandon their children! You are the mothers of the poor, just as our Lord is their father. He made himself like to them and came to preach to them, help them, and recommend them to our care. Do the same, visiting the holy places, I mean the hospitals, and virtuous persons, the members of your own Company, and this will be a sign of your own predestination. It will be a way for you to advance in virtue, a way to attract others, and the chosen way to make your Company prosper, to the glory of God and the edification of the people.

Another way to preserve your Company is to moderate your activities, for a proverb says, he who holds on to too much grasps poorly. It has happened in some other companies or confraternities, in several communities, and even in entire orders, that by attempting too much they have succumbed under the burden. Virtue stands in the middle, between the opposite vices of excess and defect. For example, if under the pretext of charity you would try to do every possible good for another, allowing nothing to pass when you see you could do something, you would fall into a vice, just as much as the person who would do nothing would fall into the opposite vice. Theologians tell us it is just as dangerous to fail by excess as it is by defect. Ordinarily the devil tempts charitable people to excess in their charity, knowing that sooner or later they will succumb. Have you never seen persons too loaded down who fall under their burden? It could happen that a whole company could fail, if it attempts too much.

We see this ourselves in the fourteen ladies of the Company who go two by two to the Hotel Dieu to visit and console the sick poor. They do much good and others bring some small refreshments every day to the sick. The work is divided up to console and instruct the poor women and sick girls in their beds or wherever they happen to be. It has been difficult to keep up this visitation, and there are some things hard to overcome, so that it has become difficult to get volunteers for this service.

The help given to the border regions and the invaded provinces is great. It is almost unknown that a group of women would gather together to help regions of the country reduced to such extreme necessity, by sending large sums of money and food and clothing
for a large number of poor men and women of all conditions and ages. We have never before read of such persons joining forces to do what you ladies have done. We must be careful not to overburden ourselves, and so perhaps leave aside some important work, and allow the whole enterprise to fail. Someone said to me recently, God is all powerful, but we are weak. We seek virtue by doing more. But virtue is not found simply in doing more. Saint Peter converted five thousand in a single sermon, while our Lord preached several times and perhaps converted not a single person. He even said himself that those who believed in him would do more than he himself had done. He willed to be more humble in undertaking less. A loaded stomach does not digest well. A porter will lift his load first before putting it on his shoulders to see if it is too heavy for him.

We should pray to God to determine our burden, for then if our strength fails, he will help us carry it. May he give the grace to the Company to be reserved, to take up nothing but what comes from him. How much time passed before taking up the care of the abandoned children? How many requests did we have to take up that work! How many prayers, pilgrimages, and communions were made, to help us decide. You are aware, ladies, of all this, and you are aware, too, that we should always use the same caution before accepting any new obligations through an indiscreet zeal. When you see you are doing the things well that God has asked of you, have courage and bless his infinite goodness. Give yourselves to these duties with perseverance, but do not presume to try to do more.

Consider the feeding and instruction of the poor in the Hotel Dieu, the care and education of the foundlings, looking after the spiritual and corporal needs of the criminals condemned to the galleys, the help given to the frontier regions and the ravaged provinces, the contributions to the missions, to the Far East, the Hebrides, and the south. These, ladies, are the responsibilities of your Company. What? Have these ladies done all this? Yes, and for more than twenty years God has given you the grace to begin these and carry them out. Do not undertake anything further unless you consider it carefully, but do what you are now doing better and better. This is what God asks of you.

A third means of preserving the Company is to continue to invite other women of piety and virtue to join you. If new members do not come, your Company will decrease in numbers and become too weak to fulfill the heavy burdens you bear. It has been proposed
that some time before their death, a sister or a friend be induced to enter the Company, but perhaps this would not appeal to everyone. A good means, ladies, would be if each of you would be persuaded of the great good in this world and the next for souls to exercise the works of mercy, spiritual and corporal, in the way you do. This undoubtedly would lead others to join you in your practice of charity, in consideration of the good you do. This conviction would have the effect of mutually encouraging each other, and this in turn would influence others by your words and example.

“Allow me, ladies, to ask your opinion.” Turning to Madame de Nemours he said, “Madame, has anything come to your mind, that would be a means to help the Company?” After she spoke, he asked others. Most replied they thought the means he had suggested were perhaps the best, and others added the following:

1. Those who die must be encouraged beforehand to leave legacies in favor of the poor. Monsieur Vincent replied: “this is a helpful suggestion, which could be made to rich people when they are visited in their sicknesses.”

2. Be more exact in observing the daily prescribed exercises. Monsieur Vincent added, “This is good advice to attract persons, and this exactitude leads to a holy life which also attracts.”

3. Each lady of the Company ought to make up the deficit of the Company, as much as she is able.

In conclusion, Monsieur Vincent said: “It remains only to find out if you prefer to have your officers remain. If not, we will proceed to a vote.” He asked each one’s opinion, one after the other, with the unanimous result that the officers should continue, and therefore there was to be no election at that time.

He ended the assembly with these words:

Let us thank God, ladies, for this assembly. Let us pray that he will accept the new sacrifice we will offer him on our knees, in giving ourselves to him with our whole heart, to receive from his infinite bounty his spirit of charity. Let us pray also that he give us the grace, to each one of us in particular, and to the Company in general, to respond to his designs upon us. May he raise up this ardent spirit of charity of Jesus Christ, that we may merit to be filled with it, and that having spread this charity abroad in this world he may make us worthy to be received by his Father eternally in the world to come. Amen.9

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Help Given by Monsieur Vincent to Different Provinces
Devastated by Wars

SECTION ONE

Help Given to Lorraine

WE CAN SAY without exaggeration that we will see in this and in the following two sections a masterpiece of charity seldom equaled. In these pages we speak of the help given by Monsieur Vincent to an almost limitless number of persons reduced to the last extremity by the horrors of war. The pages of history tell us of many examples of the extreme misery caused by the scourges of war. They speak of the ruin and desolation of cities, provinces, and sometimes of entire monarchies. In none of these pages do we read that amid the terror and confusion of armies, and surrounded by the violence and plunder of the soldiers, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy were widely practiced. This was not in favor of a privileged few, but to entire peoples, and not for some days, but for a long succession of years. During these times charity triumphed in those very places where justice had no voice, legitimate authority was no longer recognized, and the laws and ordinances of the sovereigns were trampled under foot.

Indeed, we must insist that in all past ages nothing of the kind had never been seen. If something similar was done, historians have not recorded it, possibly because they would find it so hard to believe, or because they would think the written records of such events were exaggerated. What we have to recount here was so public and evident, and seen over several years by a large number of witnesses, that there is no fear these accounts will be received with hesitation. Should some incredulous persons contradict what we shall say, whole provinces would rise up against them in a parade of witnesses. They owe their lives and what they value more even than life itself, to the charitable help Monsieur Vincent gave them.

The one who conceived this help by the inspiration of God, who began it, continued and sustained it over many years, and who inspired so many others to participate in these undertakings with the same charitable spirit with which he was so filled, was no other than this same Vincent de Paul.
God was pleased to enlighten, strengthen, and give him such an abundance of grace that he created a masterpiece of charity, exceeding all human industry and power.

We will begin this chapter by speaking of Lorraine, which first felt the effects of war, and which the violence of the scourge completely ruined. This province was formerly one of the most densely populated, the most fertile, and the most pleasant of all Europe. It had good rulers, and the people were faithful to them, with mutual esteem, so unlike what often happens with other countries. For many years it enjoyed peace, both inside and outside its borders, with all the blessings which flow from years of prosperity.

The abundance of worldly goods and pleasures is more apt to attach the hearts of men to earth than to raise them to heaven. Among the satisfactions and comforts of life only rarely would vices and sins occur which Providence would purge by way of the waters of tribulation. This began in 1635 with three scourges, if not at the same moment, at least one after the other, that is, plague, war, and famine. These came as a deluge, destroying everything almost, afflicting the entire province. A large number of inhabitants were stricken, and nearly all the survivors fled for their lives. Priests, nobles, and leading citizens escaped, seeking elsewhere the supports of life they could not find in their own homes. Desolation reached such a point that those who remained had to eat the half-rotten carrion of beasts to survive. They themselves became the prey of wild animals. From all sides starving wolves tore to pieces and devoured women and children, even in full daylight, and in the sight of everyone. Some of these poor creatures, grievously torn by the wolves, were carried half dead to the hospitals of the towns, where priests of the Mission tended them. The wolves were so hungry for human flesh they would come into the towns and villages. They entered houses whose doors chanced to be open. They would come into the larger cities at night through breaks in the walls, and carry off women and children, and whatever else they could find.

God is ever mindful of his mercy, even in this life in the midst of the most rigorous carrying out of his justice. Wishing to give some consolation and help to this sorely tried people, he raised up Monsieur Vincent. When he learned of the desolation of the province, he was deeply moved. He responded like another Moses in prayer: “Why, O Lord, has your anger risen against your people? Please let your vengeance cease.” Moved by a spirit of compassion and charity, he offered himself to the divine majesty to do what he could to relieve and console these poor people, reduced to such extremity. Shortly after, divine Providence sent him someone with money to be used for this purpose. He immediately sent it to the priests of his Congregation in Toul, in Lorraine, and these charitable missionaries began

1. Exod 32:11-12.
at once to use the money to house, feed, and tend the sick poor collected from the streets. He sent other priests and brothers from the house of Saint Lazare to help out in other cities in Lorraine, especially Metz, Verdun, Nancy, Bar le Duc, Pont a Mousson, Saint Michel, Luneville, and others. The following letter, dated December 1639, testifies to the help he gave to the poor of Tours:

Jean Midot, doctor in theology, archdeacon, canon and vicar general of Toul, the see being vacant, certifies and affirms that the priests of the Mission living in this city have continued with much edification and charity to help, clothe, feed, and doctor the poor for these past two years. They cared for the sick, sixty of whom they brought to their own house, and a hundred more in the suburbs. Second, they helped by their alms many other poor persons, ashamed of their condition but brought low by a great need, and who fled to this city. In the third place, they accepted into their home or brought to the Hospital of Charity many sick and wounded soldiers of the king, who were fed and cared for to the great edification of all people of good will. In testimony of which we have signed, and countersigned, and sealed.

The priests of the Mission who lived in Toul sent this certification to Monsieur Vincent, asking him to obtain similar statements from the other cities they had served. He answered: "It would have been better not to have asked this. It is enough that God knows what has been done, not to mention the poor themselves, without any need for more testimonials."

The same help was given in the city of Metz, where incredible poverty affected huge numbers of people. Sometimes four or five thousand gathered at the gates of the city, both men and women all ages. Often in the morning ten or twelve would have died during the night. Some of the older girls were tempted to sell themselves rather than starve. Several religious communities were on the verge of breaking their cloister to seek food. When Monsieur Vincent was alerted to these extreme needs he sent help to save the lives of some and the honor of others, in an effort to help all. The city magistrates wrote the following letter to Monsieur Vincent, in October 1640:

Monsieur, you have made us your debtors in coming to the aid of the extremely poor, discouraged and sick, and especially of the poor monasteries of religious of this city. We would be remiss in

2. Francois du Coudray and Leonard Boucher, missionaries stationed at Toul, gathered forty poor persons into their own house, and the helped 150 outside of the city. Vincent feared that the missionaries would succumb under the weight of their labors both physically and financially. He wrote to them to preserve both themselves and their resources. Du Coudray responded: "Monsieur, either send me help, recall me, or leave me to die among the poor." See CED 1:538.

3. Also spelled Saint Mihiel.
our duty if we did not thank you for the help you have given us. We can assure you that the alms you sent have been used exclusively for the needy poor, and especially the religious deprived of all human help. The first received nothing of their usual income because of the war, and the others received none of their usual alms, since conditions here are so bad. We must ask you, Monsieur, as we do most humbly, to continue the help you have been giving to each group. This will undoubtedly be most meritorious for those who contribute to this cause, and to you, Monsieur, who direct this effort with such prudence and efficacy, to the glory of God. 4

The missionaries living in Verdun wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

In 1639, 1640, and 1641 we had sometimes five or six hundred poor persons to care for. At other times we had at least four hundred to whom we gave bread each day, and divided them into two groups, the younger and the older, so we could offer instruction with greater effect.

We gave soup and meat to some fifty or sixty sick poor each day, and some money to others, as the need arose. We helped about thirty poor who were ashamed to come with the others. Many peasants and farmers came asking for alms, and we gave them bread whenever they came. We clothed the naked, and gave shoes to those who needed them most.

One missionary wrote to Monsieur Vincent that he had been greatly edified and consoled at the admirable patience and unbelievable resignation he experienced among the sick and the dying. "Oh, Monsieur, how poverty has led many to paradise! Since coming to Lorraine, I have seen more than a thousand poor people die, and they all seemed perfectly ready. How many intercessors in heaven for their benefactors!" 5

In Nancy, the following distributions were made to various categories of poor during these same years:

(1) Those in good health, four or five hundred, were given soup and bread each day. Instructions were given to prepare them to confess and communicate, usually once a month. In their charity, the missionaries housed some of these poor people in the same place they themselves lived.

(2) Besides, they kept in their own home some sick persons, whom they fed and nursed. Other sick were taken to the Hospital of Saint Joseph. Each one received linens and some money, but only after they had gone to confession and received communion. Usually thirty or forty other sick

4. CED II:131-32.
5. CED II:216.
persons were kept here or there in the city, to whom they gave bread, soup, and meat each day.

(3) They helped two types of people in financial difficulties, about fifty of the middle class, to whom they gave a certain amount of bread each week. The other group numbered around thirty upper class people, either priests or laity, much in need, but ashamed of their poverty. They received some money each month, depending on their condition and need.

(4) They took particular care of many poor nursing mothers, to whom they gave money, bread, flour, and soup.

(5) They took care of the sick and wounded soldiers, paying the doctors and the cost of the medicines. They even had received some inexpensive private remedies which brought great relief to many of the sick.

(6) They gave linens and clothes to all the poor who needed them. When they gave shirts to them, they would take the soiled ones to have them washed, to be given in turn to others. This would sometimes amount to six or seven dozen at a time.

We are not able to cite the most touching letters Monsieur Vincent received from this desolated province on the extreme affliction of the people, or on the extraordinary help they had received, because most of the these letters have been lost. He sent them to various places, to influence the rich to contribute, or to show those who already had contributed what good use their money was being put to. The following letter is what a virtuous priest wrote to Monsieur Vincent on this matter:

After I saw the letter from Lorraine, which you sent to Monsieur N., and who then showed it to me, I must tell you I could not read it without tears. Sometimes I shed these tears in such abundance I could scarcely continue reading. I praise our good God for the paternal providence he has exercised toward his creatures, and I beg him to continue his graces to your priests, whom he uses in this holy work. I must tell you in closing how much I mourn the deaths of some of your charitable workers who have gone to heaven. They have helped so many others attain it also, while miserable me, I remain a useless beast, wandering over the earth. 6

The first priests of the Mission who went to Pont a Mousson in May 1640, sent word to Monsieur Vincent they had helped four or five hundred poor people. These had suffered so much from their poverty that the missionaries had never before seen people so deserving compassion. Most were from the country, and some were so emaciated and frail that they died as they ate.

The four pastors of the village had given them a list of the sick and the most miserable of the embarrassed poor. They had visited the sick, and found

6. CED II:37.
several in their last agony. Some religious sisters were in great need. In the regions surrounding the city wolves had been attacking people, and this frightened a number from coming to seek food, particularly the children of ten or twelve years of age. A good and charitable pastor offered to bring some relief to them, aided by the alms given by the missionaries.

There were usually around a hundred sick in this town, and fifty or sixty shy or embarrassed poor, besides the many other good people reduced to hunger. The missionaries helped all in the other localities, in the same way we have described. They distributed bed linens and clothing, particularly to the sick, and shoes and tools to those still able to work, to enable them to earn their bread by their own labor.

The missionaries daily distributed food to several hundred other poor refugees. To all they offered a sort of mission to dispose them to make a good general confession, which many did in a Christian manner.

The mayor, magistrates, police and city council of Pont a Mousson wrote to Monsieur Vincent in December 1640, to thank him for his help, and to beg him to continue his help:

The fear we have that shortly we will be deprived of the charity your goodness has bestowed on the poor of our city causes us to write to you, Monsieur, to ask you to please continue to help us as before, for our needs are as great as they have ever been. For the past two years the harvest has failed, and the animals have eaten our crops in the fields. The constant garrisoning of the troops has brought us all to begging. These motives, agonizing but true, should stir your tender heart, already so full of love and pity, to continue your kindness toward these five hundred poor. They would surely die quickly if your kindness to them would come to an end. Please do not allow this to happen, but give us the leftover crumbs from the other towns. You will not only be exercising charity toward the poor, but you will be snatching them from death and earning the eternal gratitude of the undersigned.7

Around the same time one of the priests of the Mission went to the town of Saint Mihiel, writing to Monsieur Vincent as follows:

Once I arrived here, I immediately began to distribute alms. I found a large number of poor, not all of whom I could help, for more than three hundred were in direst need, and three hundred more required assistance. Monsieur, I tell you the truth. More than a hundred seemed to be mere skeletons covered with skin and so frightful I would not have been able even to look at them if the Lord did not strengthen me. Their skin was like polished marble, and so

7. CED II:145-46.
shrunken that their dry teeth appeared in their open mouths. It was the most appalling thing I have ever seen. They looked for roots in the fields to cook and eat. I very much recommend the great misery of these poor people to the prayers of our Company. Some young women die from hunger, and I fear that some among them may fall into even greater disaster than anything merely temporal.8

In another letter of March 1640, he wrote again:

At the last distribution of bread, we helped 1,132 poor, not counting the many sick, with food and medicine. They all pray for their benefactors with such a sense of thanksgiving that many cry from emotion. Some rich people react the same way. I do not believe that these people, for whom so many prayers are being offered to God, will die. The authorities of the town praise this charity, publicly admitting that many would have died without this help, and acknowledging the debt they owe to you. Just recently a poor man from Switzerland abjured his Lutheran heresy on his deathbed, and after receiving the sacraments died a Christian death.9

In this same year, 1640, Monsieur Vincent sent one of the leading priests of the Congregation10 to visit all the missionaries working at distributing alms in Lorraine. He was to suggest ways of carrying out this charity, and also to ascertain the regions of greatest need. He wrote to Monsieur Vincent from Saint Mihiel:

I must tell you, Monsieur, of the admirable things I have seen in this town which you would scarcely believe if you did not see them with your own eyes. Besides all the poor beggars, already mentioned, the greater number of inhabitants of the town, the nobles above all, endure such hunger as you can scarcely imagine. What is worse, they cannot bring themselves to ask for bread. Some do, but others prefer to die rather than beg. I have spoken myself to some of these people who could not refrain from weeping as they spoke of this situation.

Another unusual thing happened. A widow had nothing for herself or for her three children. When she saw herself threatened with starvation she skinned a snake, put it over the coals to be roasted, and ate it for want of anything else. Our confrere here heard of this, and brought something for her.

No horse dies in the town, no matter from what cause, without being grabbed and eaten. Not three or four days ago I saw a woman

8. CED II:24.
9. CED II:35.
at the public distribution of bread. Her basket was filled with some of this tainted meat which she was trading off for bread with some of the other peasants.

A young woman was thinking of selling what was most precious to gain a bit of bread, and was looking for an opportunity to do so. God be blessed and thanked, she found none, and now is out of danger.

Another deplorable case concerns the priests. By God’s mercy they all lead exemplary lives, but they suffer the same lot as the others, with no bread to eat. A pastor living a half league from here is reduced to pulling a plow, joining his parishioners in the traces in place of horses. Is it not deplorable, Monsieur, to see a priest and a pastor reduced to such a state? You do not have to go to Turkey to see priests condemned to hard labor. We see this at our very doors, brought about by the troubles of the times.

Our Lord is so good, Monsieur, it seems he has blessed Saint Mihiel with a spirit of devotion and patience. Amid their extreme lack of temporal things, the people seem avid for spiritual things. We see up to two thousand persons attending the catechism lessons, a lot for such a small town, where most larger houses are deserted. The poor are careful to attend and to receive the sacraments. The missionary here is greatly esteemed, for he teaches and cares for them. Those with a chance to speak to him consider themselves fortunate. He shows great charity and devotion to his work for all the people of the region. He was so overworked by the number of general confessions, and his lack of proper nourishment, that he has fallen sick.

I am amazed how with so little money coming from Paris he has been able to give so much to so many. I see in this a manifestation of the goodness of God, who has multiplied his resources. He reminds me of what the holy Scripture says of the manna in the desert: each family received the same amount, which turned out to suffice for all, regardless of the number being fed. I see here something similar, for our priests who have more poor people to help do not give any less and yet want for nothing.\footnote{CED II:58-59.}

In 1643, the lieutenant, provost, council, and governor of the city wrote the following letter to Monsieur Vincent:

The governors and citizens of Saint Mihiel give you a thousand thanks for the care and help you have rendered by the alms and other helps you have given to the sick poor, and by helping to have a part
of the garrison taken from the city. We ask you most humbly to continue your concern and your alms since this poor and desolate city has as great a need now as ever before.

By your care, a countless number have been saved who otherwise would have perished. If your help is curtailed or even stopped altogether, we must expect a large part of the inhabitants will die from hunger, or at least will leave to seek their living elsewhere. We need hardly mention the help you have given to enable the convents to survive, or the help given to so many good people, even some of the upper class, in their sickness and need. We cannot praise enough the efforts and care you have taken of us. We pray you most earnestly to continue these same helps for so many sick and needy, which undoubtedly will be a source of great merit and honor before God.12

The poor of Bar le Duc, eight hundred or so inhabitants and refugees, received help in both soul and body. This was a great help to the surrounding countryside and especially the city. Previously a large number of poor were to be found there. They slept on the streets, at the crossroads, and in the doors of the churches. Tradesmen were dying of hunger, of the cold, and of their illnesses and misery. One of the priests of the Mission wrote to Monsieur Vincent in February 1640 that at each distribution of bread he had to give clothes to twenty-five or thirty poor people, and then he added:

In a short time I have clothed, by actual count, two hundred sixty, but I cannot measure the spiritual good of general confessions and holy communion, in the space of the past month alone. I have counted more than eight hundred. This Lent I hope we will be able to do even more. We give the hospital a pistole and a half every month for the sick we send there. Since among them around eighty are sicker than the others, we give them soup, bread, and some meat.13

The visitor sent by Monsieur Vincent passed through Bar le Duc in July 1640. He sent this report:

First, every week our missionaries give some linens, especially shirts, to many poor. The missionaries collect the old ones to have them cleaned, so they can be given to others, or to be cut into bandages for the wounded or the ulcerous.

Second, they themselves take care of some persons suffering from a scalp disorder. There used to be about twenty-five, but only about twelve are now sick of this ailment. This disease is common

12. CED II:369-70.
throughout Lorraine, in all the other cities of the province. They are well taken care of, and an effective medicine has been found which our brothers have bought.

In the third place, our priests here spend a large amount to help peasants on the move. Our Missionaries in Nancy, Toul, and other places often meet whole groups of peasants whom they help to reach France, since this town is a gateway to the kingdom. The priests give them food and some money for their journey. Of the two priests who worked in Bar le Duc, one died from his exertions, and the other became grievously sick. Father Roussel, the rector of Jesuit college where the priests stayed, wrote to Monsieur Vincent in 1640:

You have heard of the death of Monsieur de Montevit, whom you sent here. He suffered much from his lengthy sickness, but I can truly say I have never seen such great patience and more resignation than I did with him. We never heard him say a single word that showed the least impatience. All his speech reflected a rare piety. His doctor said he had never treated a sick person more obedient and simple than this man. He received communion often during his illness, including the two times he received communion under the form of viaticum. His agony, which lasted eight days altogether, did not prevent him from receiving extreme unction with full awareness. He relaxed when he received this sacrament, and lost consciousness immediately after. Finally he died as I would wish to die, and as I ask of God.

The two chapters of the city joined the funeral procession, as did the Augustinian Fathers, but the greatest honor of his burial was the seven hundred poor who accompanied his body to the grave, each with a candle in his hand. Most of them wept as if they were burying their own father. The poor owed him this tribute, for he had contracted his illness in treating them and in alleviating their sufferings. He was ever among them, and breathed no other air but the tainted air of this sickness. He heard confessions with such devotion, morning and afternoon, that I could never prevail upon him to take a day off. He was buried near the confessional where he caught his sickness, and where he gathered the beautiful bouquet of merits he now enjoys in heaven.

Two days before his death his companion fell sick with a high fever which put him in danger of death for eight days. He has

14. CED II:59-60.
15. Germain de Montevit, born at Cambemont, near Coutances. He was already a priest when he entered the Congregation at age twenty-six on April 19, 1638.
recovered and is now well. His sickness came from overwork, and too much attention to the poor. On Christmas Eve he went twenty-four hours without eating or sleeping, leaving the confessional only to say mass. Your priests are docile and flexible in everything, except when it comes to taking advice about taking a bit of rest. They think their bodies are not flesh and blood, and that their whole life ought to be lived in a single year. The brother is a young man of exceptional piety.\textsuperscript{16} He served the two sick priests with as great a patience and devotion as anyone could wish for.\textsuperscript{17}

We will not speak of all the other villages, towns, and hamlets in Lorraine which received the same charitable help from Monsieur Vincent’s missionaries. He could rightly be called, after God, the father of the poor, and the provider of this desolate province, for it would be too long and repetitious. We will cite only a letter from the authorities and members of the council of Luneville to Monsieur Vincent:

\begin{quote}
Monsieur, for the several years this city has been stricken with the plague, war, and famine, which have reduced it to the extremity in which it now is. In that time, we have received nothing but hardships from those from whom we expected to receive help, and cruelty from the soldiers, who have taken by force the little bit of grain we had. It seemed that heaven had only punishment reserved for us until your sons in our Lord arrived here with their alms. They greatly relieved the effects of the ills we suffered, and rekindled our hope in the mercy of God. Since our sins provoked his anger, we humbly kiss the hand which punishes us, and receive with sentiments of extraordinary thanksgiving the gifts of his divine goodness. We bless those instruments of his infinite mercy, and those who have helped us by their gracious charity, as well as those who contributed and those who distributed these alms. We bless you especially, Monsieur, whom we believe to be, after God, the principal author of the charity we have received. To say these alms will be well used in this poor place, where all have been brought low, is something your missionary can tell you better and with less bias than we can ourselves. He has seen our desolation. We acknowledge before God the eternal obligation we have incurred, by your having come to our aid in our sorry state.\textsuperscript{18}

When the missionary who carried the alms to Lorraine returned to Paris, he reported to Monsieur Vincent and to the Ladies of Charity that a large
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\textsuperscript{16} David Levasseur.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{CED} II:23-24.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{CED} II:257-58.
number of noblewomen and others with no means of livelihood, nor relatives
to help them, were greatly harassed by the officers of the garrison. This led
Monsieur Vincent, who agreed with the Ladies of Charity, to instruct the
missionary to bring to Paris all those women who wanted to come, to avoid
the danger in which they were. When he announced this offer in the various
towns he passed through, a large number came to take advantage of the
opportunity. He had to choose those in greatest danger. He managed, over
some time, to bring a hundred and sixty with him to Paris, all at his own
expense. Several small children accompanied them. They were received at
Saint Lazare, and placed in families as servants. Monsieur Vincent directed
the young girls to the home of Mademoiselle le Gras. She made their
presence known throughout the best families in Paris, so those who wanted
chambermaids or servants might apply to her for their services. In this way
they were placed in honorable positions, saved from the dangers to which,
unhappily, they were exposed.

Besides those women and children, the missionaries in Lorraine arranged
for several men and women to leave their region and find a new life in France.
Most of these poor people came in droves to Paris, where they were
welcomed and helped by Monsieur Vincent, both corporally and spiritually.
To prepare them to make a good general confession and to live a Christian
life he had them brought together in the town of La Chapelle, a half league
from Paris, where he gave a mission in 1641. Other groups which came the
following year were likewise given a mission, and both groups were helped
to become established, and to find work in their trade. 19

Among these refugees was a blood brother of a canon of Verdun. The
canon had had to leave his cathedral church because it was unable to provide
him with anything else but the bread of sorrow. Lately he had been forced
to till the soil to have enough to live on, but the hard work and poor food
had finally made him ill. He was no longer able to do anything, and would
soon have died unless he received some help. He ended the letter he wrote
to his brother with these words:

In truth, I do not know where to turn for help except to you, my
brother, who have had the good fortune to fall into the hands of one
of the saintliest and most charitable men of our unhappy times. By
your intercession, I hope I may receive some help from Monsieur
Vincent.

His hope was not misplaced, for the charitable father of the poor provided
the help he needed in his extreme situation.

19. The people of Paris marveled at this charity and said: "Monsieur Vincent must be from Lorraine
himself, since he does so much good for the poor people there." Yet his charity also extended to
Paris, where each day the poor came to receive bread.
Among the many refugees in Paris were several nobles, and others of standing, even entire families. They were not accustomed to earning their living, and even less to asking for help, and they could not survive at all. Monsieur Vincent undertook to help them, not with the alms destined for the poor of Lorraine which he sent faithfully to the thousands of poor still there, but by another organization which God inspired him to form. He gathered several lords and other people of substance living in Paris, and these he brought together once a month at Saint Lazare. He took up a collection, to which he also contributed, to amass a great enough sum to support these distressed nobles. Each month he distributed alms according the number and needs of the people in each family, and this continued for seven or eight years. We will say only a word in passing about this, for we have already spoken of this enough in Book One.20

Several other persons of all classes came from time to time to Paris from Lorraine of their own accord to seek help from Monsieur Vincent. He became known as the universal refuge of this poor region. Father Pierre Fournier, the rector of the Jesuit College in Nancy, said in a letter written in 1643:

Your charity is so great that everyone has recourse to you. You are regarded here as the asylum of the needy poor. This is why some have come to me, so that I could recommend them to you, and so that they too could experience your goodness. There are two here now whose virtue and character recommend them to your charitable favor.21

A Missionary at Saint Mihiel came across fourteen Benedictine nuns who had come from Rambervilliers in the hope of reestablishing themselves. Because of the extreme famine, however, they were not able to do so. Upon the advice of Monsieur Vincent and the Ladies of Charity the Missionary brought them to Paris for help. God permitted, in time, that they settled in the faubourg Saint Germain, where they have since remained. From that time on they spread abroad the good odor of their saintly lives, to the great edification, not only of the faubourg, but of the entire city of Paris. They later took the name of Religious of the Blessed Sacrament.

The distribution of bread, soup, and meat ended in Lorraine in 1643. Monsieur Vincent recalled most of the Missionaries he had sent, since few sick persons remained, and the poor had received some relief from the oppression of the soldiers. The peasants were able once again to take up their ordinary work. The alms did not completely stop, but continued for five or six years for the help of the most unfortunate. Monsieur Vincent saw to it

20. Ch. 35.
that these alms were distributed in most of the other towns of Lorraine, such as Chateau Salins, Dieuze, Marsal, Moyen Vic, Epinal, Remiremont, Mirecourt, Chatel sur Moselle, Stenay, and Rambervillers. By this means large sums helped not only a great number of the bashful poor, the ruined middle class, and the noble families who, unable to liquidate their wealth, were in a deplorable state, but also all the religious communities of men and women. These funds were given yearly, depending on the needs of each house. Some received three or four hundred livres each quarter, and others five or six hundred, depending on the number of persons involved and their needs. The missionary assigned to distribute alms obtained a receipt from each house for the alms given.  

Besides these sums, more than four thousand bolts of cloth were bought in Paris and brought to these ruined cities for the benefit of the poor religious, both men and women, the poor nobility, and several other persons and even entire families covered only in rags. The queen herself was so touched by their pitiable sight that she sent the funeral tapestries and cloths after the death of the late king, and the duchess of Aiguillon did the same.

The religious houses were given entire bolts of cloth to enable the members to sew their own habits. Those who lacked them received veils and shoes. Usually around a hundred persons, men and women, boys and girls, were brought back from each trip into the provinces. We should remark that these distributions of money and clothes continued for nine or ten years. This happened not only in the towns of Lorraine, as we have already said, but upon orders of the queen and under Monsieur Vincent’s direction, in several other devastated towns conquered by the king’s armies. Among these were Arras, Bapaume, Hesdin, Landrecies, and Gravelines. The priest assigned to distribute alms went from one parish to another and from house to house. He was accompanied by the pastor or some other cleric assigned by him to help distribute these clothes and money according to the needs of each, so as not to be deceived about those most in need of help.

The sums distributed in the two regions of Lorraine and Artois came to one hundred fifty or sixty thousand livres, for the relief of the extreme poverty of twenty-five towns and surrounding areas, and of a great number of other smaller villages and hamlets. This undoubtedly was an effect of the infinite love of God with which the heart of Monsieur Vincent was so filled, especially in favor of the most afflicted of the people. It was shared by the

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22. Brother Mathieu Regnard was almost always in charge of these distributions, of which more than fifty receipts dating from February 1647 still exist. He was born at Brienne le Chateau in the diocese of Troyes. He gave his account of his work at the request of Vincent’s successor, Rene Almeras, in view of the anticipated canonization of the founder. Brother Regnard always attributed his own safety and the incredible success of his mission to the prayers and merits of Vincent de Paul. Brother Regnard died at Saint Lazare, October 5, 1669.
late king and the queen, and by others of standing and virtue, and particularly
by the Ladies of Charity of the city of Paris whom he had brought together
for these great enterprises. All these persons were inflamed by the divine
fire burning in the heart and words of this saintly priest, and provided him
with the alms to be distributed under his care. He used his missionaries for
this purpose, following in everything the suggestions made by these Ladies
of Charity in their meetings, or the orders from the queen, so that all would
be done in keeping with the intentions of the donors.

The fruits of these alms were, as we have seen: (1) To preserve the life,
and restore health to an almost infinite number of persons made listless and
discouraged by hunger, cold, nakedness, and other miseries. (2) The instruc-
tion of many, preparing them to receive worthily the sacraments and to lead
a good life. (3) Help to the dying to enable them to die well, in the grace of
God. (4) To rescue from a shameful lot a large number of young women
reduced to extremity by their pitiable condition. (5) To enable several
religious communities to preserve their cloister, their vows, and their rules,
and to continue the sacred liturgy in their houses, for without external help
most would have been forced to wander among the people, seeking to
preserve their lives with great danger to their conscience. We learn this from
several of their letters, but it would weary the reader to report all this in detail.
What has already been said will suffice to give as much information as
needed.

We will add only one additional extraordinary piece of information
among several others which God permitted in the carrying of large sums of
money in both Lorraine and Artois. This had to do with the brother23 who
made more than fifty trips, carrying up to twenty-five or thirty thousand
livres of gold, never having it stolen, although he had to cross through areas
frequented by many soldiers, and had to avoid many robbers. He even
managed to escape several times while traveling in a group that was attacked.
Traveling with others on another occasion, he fortunately, by a secret design
of divine Providence, became separated from them, for they were immedi-
ately afterward robbed, while he suffered no such indignity. Several times
also he would go through a wooded area filled with robbers or wandering
soldiers. As soon as he heard them or saw them coming he threw into the
bushes his wallet, which ordinarily he carried in a beggar’s pouch, and then
walked fearlessly right through them. Sometimes they searched him. When
they found nothing, they allowed him to go on his way, but of course, as
soon as they left, he would return to find the wallet he had tossed into the
bushes.

One evening, he met some robbers who took him into the woods to

23. Mathieu Regnard.
frighten him. When they found nothing on him, they still wanted him to pay fifty pistoles ransom. He replied that if he had fifty lives he could not ransom them with one Lorraine gros. He was let go.

On another encounter with some Croatians in open country he had time only to slip off his beggar’s pouch and to cover it with some weeds, leaving only a few sticks to mark the spot. He returned at night to find his money, but was able to locate it only the next morning. In sum, God gave him a cleverness, and favored him with a special protection, either to avoid the robbers, or to escape from them when he was taken. Even the queen was delighted to hear of his adventures, and several times had him recount his experiences and the simple stratagems he used in avoiding difficulties. For his part, he always attributed his good fortune to God’s protection of him, and because of his faith and the prayers of Monsieur Vincent.

SECTION TWO

Help Given to the Provinces of Picardy and Champagne

In 1650, by a secret judgment of God, the scourge of war which for many years had afflicted the greater part of Europe began to be felt in France. It continued to do so until the concluding of a general peace in 1660. Among all the provinces of the country, Picardy and Champagne were most exposed to the storm. They endured its violence longer, particularly after the enemies of the state besieged the city of Guise, and the king’s army advanced to its relief. The two armies confronting each other at the frontiers caused extreme desolation. When they withdrew they left in their wake many soldiers weakened by hunger, and suffering from many illnesses. Many wandered in search of food, but others fell by the roads from sheer weakness, dying miserably, deprived of all human consolation. Some witnesses to this sorry spectacle brought the news to Paris. Everyone rejoiced there at the retreat of the enemy, but few troubled themselves about the poor abandoned soldiers who died so miserably, deprived of all help.

Monsieur Vincent, so sensitive to the sufferings of the neighbor, was touched to learn the pitiable state to which these poor people were reduced.

25. The Peace of the Pyrenees, signed November 7, 1659.
He spoke to Madame de Herse, much given to works of charity, and immediately sent two of his priests with a horse loaded down with provisions. They carried around five hundred livres in cash in the hope of saving those dying from hunger or readying those beyond hope for a happy death. Once the Missionaries arrived on the scene they found such a great number of these poor people dying along the hedgerows and the roads that they quickly exhausted the provisions they had brought. They had to go to the nearest villages to purchase more, but were astonished to find the same conditions prevailing in the villages as in the countryside. They quickly wrote to Monsieur Vincent to alert him to the desolation of the entire province, and that the help they had brought was completely inadequate in the face of such pressing needs. The armies had gathered in all the crops, and had left the people with scarcely the shirt on their backs. Most of the country people had left their homes to seek some means of livelihood in the towns, but no one gave them any help, for even the merchant class lacked bread. They gradually weakened, and many died terrible deaths. Once Monsieur Vincent received these letters, he alerted the Ladies of Charity of Paris, and arranged with them to send other missionaries with greater alms than before.

To understand better the magnitude of these works of mercy we must realize the extreme misery of the people in these two provinces during the ten years or so when the armies from one side or the other pillaged and ravaged, spreading desolation everywhere. We can see this better by citing the letters these same Missionaries wrote to Monsieur Vincent from various places, telling him of what they had seen with their own eyes, to provide an outlet for his great charity. This is what they wrote, from Guise, Laon, and La Fere:

It is a great pity to see such a vast multitude of sick everywhere we turn. Many suffered from dysentery and fever. Others are covered with sores or a purple rash, or with tumors and boils. Many are swollen, either in the head, the belly, or the entire body. These troubles come from eating only the roots of plants during most of the year, or spoiled fruit, or some bread made from barley husks, scarcely fit for dogs. We hear nothing but pitiable cries for something to eat. Sick as they are they travel in the rain and by wretched roads two or three leagues distant to have a bit of soup. Many live in the villages deprived of confession and the sacraments. They do not even have anyone to see to their burial. This is so true that not three days ago, in the village of Lesquielle, near Landrecies, where we had gone to visit the sick, we found a dead man. His body was half eaten by wild animals who had entered the house. Is it not a
strange desolation to see Christians so neglected in life, and even after their death?\textsuperscript{26}

They wrote in another letter:

We have just finished visiting thirty-five villages near Guise. We found there nearly six hundred people whose misery is so great they throw themselves upon dead dogs and horses after the wolves have satisfied their hunger. In the city of Guise alone are more than five hundred sick living in cellars or caves, more suited to house animals than men.\textsuperscript{27}

Many poor people in Thierache for many weeks have not had bread to eat, not even the bread made from the husks of barley which is reserved for the better-off. They eat only lizards, frogs, and wild grasses.\textsuperscript{28}

In several ruined towns, the leading inhabitants are in a shameful necessity, their pallid faces showing how great their need is. They must be helped privately, like the nobility in the countryside. Seeing themselves without bread and lying upon straw, these people suffer the shame of not being able to beg for what is needed to live. And besides, from whom can they ask help, since the war has spread its misery everywhere?

What is even more lamentable is that these people on the frontiers not only lack food, wood, clothes, and blankets, but lack a shepherd and any spiritual comfort. Most of their pastors are either dead or sick, and the churches are ruined and sacked. In the diocese of Laon alone are a hundred or so churches where mass cannot be celebrated, since they are so ruined. We do what we can, but the task is endless. We must come and go without stopping, always at risk from the hunters, to help the more than thirteen hundred sick we have under our care in this single district.

Several convents live in great poverty, and the nuns suffer from hunger and the cold. Their choice is to die in their cloister, or to break it to seek enough to sustain life.\textsuperscript{29}

Writing from the diocese of Soissons, the priest there said:

We have visited the poor of the town, and the other villages of the valley, where the affliction we have seen surpasses anything you have been told. To begin with the churches: they have been profaned, the blessed sacrament trampled under foot, the chalices and ciboria carried off, the baptismal fonts broken, the furnishings

\textsuperscript{26}CED IV:97.
\textsuperscript{27}CED IV:136. Abelly joined the following several letters into one.
\textsuperscript{28}CED IV:214-15.
\textsuperscript{29}CED IV:107.
stolen. In this small region are more than thirty-five churches where it is impossible to say mass.

Most of the local people died in the woods while the enemy took over their houses. Others returned to die under their own roofs. We see only the sick wherever we go. More than twelve hundred, besides the six hundred enfeebled ones, live in the thirty ruined villages in the area. They sleep on the ground, or in houses half destroyed and open to the sky, without any help. We find them living with the dead, and small children at the side of their dead mothers.\textsuperscript{30}

Those from Saint Quentin wrote as follows:

How can we help the seven or eight thousand starving poor, the twelve hundred refugees, the three hundred and fifty sick who should be fed with soup and meat, the three hundred families of the city or country too ashamed to beg, the young women on the verge of selling themselves, or to prevent what happened the other day to a young man about to kill himself, and who would have done so if someone had not prevented him, the fifty priests whom we should help feed before all the others? Just the other day one was found dead in his bed. He preferred to die rather than ask for himself what he needed to stay alive.\textsuperscript{31}

The suffering of the poor cannot be expressed. If the cruelty of the soldiers drove them into the woods, hunger brought them back, and they have now taken refuge here. There are nearly four hundred sick, and the town cannot help, forcing many to leave, only to die along the roads. Those who stayed are in such rags they rise from their rotting straw only to seek us out.\textsuperscript{32}

The famine is so great we have seen men eating the soil, grazing on grass, chewing on the bark of trees, tearing the rags covering their bodies to swallow them. What we could not dare say, if we had not seen it with our very eyes, horrible as it is, they eat their own hands and arms, and die in their despair. We have three thousand poor refugees, five hundred sick, not to mention the poor nobility and the poor of the city too ashamed to beg, whose number increases every day.\textsuperscript{33}

The Missionaries sent to the region around Reims and Rethel wrote as follows:

No words could tell nor ears believe what we have seen since we

\textsuperscript{30} CED IV:106.
\textsuperscript{31} CED IV:106-07.
\textsuperscript{32} CED IV:257.
\textsuperscript{33} CED IV:300.
first came here. Churches are profaned, with what is most sacred and most adorable not spared. The fixtures have been stolen, the priests either killed, tortured, or put to flight. All the houses are destroyed, the harvest carried away, the fields lying idle, with neither tillers or sowers. Famine and death are everywhere. The dead are not buried, but left for the wolves to devour. The remaining poor are reduced to searching the fields for bits of wheat or oats which serve to make a kind of bread that is almost like dirt, so unhealthy nearly everyone is sick. They take shelter in caves or in huts where they sleep on the bare ground, without coverings unless they happen to have a sheepskin. Their faces are black and disfigured, and yet their patience is admirable. Entire districts are deserted, since those who have escaped death have themselves left to seek food. Only the sick remain, or orphans, or poor widows in charge of little children. They are all exposed to the rigors of hunger, cold, and all sorts of difficulties and misery.  

This, then, was the state to which the people of these two great provinces had been reduced, especially the four or five dioceses closest to the frontiers. This happened for nearly ten years, from 1650 until the publication of the general peace treaty in 1660. This great desolation was not the same everywhere, nor at the same time, except at the beginning. During the remainder of the time, however, these conditions prevailed in one or another part of Picardy and Champagne.

From the beginning Monsieur Vincent sent ten or twelve missionaries to travel everywhere and attempt to save the lives of thousands of persons reduced to the last extremity. They divided the territory among themselves, some in the diocese of Noyon, others in Laon, or Reims, or Soissons. Each one took responsibility to serve the needs of their particular district. They set up centers for the daily distribution of soup and bread, food, jams, medicines, clothes, linens, shoes, tools, seed, church furnishings, money, and so on.

The Daughters of Charity were also sent to several places, especially to look after the sick poor. Since their alms and distributions were needed so widely, the expenses during the first years mounted to ten, twelve, or even sixteen thousand livres a month. The price of commodities was so high and the misery so extreme and widespread that, without this help, nearly all these poor people would surely have perished.

Since spiritual help is no less important for souls, the missionaries devoted themselves with great care and almost indefatigable zeal to the poor. Since they could not be everywhere at once, they had the aid of some other priests who helped out in those parishes with no pastor.

34. CED IV:144-45.
Besides the Missionaries employed in the various dioceses, Monsieur Vincent sent a qualified priest to oversee the entire enterprise. He traveled everywhere to see the actual needs of the poor, and those places which needed help most desperately. He selected persons of piety and charity in the various towns and villages where the Missionaries could not remain, to take charge of the distribution of food and other alms to the poor. This supervisor regulated the flow of aid, increasing or decreasing it according to circumstances as the number of poor and sick increased or diminished in each place. He reported all this faithfully to Monsieur Vincent by letter. He in turn kept the Ladies of Charity of Paris informed. These ladies met each week with him, to advise and agree on what could be done to further this holy enterprise.

SECTION THREE

The Remarkable Effects of the Help Given to the Provinces of Picardy and Champagne

After seeing the extreme misery of these two provinces and the deplorable state to which the people had been reduced, it would be well now to consider the blessings with which God favored the charitable help Monsieur Vincent obtained for them. We can see the happy results of the alms of the Ladies of Charity and all the other virtuous contributors, and the unbelievable efforts of the missionaries who distributed them. It would not be possible to report all, but the little we will say will suffice to judge all the rest.

A month after Monsieur Vincent began to help, he received the following letter:

The food given as a result of the alms sent from Paris to the sick at Guise, Ribemont, La Fere, and Ham has saved the lives of more than two thousand poor people. They would otherwise have been driven out of the town where they had taken refuge, and would surely have died in the fields, with no help, either spiritual or corporal.

The religious women of La Fere and other towns realize that the help they received saved their lives. Thus, they pray unceasingly for those responsible for such great blessings.

35. Rene Almeras.
36. See CED V:72, 92, 94, 103, 115, 119.
37. CED IV:88.
Other letters written from Laon, Soissons, and other places may be cited as well.

We have given out the church ornaments, and the blankets and clothes for the sick. We cannot tell you what an effect this has had in the frontier regions, where people talk about practically nothing else except this charitable help. Our helpers have taken such care of the sick that by God's grace in the single city of Guise, of the five hundred sick we had, over three hundred have recovered. In the forty villages around Laon, so many have returned to perfect health that you can scarcely find six poor people unable to work at their own livelihood. We have felt obliged to help them in this, by supplying axes, billhooks, and spinning wheels to enable the men and women to work on their own with no burden on anyone, as long as no other misfortune occurs to reduce them again to miserable conditions.

We have distributed the seed sent from Paris. It has already been sown, and God has blessed the sowing. These poor people support their ills with greater patience when they have hope the harvest will bring them some relief.

We provide two hundred livres each month in support of several poor pastors, and as a result all the parishes of the deanery of Guise, Marle, and Vervins have been taken care of. Mass is celebrated in each parish at least once a week, and the sacraments are being administered. 38

In letters written from Reims, Fismes, Bazoches, and other surrounding areas, we read:

We do not have words enough to express our thanks. We are well aware the hand of God has struck this province, turning its fertility into sterility, and its joy into tears. Its once-populated villages now have only deserted hovels. Were it not for the charitable people inspired by God in Paris, there would not remain any trace of the people caught in this storm. The saved owe their lives to these generous people.

The thirty-five villages of this valley and its surrounding areas give a thousand thanks to their benefactors. We have distributed items for the churches, and clothes to the poor. Many of the sick have recovered and are now able to earn their own living.

We have held a meeting of the local pastors, during which we distributed to the twenty-three most needy the four hundred livres sent to us from Paris. This will enable them to survive and reestab-

lish their parishes, which otherwise they would not have been able to do. 39

Letters were written from Saint Quentin and surrounding areas on the same topics, of which we give several extracts:

We cannot tell you how many sick have been cured, how many in affliction have been consoled, how many poor people have been rescued from despair by your help. They would otherwise have been lost in both the country and in the towns.

Alms you sent from Paris during Holy Week enabled us to rescue several young girls from imminent danger of losing their virtue. We spent our Lent in the country places in over a hundred and thirty villages to help the poor or to see that others help them both corporally and spiritually. We have given forty pastors ten livres each month, enabling them to remain in their parishes to carry out their pastoral duties.

We used your gift to buy seven hundred livres worth of sickles, flails, and winnowing baskets and other tools to enable the poor to earn their living by working on the harvest. Our oats have come up well, thanks be to God and to the seed you sent, giving us hope for a good harvest and relief for the coming winter. 40

These letters were written in 1651. The following were written in 1654 from Saint Quentin, Laon, Reims, and other places:

We are threatened by roving bands of robbers, but we have visited more than a hundred villages. We have found older people and children, nearly naked, and almost frozen with the cold. Women are in despair, nearly paralyzed by the cold. We clothed more than four hundred, and gave them hemp and spinning wheels. The help we began to give to the pastors has continued. After we brought them together by deaneries we saw they were almost despoiled of everything. We gave clothes and cassocks to them, and supplied church items to them, and missals. We helped repair the roofs and windows of their churches, to protect the sacred host from the elements and to prevent the wind from blowing it away during mass. This is why we now have the holy sacrifice of the mass celebrated in a large number of churches and parishes where the people receive the sacraments, which otherwise would be deserted and abandoned. 41

Besides the four hundred poor who have been clothed, we

40. CED IV:181.
41. CED V:87-88. Abelly has joined the two following fragments with this one.
discovered in the region of the city of Laon nearly six hundred orphans under twelve years of age, in pitiable nakedness and need. The alms from Paris have enabled us to clothe and help them.\footnote{CED V:118.}

Despair had brought many girls of good families living near the frontier, to the greatest danger. We thought the best remedy was to remove them from the site of greatest danger, and so we began to bring them to the community of Daughters of Saint Martha in the city of Reims. There they were taught the fear of God, and put to some useful work. We now have thirty of these young girls in this charitable home, all daughters of gentlemen of the region. Some had to be hidden in the cellars for a time to avoid the insolence of the soldiers. The expenses of this charitable effort and of bringing others to places of security are great, for besides paying for their board we had to supply clothes for them. We hope, however, that the charity of people which began so well will continue, and even increase.\footnote{CED V:95.}

The Missionaries had to go from one town to another after they had cared for the most pressing needs of the priests and the churches, helped the poor, removed young girls to safe havens, seen to the care of the orphans, and provided means of earning their own livelihood to those capable of working. In order not to leave the sick or those likely to become so unattended, they set up an organization in each locality to care for them, depending on the virtue and fidelity of some charitable persons to whom they gave some money and medicines, which they renewed from time to time. In the many towns with ruined and abandoned hospitals, the missionaries worked to put them back into operation, and received many patients at the expense of six or seven sous per day for each one. They were careful to pay this sum regularly on orders from Monsieur Vincent, and by the generosity of the Ladies of Charity of Paris who supplied the funds.

In the city of Rethel the hospital could not receive all the many sick soldiers and peasants. More than seven hundred were sent to the hospital of Reims. Since the number of those sick increased and the expenses mounted greatly, it was thought advisable to have the brothers of the Congregation, together with some priests, bring certain medicines, especially some powders compounded by the infirmarian of Saint Lazare for dysentery, fevers, and some other ailments. God blessed these medicines so greatly that those who used them thought they were almost miraculous, for they hastened the cure of a large number of sick, who before were at the point of death. On occasion these medicines would work their wonders in twenty-four hours or thereabouts.
Not content to help the living, Monsieur Vincent extended his concern even to the dead. The following single example will suffice to show this. After the battles which took place in Champagne in 1651, near Saint Etienne and Saint Souplet, more than fifteen hundred enemy remained dead on the field of battle, prey for dogs and wolves. Once he learned of this, Monsieur Vincent sent one of his Missionaries to supervise the burial of the decomposing corpses, using local labor for the purpose. He managed so well with the three hundred livres at his disposal that he was able to bury them all, delivering the living from a horrible spectacle and the polluted air. This good priest himself wrote about these events:

We have finished today what Jesus Christ recommended to us in his Gospel, to love and do good to our enemies. We have given decent burial to those who had stolen our goods, ruined many of our people, and who beat and outraged them. I consider myself happy to have been able to obey your orders in a matter explicitly recommended in holy Scripture. I must say, however, that there was some difficulty in collecting these corpses spread over a large area, especially because of the thaw which developed near the end. We can see how God favored our work, by the great cold wave that occurred. If we had to do this service in the warmer weather we could not have had helpers for a thousand ecus, and yet it cost us only three hundred livres in all. These bodies which will one day share in the resurrection are now enfolded anew in the womb of their mother. The whole province is indebted to the charitable contributors to this good work, not to mention the crown God has prepared for them in heaven as a reward for their virtue.

We ought not omit mentioning the help Monsieur Vincent gave to the poor Irish Catholics, exiled from their own country by Cromwell. Out of necessity they had to enroll in the army. Two regiments of these soldiers suffered much in the war at Bordeaux. The following year they were sent to the region around Arras, and after serving in these two campaigns retired to Troyes. They arrived there in a sad state. They brought with them more than a hundred and fifty orphans and a large number of poor widows, barefooted and covered only in the rags they had been able to salvage from those killed in the wars. This desolate army walked toward Troyes, gathering for their food only what the dogs themselves would disdain.

When Monsieur Vincent was informed of these conditions by the priest of his Congregation stationed there, he alerted the Ladies of Charity of Paris, and sent a priest of his household, originally from Ireland, to go to their relief.

44. Edmond Deschamps.
45. CED IV:143-44.
The girls and widows were taken to the hospital of Saint Nicolas for lessons in spinning and sewing. The orphans were given special care, and each one clothed and helped. At first six hundred livres was sent from Paris, with many clothes and other things so badly needed. This aid continued from time to time, as the needs developed. The timely help given to these poor exiles lifted their saddened spirits. It prepared them to receive the instruction and exhortations of the missionaries who spoke to them in their own language twice a week in Lent, to prepare them for communion at Easter. Since nothing is stronger than good example, his devotion to these poor people aroused the charity of the townspeople, not only toward these poor strangers, but also toward everyone else in their town.

After three or four years of help to the two provinces of Picardy and Champagne, at the cost of nearly three hundred thousand livres, things began to improve for the people because the armies moved away and because they had received help. Monsieur Vincent recalled most of his priests, leaving only a few to continue their help until the signing of the general peace treaty. These few priests continued to help the poor, to help in the repair of the churches, and to assist the priests and pastors. Moreover, one of those who remained, following the advice he received from Monsieur Vincent, formed a Confraternity of Charity of a certain number of the more charitable and better situated of the merchant class. They were to care for the sick, orphans, and other abandoned poor, under the guidance of some virtuous priests. He formed these associations in several towns, especially Reims, Rethel, Château Porcien, La Fere, Ham, Saint Quentin, Rocroi, Mezieres, Charleville, Donchery, and other places, after first having them carry out these services to the poor. By his guidance and the regulations he left them, he enabled them to continue this good work for the relief of the poor.46

We would add to what we have said only some expressions of thanks, given in letters written to Monsieur Vincent by some of the leading persons of the places which had been helped. We will cite only a few, to confirm the truth of what has already been said.

Father Rainssant, canon regular of the order of Saint Augustine and pastor of the town of Ham, wrote:

The missionary you sent to this region has left me to look after the assembly of our pious citizens in favor of the poor. He left me

46. One of the missionaries remaining in Picardy after the conclusion of the peace was Brother Jean Parre. He was one of the main and most devoted distributors of Vincent's charity in the devastated provinces. For two years, Vincent wrote him weekly. These letters, filled with charity and prudence, furnish details on the distribution of the alms sent from Paris. The brother let no opportunity pass without soliciting help for the great needs of the region which he knew of. He was born at Chatillon in Dunois in the diocese of Chartres. He entered the Congregation, April 16, 1638. His death date is not recorded.
grain and money to feed and keep the orphan girls who are taught a skill to help them earn their own livelihood. I teach them catechism, while a religious sister of the hospital teaches them to pray, and has them attend mass every day. They live together in the same house.

All the sick of the town are well cared for. A good doctor visits and prescribes all that is needed. We are careful to see that nothing is lacking. Our ladies are devoted to this service. I would never have dared hope to see in this poor town of Ham what I now see with great consolation and admiration, due solely to the divine and heavenly Providence of our Lord. Just recently we regained a poor girl from the hands of the heretics. She is now doing well. This motivated a Huguenot servant to come to me to be converted, seeing the care we take of the poor and the charity we show to the sick. We have instructed him enough, and in a few days he will make his abjuration.

This same missionary of yours has left me something to help the poor orphan boys and girls, and the sick poor of the villages which depend on our town of Ham. He has obtained two good and virtuous pastors to help me in this until his return. We owe all this good work to you, Monsieur, as the prime mover, after God. 47

Monsieur de la Font, lieutenant general of Saint Quentin, wrote the following letter on the same topic:

The aid sent by the grace of God and your care to this province and so carefully distributed by those you commissioned, has given life to thousands of people reduced by the scourge of war to the last extremity. I must render you most humble thanks for all these people. We saw last week, during the movement of the troops, up to fourteen hundred poor refugees in this city fed each day from your alms. We still have more than a thousand, not counting those in the countryside, with nothing to eat except what is given them from your charity. This misery everywhere is so great no one remains in the villages, since there was only straw to lie upon. Those previously the most affluent were unable to find enough to live on. Some who once owned more than twenty thousand ecus now need a piece of bread, and have gone two whole days without eating. I am obliged by my position and by the sights I have seen, to beg you humbly to continue to be the father of this region, to save the lives of so many poor. Although they are languishing and dying, they are helped so worthily by your priests. 48

47. CED V:333-34.
48. CED V:377-78.
Monsieur Simonnet, president and lieutenant general of Rethel, expressed his thanks in these words:

We may observe in the charity you show to us the original form of true Christian devotion, since in the primitive church the Christians had but a single heart, and would not allow any of their number to suffer the effects of poverty without coming to their aid. You, likewise, Monsieur, looked to the needs of the poor with such methodical zeal, using the priests of your Congregation, that you sent them to all the surrounding area. The poor there had been reduced to eating field grass and even eating dogs, as I have seen with my own eyes. These priests have saved the lives of an innumerable multitude, and have consoled and comforted others in their last agony. All this has been the fruit of your charity. 49

Monsieur de Y, canon and later archdeacon of Reims, wrote the following letter:

I am happy to write to you to thank you in the name of the poor of our area for your generosity to them, for without your help they would have died from hunger. To express the gratitude they have, I must tell you these poor people use the little strength they have to raise their arms to heaven, to call down on their benefactors the graces of the God of Mercy. The poverty of this province cannot be accurately described. Everything that has been said is inadequate to current conditions. You must believe the reports sent to you by your priests. Their zeal and fairness was so evident in the distribution of the alms you sent that it edified everyone. For myself, I thank you for having sent them to us and for the good example they have given us. 50

The late Monsieur Souyn, bailiff of the city of Reims, wrote to Monsieur Vincent on this same topic:

I trust you have been shown the report I sent to Paris on the charitable work you have accomplished here, and the corporal and spiritual help you have given to the poor of the region. You did so in imitation of our divine master and savior, whose perfect imitator you become. Two of your priests came to this city. One came to pick up some money in alms, which he could not do in his usual place of residence for it was totally without resources. The other came to pick up some grain he had bought, to be taken to Saint Souplet for the poor of that town. Both worked under your direction at the relief of the most afflicted, while you continued to inspire the

49. CED IV:233.
50. CED V:385.
fire of divine charity throughout Picardy and Champagne for the relief of the poor.

I await the arrival of Monsieur N., to whom you have given the general direction of this great work, who will set up our winter headquarters. Meanwhile, I am looking after the hospitals and providing assistance to some poor pastors. Our storehouse of oats, set up by your help, is busy in making distributions during these bad times. Continue your charitable care, Monsieur. It preserves the mortal life of so many of the poor, and assures them eternal happiness by all the spiritual help they are given, particularly by the administration of the sacraments. This would cease in many places in our diocese if we did not have your help.51

We will pass over many other letters which contain similar expressions of gratitude. In concluding this chapter it is enough to say that since the beginning of the assistance to these two provinces until the signing of the general peace treaty,52 more than five hundred thousand livres in alms were sent from Paris, in money and in clothes, church furnishings, etc. At the direction of Monsieur Vincent, these alms were distributed with such order and prudence that they not only saved the lives of a countless number of poor, but also supported a large number of pastors in their parishes who otherwise would have had to leave. Many pillaged and ruined churches were made fit to celebrate mass. Many, even some of the nobility, were rescued from imminent peril to what they held dearer than life itself. A place of refuge was found for a great number of orphans, totally abandoned by everyone else.

Lastly, the priests of the Mission contributed to the eternal salvation of a great number of souls by the administration of the sacraments and by other spiritual helps when these were most needed.

One day, Monsieur Vincent reflected on these events:

We cannot think of the immense alms God inspired people to give without being filled with admiration: the alms, clothes, linens, blankets, dresses, shoes, etc., given for men, women, and children, and even for priests. Think of the number of albs, chasubles, missals, ciboria, chalices, and other church goods sent for the restoration of the churches, so ravaged that the celebration of the sacred mysteries and the other exercises of our Christian religion could never have been reestablished without this help. Many of these churches had been given over completely to profane uses.

It was surely a spectacle to see the houses of the Ladies of Charity

51. CED IV:260-61.
52. The Peace of the Pyrenees.
of Paris filled with all sorts of goods, looking for all the world like the storehouses of wholesale merchants! These women will undoubtedly have in heaven the crown of priests for their zeal and charity, to clothe Jesus Christ on his altars, in his priests, and in his poor suffering members. 53

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CHAPTER TWELVE

The Efforts of Monsieur Vincent to Combat the Errors of Jansenism

IN Imitation of the patriarch Job, this humble and faithful servant of God could say about the errors which have troubled the Church in this present century, that what he had most feared had come to pass. He found himself involved in what he had always regarded as most dangerous.

He once said to his community:

All my life I have dreaded the birth of some new heresy. I have seen the damages inflicted by those of Luther and Calvin, and how many people of all ranks have succumbed to the deadly poison after merely tasting the false doctrines of the so-called reformers. I have always feared being engulfed in the errors of some new doctrine before knowing what was happening. Yes, all my life I have feared this.

He repeated this same idea many times to others, people of virtue and worthy of confidence.

Nevertheless, by a singular design of his Providence, God willed that what he feared came about. In his lifetime Jansenism appeared in the Church, and even before this new heresy appeared he became involved with one of its first apologists. This was to show most clearly his firm faith and vigorous zeal. It also established him as a pillar of iron in the Church, as a wall of granite, (as was said of an ancient prophet) to maintain and defend the truth.

In preparing him and warning him against these new errors, God permitted him to form a close friendship with a priest, originally from his own province. After a long stay at the university of Louvain, he returned to France. With him, he brought Jansenius, his classmate and confidant in the new doctrines which he had conceived to reform the Church in her discipline and in several points of her faith.

This priest visited his own province and some others also, and realized

4. Jean Duverger (or, Duvergier) de Hauranne, the commendatory abbot of Saint Cyran. He was born in Bayonne in 1581. He studied at Paris and Louvain. Around 1616 he accompanied Bishop Henry Louis Chastaignier de la Rocheaposay to the diocese of Poitiers. The bishop resigned the Abbey of Saint Cyran in his favor. Duverger is customarily known to history by this name.
5. Cornelius Jansenius, to give the Latin form of his name, was born at Acquoy, a village near Leerdam in Holland in 1585. He studied at Louvain and then came to France where he became acquainted with Saint Cyran. In 1636 he became bishop of Ypres. He died two years later, 1638.
there was no place like Paris for propagating his errors. He met there some people willing to listen to him, either out of vain curiosity, or to appear to be someone special in hearing from him a new doctrine unknown, as he said, these last centuries to the scholastic doctors.

Seeing the esteem several persons had for his countryman because of his learning and other good qualities, Monsieur Vincent believed his conversations could not but be helpful to him and to his Company, which then was in its infancy. He used to visit often, and this led to a close friendship. Monsieur Vincent was that mystic bee with no other aim than to draw out that honey of good doctrine, and other fitting counsels that he felt he could take from his friend. The priest, on the contrary, wished to profit from these conversations and friendship to insinuate the venom of his errors and his pernicious maxims into the mind of Monsieur Vincent. He hoped then to influence the entire Company, and so to spread his views into many other places.

Since Monsieur Vincent was disposed to listen to him, this is why he began little by little to put forth some of his own ideas. They were based on such beautiful pretexts and interspersed with other good and holy ideas that a mind less enlightened than Monsieur Vincent's would have had difficulty appreciating them in their true light.

This faithful servant of God was at first surprised to hear such an extraordinary doctrine and such maxims. The more the Abbe went in his explanations the more these ideas began to appear suspect to Monsieur Vincent, and even dangerous. One day, as on other occasions, they were discussing together some point of the doctrine of Calvin. He was surprised to hear the Abbe take the side and defend the errors of this heresiarch. When he pointed out that the Church had condemned this doctrine of Calvin, the Abbe replied that Calvin was not so much wrong as poorly understood, adding the Latin words, *bene sensit, male locutus est* ["He understood well, but he spoke badly"].

Another time, as this Abbe was heatedly supporting a proposition condemned by the Council of Trent, Monsieur Vincent felt charity demanded some response. “Monsieur, you go too far. What? Do you want me to believe someone like yourself, subject to error, rather than to believe the entire Church, which is the dove of truth? It teaches me something, and you suggest the opposite. Oh, Monsieur, how can you prefer your own judgment to that of the best heads in the world, and to so many holy prelates assembled in the Council of Trent, who have pronounced on this point?” “Don’t speak to me of the council,” replied the Abbe, “it was a council of the pope and scholastics, with little else but intrigues and cabals.”

These rash words from a spirit intoxicated with self-esteem and beginning to leave the straight path of truth, obliged Monsieur Vincent, with his singular respect for all decisions of the Church, to exercise much more circumspection in his conversations with this man. He saw them as dangerous, and if he continued in this way he was determined to break off contact completely. He did not have long to wait, for this to happen in another encounter with his friend.

Going one day to visit, Monsieur Vincent found him in his room reading the Bible. He remained for a while not saying anything, not to disturb his reading. Finally, the Abbe turned to him and said, “Do you see, Monsieur Vincent, what I am reading? It is holy Scripture, and God has given me a perfect understanding of it, and many lights to help me in explaining it. Holy Scripture is clearer in my own mind even than it is in itself.” These were his very words, which Monsieur Vincent spoke of several times.7

Another day, Monsieur Vincent had celebrated mass at Notre Dame, and went to visit the Abbe, whom he found shut up in his study. When he finally emerged some time later, Monsieur Vincent smilingly said to him in his usual good-natured way: “Admit it, Monsieur, you have been writing down what graces God favored you with in your morning mental prayer.” After inviting him to be seated, the Abbe responded, “I must confess to you, God has given and continues to give me great lights. He has shown me that the Church no longer exists.” Seeing the surprise of Monsieur Vincent, he repeated, “No, the Church no longer exists. God has made me see that for the past five or six hundred years there has been no Church. Previously, the Church had been like a great river of flowing clear water. Now, what we have been calling the Church is no more than a stream of slime. The bed of this river remains the same, but the waters have changed.”

“What, Monsieur,” Monsieur Vincent said, “do you prefer your own thoughts to the word of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said he would build his Church upon a rock, and the gates of hell would not prevail against her? The Church is his spouse, and he will never abandon it. The Holy Spirit will always be at hand to help her.” The Abbe replied, “Indeed, Jesus built his Church upon a rock, but there is a time to build up and a time to tear down. She was his spouse, but she is now an adulteress and a prostitute. This is why he has repudiated her, and he wills another more faithful one should be substituted for her.” Monsieur Vincent told him he was far from the respect he owed the truth, adding that he should be most hesitant about his own sentiments, so preoccupied as he was with bad thoughts. After some further remarks, they left each other’s company.

Monsieur Vincent himself recounted all these events on several occa-

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7. See CED III:318-32; IV:148-49.
sions, either to some members of his own Congregation, or to others from outside who have reported them. He always spoke of them with sorrow, and did so only when obliged by some motive of charity, to disabuse or to warn people against the surprises of these new doctrines.

He was aware from this time that his exalted opinion of his own prowess had blinded the Abbe, and he was being moved by presumption and pride. Also, the Abbe was likely to fall into the abyss of a new heresy and probably would influence many others to follow him. Thus, Monsieur Vincent felt the obligation in charity and the bonds of his former friendship to make a last effort to save him, by the exercise of fraternal correction.

With this intention Monsieur Vincent one day paid him a visit. After some usual pleasantries he began to speak of the obligation of submitting one’s judgment to the Church, and of having a greater respect and deference for the holy Council of Trent than he had shown before. Coming to particulars, to some of the erroneous propositions he had advocated, Monsieur Vincent made him see that these were contrary to the doctrine of the Church. Monsieur Vincent showed him that he was making a great mistake in entering upon this labyrinth of errors, and even more, in having tried to entice him and his whole Congregation down this same slippery path. He begged him, in the name of our Lord, to retrace his steps before it was too late.

We do not know the details of this conversation, but only that Monsieur Vincent spoke so strongly to him that he seemed so bewildered as not to respond at all. However, he found it difficult to accept this intervention, which struck him to the heart. Upon returning to his abbey, he wrote a lengthy letter a month later to justify himself. We will cite here only some extracts.

The natural humility which is part of your character leads you to believe what others tell you of holy Scripture. It helps me see nothing is easier than for you to accept what you now see as my mistakes. When I heard you in your fraternal admonitions add this fifth reproach to the four we had spoken of before, that I was interfering with you and your entire house, I felt it was not the moment to defend myself. I was happy to accept this from a person who has honored me for such a long time with his friendship, and who has the reputation in Paris of being a man totally given to doing good.

What struck me with admiration was that you, who profess to be so meek and so reserved, have taken the part of those rising up against me. You joined others in their attacks, and even added the insult of coming to see me in my own quarters, something no one else dared do. I take the liberty of pointing out that none of the
prelates who haunt your house, with whom I am not in agreement, and whose approval of my opinions I do not seek when I speak with them in private, are delighted and thank me for what I have to say.

After several other intemperate expressions, his inflated opinion of himself made him reject all the charitable suggestions of his faithful friend. He ended his letter as follows:

I have put up with certain practices of yours, especially seeing how attached you were to them because of the advice of the great personages you consulted. I was always careful to keep these thoughts to myself, that God did not at all approve of what you did, for they could be justified only by a true simplicity rare indeed among Christians. I rarely agree with what a saint of our own day has said, that of the ten thousand who profess to be directors of souls, scarcely a single one is worthy of the name. The only thing which excuses them before God is simplicity of mind. I had the patience to let you go on, and to accept only by condescension what I did not entirely agree with.

This letter allows us to see the hope which Saint Cyran had of attracting Monsieur Vincent to his own party, and to insinuate his opinions and maxims into the Congregation of the Mission. By a singular grace, God preserved the father and children alike from this contagion and always maintained them in a faithful and sincere profession of the truths recognized and taught by the Church.

Some time later this priest, persisting in spreading secretly his evil doctrine, was put in prison by the king’s order, and his papers seized. Among them was found the draft of the letter we have just quoted, which came to light in this way. The judge questioned him publicly on what Monsieur Vincent had said to him to provoke his letter. It would have been hoped that this detention would humble his spirit, and open his eyes to what was happening, but this did not occur. Those of his party used their influence to have him released, but by a secret judgment of his Providence, God soon after called him from this life.

8. Francis de Sales, beatified in 1661, canonized in 1665.
9. CED 1:401-06.
10. Saint Cyran worked actively to spread his theological opinions. Cardinal Richelieu understood the dangers which they posed both to the Church and to the State. He formally inquired into these doctrines after many complaints and charges were leveled against Saint Cyran and his teaching, including the opposition of both Vincent de Paul and Charles de Condren, the superior general of the Oratory. Richelieu imprisoned Saint Cyran at Vincennes in 1638. He instituted a formal interrogation of the prisoner which unfortunately failed to meet canonical standards. He proceeded on his authority justifying his actions by saying that “If Luther and Calvin had been imprisoned when they had begun to teach heresy, the European states would have been spared from the troubles they caused.”
11. He was released from prison after the death of Richelieu in December 1642. He himself died the
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About this same time two pernicious books promoted by this Abbe appeared. The one attempted to show that Saints Peter and Paul had received from God an equal power in the government of the Church, thus striving to undermine the authority of the head of the Church.\(^\text{12}\) The other book was *Augustinus* by Jansenius, which has since made such a disturbance and caused such division in France and throughout the Church.\(^\text{13}\) Monsieur Vincent was well aware of the dangerous source of this new doctrine, and felt himself obliged to do all in his power to have it condemned.

To begin with, among other things he did, he wrote to a cardinal,\(^\text{14}\) on October 4, 1646, as follows:

I most humbly beseech Your Eminence that I might send you some pages written by one of the most learned of our theologians, and one of our most honest, but who does not wish to be named.\(^\text{15}\) These refute the opinion of the two leaders, Saints Peter and Paul. He has learned from the Gazette of Rome that the book he refutes is being examined, and that two doctors of the Sorbonne have testified the doctrine of the book is that of their faculty. After this same faculty heard that this opinion of the two leaders was ascribed to them, they assembled, and declared to the nuncio that these two professors are in error. The faculty is of the contrary opinion. They asked him to have the next issue of the Gazette report that this doctrine was erroneously reported as being theirs.

Thus it came about that this good and virtuous person brought me these writings with the request that I send them on to Rome, and help those whom His Holiness has delegated to examine the book in question. He found that the passages seeking to support the equality of Saint Peter and Saint Paul are refuted by the very authors themselves, one after the other.\(^\text{16}\)

After this letter was sent, the Holy See censured and condemned the book on the two leaders.\(^\text{17}\) Monsieur Vincent had the consolation of seeing in this the happy outcome of his own efforts in this regard.

Monsieur Vincent quickly realized that the book by Jansenius was a collection in bits and pieces of all the late Abbe had been speaking of in the

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\(^\text{12}\) This work, *De l'autorité de Saint Pierre et de Saint Paul*, 1645, was written by Martin Barcos, Saint Cyran’s nephew.

\(^\text{13}\) *Augustinus, in quo haereses Pelagii, etc., recensentur* was published at Louvain in 1640. Urban VIII condemned it on March 6, 1641, particularly the “Five Propositions” extracted from it, and which summarized the erroneous doctrines of the entire work. Successive pontiffs continued this condemnation.

\(^\text{14}\) Jerome Grimaldi.

\(^\text{15}\) Nicolas le Maistre, a doctor of the Sorbonne.

\(^\text{16}\) *CED* III:65-67.

\(^\text{17}\) January 1647.
conversations he had with him. The venom of this new doctrine was the more to be feared because it claimed to be restoring theology to its original purity. This is why, with his greater awareness, he felt obliged to provide some antidote to warn others against the dangerous reading, while waiting for the authority of the Church to bring a more definitive remedy. He requested several persons of learning and piety to take up the pen in refutation of the errors of this evil book. Among others was the late Monsieur de Raconis, bishop of Lavaur,18 whom he advised and with whom he worked to stop the spread of this evil doctrine. This has come to light by the discovery of several letters written to Monsieur Vincent by the bishop at this time, of which we will cite only one:

Since yesterday, after I had the honor of speaking with you, I have seen the Prince of Conde on the matter of Jansenius. I found him eager and enlightened about the errors of this author. He encouraged me greatly to continue my work, and to encourage your zeal for the defense of the Church. We spoke at length, to my complete satisfaction. He had two recommendations for me. The first was to see the nuncio, to tell him that the prince,19 for his part, would be available to meet with him to talk over this matter, and to explain the absolute necessity for the good of both Church and state to reply to this author. I took care of this at once. After a long talk, I agreed with the nuncio, that I would draw up a catalogue of the errors of Jansenius already condemned either by councils or by popes. I promised to do this. From there I returned to see the prince, who was delighted at the way this turned out. He assured me he would speak to the queen and to Cardinal Mazarin about the importance of this matter.

The second recommendation he made to me was to assure you of his zeal in this matter, and his willingness to work together with you.20

Since this false doctrine influenced many to follow these novelties, and since Monsieur Vincent had been invited into the queen’s council from the very beginning of the regency, he explained to Her Majesty and to Cardinal Mazarin the importance to religion and to the state of not offering benefices or positions to any suspected of these novelties. Knowing that the professorships and pulpits were the sources from which saving waters of doctrine and morality were drawn, he did all in his power to assure that those

18. Charles Francois d’Abra de Raconis, born in 1580. He taught philosophy at Paris. His exemplary life, joined to the success of his teaching and preaching, brought him a promotion to the see of Lavaur in 1639. He died in 1646.

19. Henri II de Bourbon, the Prince of Conde.

appointed were well grounded in the common teachings of the Church. He had prayers offered for this intention, and used other means for this purpose, as his charity dictated.

He often consulted with the nuncio and with the chancellor on the ways to arrest the spread of this false doctrine. Once, when he learned that someone wanted to defend a thesis suspected of Jansenism in a religious house, he used his influence to have it stopped. This is what he wrote to a worthy prelate:

Your Excellency, a religious of this city has advanced a thesis in support of a proposition tainted with Jansenism, and which the Sorbonne has condemned. The chancellor forbade the assembly and the public defense customary on these occasions. When the superior protested, he was sent for, and told that as he contravened the order, he and his community would be dealt with appropriately. He was sent to the nuncio, who reproached him for allowing this thesis to appear. He threatened him and all those favoring this doctrine with punishment, and with being reported to the pope and the general of their order. This superior and all his community punished this religious. They declared him unable to accept any responsibility or office in the order, deprived him of his active and passive voice, and ordered him expelled from their house. This leads us to hope that if such measures are taken to prevent these abuses, this pernicious doctrine will soon die out.22

This faithful servant of God lost no occasion to prevent these errors from causing havoc in the Church. However, this evil continued to grow despite all efforts to oppose its progress, and it began to appear everywhere. It introduced division into the schools and even into religious communities, and sometimes into secular families. It in some way threatened the tranquility of the state. Monsieur Vincent was aware of this evil, and foresaw the deadly results that it was likely to produce. He prayed incessantly to God, and thought often within himself how the progress of this heresy might be stopped. He used many prayers and practiced many mortifications to appease God's anger, and to secure from his infinite goodness the favor of these ills from happening. His prayers and tears were not without effect. It appeared soon after that several prelates of the kingdom were moved by a holy zeal for preserving the faith and the Catholic religion. They resolved to petition the Holy See to prompt and decisive action in remedying these disorders.23 He was very consoled, and praised their intention, all the while

23. The bishops wrote a joint letter to the pope. They met at Saint Lazare under the direction of Isaac Habert, the bishop of Vabres, with Saint Vincent in attendance. The prelates then attended the
urging other prelates he knew to join their voices to the others. This is what he wrote to several, in February 1651:

The evil results produced by some of the current opinions have convinced a good number of our prelates of the kingdom to write to our Holy Father the pope, to urge him to pronounce judgment on this doctrine.

The reasons leading them to do this are, first, they hope that this will hold those to orthodox doctrine who otherwise might drift away. This happened when the censure appeared on the question of the two leaders.

Second, this is a rapidly spreading evil, because it seems to be tolerated.

Third, Rome believes that most of our bishops in France themselves hold the new opinions. Rome must be convinced that in reality few hold these views.

Fourth, this agrees with the Council of Trent. It ordained that if opinions arose contrary to what it had decided, recourse should be had to the sovereign pontiff to decide. This is what we wish to do, Your Excellency, by the enclosed letter, in the hope you would add your signature to the forty others who have already signed it, as the enclosed list will confirm.  

Besides this circular letter which he sent to several bishops, he wrote personally to one, from whom he had received no reply:

Paris, April 23, 1651

Your Excellency, some time ago I sent you a copy of a letter which most of the bishops of the kingdom wished to send to our Holy Father the pope. They asked him to pronounce on the new doctrine, hoping you would be good enough to sign, if you would wish to be among their number. Since I have not had the honor of hearing from you, I fear that perhaps you did not receive it, or you may have been put off by an account sent everywhere by the adherents of this doctrine to persuade the bishops not to sign. As a result, Your Excellency, I am sending you a second copy. In the name of our Lord please consider the necessity of this letter, caused by the division which the new doctrine introduces into families, cities, and the universities. It is a fire spreading daily, debasing spirits, and menacing the Church with irreparable desolation if a prompt remedy is not forthcoming.

meeting of the general assembly of the clergy held in Paris, where they signed the document.
Monsieur Vincent sent copies of this letter to other bishops soliciting their support.

25. Pierre de Nivelle, the bishop of Lucon.
The present state of affairs does not allow us to await a general council. Besides, you are aware of how long it takes to bring one about, and how long the last one took. This remedy is too far off for an evil so pressing. What then is the remedy for this? Beyond doubt, it must be the Holy See, not only because the Council of Trent in its last session reserved to it the resolution of difficulties which might arise from its decisions. If the Church decides in a general council canonically assembled, as it was, and if the Holy Spirit guides the Church as we may not doubt, why do we not follow the light of this Spirit which directed us in these doubtful circumstances to have recourse to the sovereign pope? This reason alone, Your Excellency, urges me to count you among the sixty prelates who already have signed the letter, which is nothing but a simple proposition. Besides, some others may still sign.

If someone were to object that he ought not state his opinion so far in advance on a matter that he might later have to judge, we may respond that it seems unlikely that we will have a council for them to be judges at. But supposing the opposite, having recourse to the pope is no obstacle. Saints have protested new opinions, but this did not keep them from councils where they acted as judges and condemned erroneous opinions.

If the popes impose silence in this matter, forbidding people to speak, write, and argue about it, would this not falsify the position of the pope as head of the Church, to whom all members should be able to contact? We should be able to have recourse to him, to be assured in our doubts and worries. To whom then should we refer? And how will His Holiness know of developing troubles if he is not informed about them?

If it should be argued, Your Excellency, that a long delay in his answer or one less decisive than what we would wish, would serve only to increase the boldness of our opponents, I can assure you the nuncio has news from Rome. Once His Holiness has a letter from the king of France, and another from a representative number of the bishops of the kingdom, he will give his decision. Her Majesty has decided to write, and the First President has said only that provided the bull from the Holy See does not originate from the Inquisition at Rome, the Parlement will receive and publish it.

What will have been gained should a third objection be raised, that is, once the pope has decided, those favoring the new doctrines do not submit? This may be true of some, especially those of the party of the late Monsieur N. [Saint Cyran.] He was not disposed
to submit to the decisions of the pope, nor even to those of a council. I am aware of this, Your Excellency, from my own experience. Some may be as obstinate as himself, blinded by their own importance. A few others, attracted only by what is new, or by some friendship or family, or because they have not thought these matters through carefully enough, will now draw back, rather than rebel against their own lawful father. We saw something of this in the controversy about the book on the two leaders, and on the *Catechism on Grace*. Once they were censured, they were no longer talked about. It is greatly to be hoped, Your Excellency, that many souls be disabused of the errors in the rest of these new doctrines, as they were of these points, and that others should be helped to avoid these newer errors.

The example of a man named Labadie is a proof of the evil nature of this new doctrine. This is an apostate priest with a great reputation as a preacher. He caused great harm in Picardy, and later in Gascony, but finally joined the Huguenots in Montauban. In a book he wrote on his so-called conversion, he stated that since he was a Jansenist, he has found the same beliefs in the new religion he has joined. Their ministers, Your Excellency, boast in their preaching that most Catholics are of their opinion, and will soon come over to their side. Since this is so, should we not do all we can to extinguish this fire which gives such assurance to the sworn enemies of our religion? Who would not attack this beast which begins to ravage the Church, and which shall devour it, if it is not crushed at birth? What would the many courageous and saintly bishops we now have, wish they would have done, if they had been in office at the time of Calvin? We can now see the mistakes in doctrine of that earlier time. They were not opposed strongly enough, and have thus caused so many wars and divisions.

At that time there was much uncertainty, but our bishops are now much better educated, and they show much more zeal for the faith. Take Bishop N. [Alain de Solminihac], of Cahors, for example. He lately wrote to tell me of a defamatory libel which appeared against our letter. It is the spirit of heresy, he told me, not to accept just correction and reprimand, and to have recourse to violent attacks and calumny. We are now at that point, as I have always thought we would come to.

Because I had expressed the hope that he would take care to

recover from an accident he had suffered, he said he would, but only to take his place in the battle about to begin, in which he hoped, with God's help, we would emerge victorious. That is what this good bishop says. We expect the same from you, Your Excellency, who are so active in preaching the orthodox doctrines of the Church in your diocese. You undoubtedly would be happy to see the Holy Father require this same doctrine to be preached everywhere, and to repress those new opinions so steeped with the errors of Calvin. This would certainly contribute to the glory of God, the peace of the Church, and I dare say, to that of the state. We see this more clearly at Paris than elsewhere. If it were not for this, Your Excellency, I would not have troubled you with such a long exposition. In your goodness please forgive me, for I dared write only in recognition of the danger. 28

Among the other bishops to whom Monsieur Vincent wrote, two responded jointly, explaining why they did not choose to sign the letter. 29 He replied to them in a letter which follows, in which we can see his spirit and his zeal:

Your Excellencies, I have received with the respect I owe to your virtue and dignity, the letter you did me the honor to send, near the end of May, in response to mine on the questions which now trouble us. I observe many thoughts worthy of the rank you hold in the Church, which seem to incline you to keep silent in the present controversies. I take the liberty of presenting several reasons which perhaps might lead you to another conclusion, which, prostrate at your feet, I beg you to consider.

First, as to your fears that the judgment of His Holiness would not be received with the submission and obedience owed to the sovereign pontiff, and that the Spirit of God would not find enough docility in hearts to bring about a true reunion, I would willingly agree. When the heresies of Luther and Calvin, for example, began to appear, if anyone had waited until they were prepared to submit and to reunite themselves, these heresies would still be among those

28. CED IV:175-81.
29. Nicolas Pavilion, the bishop of Alet, and Francois Etienne de Caulet, the bishop of Pamiers. They argued for caution and further discussion. (CED IV:265-66.) Pavilion was born in 1597. He was under the direction of Vincent de Paul for a time, and helped in his charitable works and conferences. He became bishop of Alet in 1637. He became more and more inclined toward Jansenism as time passed. Vincent was personally saddened at his position. Pavilion died in 1677. Caulet was born in 1610. He became bishop of Pamiers in 1645. Although he opposed Saint Cyran at first, he gradually became a Jansenist. He later showed his courage by strongly opposing Louis XIV in the "régale" controversy, which concerned a longstanding royal prerogative of disposing of the revenues coming from vacant dioceses during their vacancies. He also, however, strongly opposed Rome's position against Jansenism. He died in 1680.
opinions to be either accepted or rejected. They would have affected
more people than they have. If then these opinions of our own day,
whose pernicious effects we see in consciences, are of the same
nature, we will wait in vain for those who spread them to come to
agree with the defenders of the doctrines of the Church. We cannot
hope for this, and it will never come about. To put off the condem-
nation by the Holy See gives these people time to spread their
poison. Also, it takes away the opportunity for some well-placed
people of great piety the opportunity to earn the merit of obedience,
which they protest they will give to the decrees of the Holy Father
as soon as they are promulgated. While awaiting this, they remain
with the other party in good faith. They are attracted by the appear-
ance of good and the reform they preach, but they do not recognize
these are really only the sheep's clothing, which wolves always
wear to harm and deceive souls.

Second, Your Excellencies say that the fervor of the two sides to
sustain their respective position gives little hope for a true reunion,
which is the end to be sought. I must point out that contraries can
never be united when it comes to matters of faith and religion. If we
are to join with others, it must be to join the pope, when a council is
not in session. Those who do not look upon reunion in this way are
not ready for any reunion, except for an unacceptable one. Law can
never be reconciled with crime, nor lies with the truth.

Third, the uniformity you desire among the bishops is surely to
be desired, if it can be achieved with no prejudice to the faith. We
must not base our union on evil and on error. If this true union is to
come about, the lesser part must unite with the greater, the member
to the head, which is what is being proposed. Of six parts, the five
hold to what the pope shall say in the absence of a council, which
cannot meet because of the wars. If afterward a division remains, a
schism if you will, it will be composed of those who want no judge,
who do not recognize the position of most of the bishops, and who
do not defer even to the pope himself.

From this comes a fourth reason in answer to what Your Excel-
lencies were pleased to say to me, that each side is convinced that
reason and truth are with them. I admit this, but you know well that
heretics have always said as much, but this has not prevented
condemnations and anathemas from popes and councils. Union
with heretics has never been known to cure the ills. On the contrary,
fire and the sword must be used, sometimes too late, as may happen
here. Certainly, each side blames the other, but with this difference,
that one side asks for a judge, while the other does not—truly a bad sign. It does not want a solution from the pope, I say, because they know a solution could be given. Instead, they call for a council because they know it is impossible to call one in present circumstances. If they thought a council were possible, they would reject it, just as they now reject the pope.

There will never be, to my way of thinking, a cause for ridicule by libertines and heretics, or a scandal to the faithful in seeing the bishops divided. The number of those who have not signed the letter to the pope on this matter is small. It is not an extraordinary thing in the Church to see differences in mentality. But this shows the need to have a pope to decide, for as vicar of Jesus Christ, he is the head of the Church, and the superior of the bishops.

Fifth, with wars everywhere, spreading almost throughout Christendom, they do not realize that the pope is prevented from observing all the conditions and necessary formalities prescribed by the Council of Trent for those matters referred to His Holiness. This happened in the past. As we read in the fathers and in church history, several saints and bishops regularly consulted him and referred to him in doubts of faith. To anticipate that his judgment will not be accepted is not something to be presumed or feared. Rather it is to be viewed as a way of seeing who are the true children of the Church and who are not.

As to the remedy Your Excellencies propose, to safeguard the right of either side to open discussion, I beg you most humbly to consider if this has not already been tried, and has served only to give standing to error. Seeing themselves treated on the same footing as those who possess the truth, they have taken the opportunity to spread their message. It is already too late to uproot it completely, for this doctrine is more than mere theory, and has descended into practice. Consciences can no longer support the troubles and uncertainties raised in the hearts of many by such thoughts, for example, as whether Jesus Christ really died for us. We hear of those attending the dying, urging them to have confidence in the goodness of our Lord who died for them. Yet we are also told that others have told the sick they should not believe this, for our Lord did not die for everyone.

Permit me also, Your Excellencies, to add to these considerations that those holding these novelties, who see that their threats are effective, increase them, and are preparing a more serious rebellion. They take your silence as a powerful argument in their favor, and
even boast in a book they have published that you are of their opinion. On the other hand, supporters of the ancient faith are weakened and discouraged, seeing they are not universally supported. Will you not someday be sorry, Your Excellencies, that your names were used, despite your good intentions, to confirm heretics in their error and to shake believers in their faith?

To come back to the question of a general council: how could one be convoked during wartime? It took about forty years from the time Luther and Calvin began to trouble the Church before the Council of Trent could be held. Other than a council, no more timely remedy exists than to have recourse to the pope, as the council itself stated in the last session, in the last chapter of its decrees, of which I will send you an extract.

Once more, Your Excellencies, we must not fear that the pope will not be obeyed once he has decided. We see this in all heresies, but this does not mean we should allow them to go unchallenged. We also have one recent example to contradict the false notion which came from the same source, that there were really two equal rulers in the early Church. This was condemned by the pope, he was listened to, and we hear no more of it.

Certainly, Your Excellencies, all these reasons and some others you know better than I, and which I would be glad to learn, for I respect you as my fathers in the faith and as teachers of the Church, have resulted in few of the bishops of France not signing the letter in question.30

These letters of Monsieur Vincent, and all his other activities in this matter, allow us to see that his sole motive was the glory of God and the salvation of souls. We must admire his ardent zeal for the service of our Lord and his Church, coupled with profound humility and singular respect for the sacred office of the bishop. If on the one hand his charity moved him to speak out and to share the insights God had inspired in him, on the other hand his humility and respect led him to prostrate himself in spirit at their feet, begging them to pardon his forwardness. He then spoke more with the heart than the mouth to those he revered as fathers and doctors of the Church, from whom he was ready to learn in the matter he spoke of. He always acted this way, and by this humility and charity he was blessed, first by God, but then by the bishops who recognized his sincerity and zeal, which furthered their own position. In this he resembled several other holy persons who, though living a retired life, sometimes felt compelled to alert the prelates of the Church to dangers in the heresies threatening the tranquility of the Church.

30. CED IV:204-10.
While Monsieur Vincent was engaged in these efforts to have the sovereign pontiff give judgment about the book of Jansenius, his opponents in turn were doing everything in their power to thwart this move and prevent its execution. To further this design, they wrote a circular letter which was sent to all the bishops of the kingdom, to persuade them not to sign the previous letter addressed to the pope. However, this did not prevent more than eighty bishops and archbishops from signing this letter, sent to the Holy See.

As a result of this development, the Jansenists had recourse to Monsieur de N. [Louis Gorin, Abbe de Saint Amour], doctor of theology, and already in Rome, directing him to use all his influence to prevent the pope from pronouncing judgment on this matter. Besides that, they feared they did not have enough influence to avert the storm over the book of Jansenius, so they sent three of their doctors to Rome by coach. They were to prevent, or at least delay as much as they possibly could, the judgment of the pope.

When it became known that these Jansenists were on their way to Rome, Monsieur Vincent felt it most important that several orthodox doctors should also go there, to combat the efforts of the others. By a singular grace of divine Providence which ever watches over his Church, he found three members of the faculty of the Sorbonne willing to undertake the trip in service of the Catholic religion. These three were Fathers Hallier, Joisel, and Lagault, the first of whom later became bishop of Cavaillon, appointed by our Holy Father the pope, Innocent X, in recognition of his merits and service to the Church.

Monsieur Vincent was pleased when he heard of the plans of these three gentlemen. Since he knew them personally, he encouraged them in their project. He offered to do what he could to help, both before their departure for Rome or after their arrival there.

This is not the place to describe all these gentlemen did in service to the Church and for the defense of truth during their stay in Rome. They wrote to Monsieur Vincent from time to time, and in return received some suggestions from him for the benefit of religion. We shall cite only a letter, dated December 20, 1652, written to Monsieur Hallier on this topic:

I thank God for the happy success he has given your efforts there. I thank you most humbly for your kindness in writing. I can assure you, Monsieur, that nothing brings me greater joy than your letters, and I pray for nothing in this world more than I do for you and your concerns in Rome. The goodness of God leads me to hope that peace will soon be restored to his Church, and that thanks to your zealous efforts truth will prevail. This is what we shall continue to ask of God. Let us know, please, how things are progressing.31

31. CED IV:534.
It appears from this letter that Monsieur Vincent had some inkling from
Monsieur Hallier that the doctrine of the book of Jansenius contained in the
five propositions sent to Rome would be condemned, and that his friend
would soon be raised to the episcopal dignity. This happened, as we have
already mentioned.

As to the condemnation of the five propositions, the Catholic reader will
have the satisfaction of reading two letters written from Rome to Monsieur
Vincent on this matter. The originals of these are preserved in the house of
Saint Lazare in Paris. The first of these was from Monsieur Hallier:

Last Monday I had time to send you only the news that the
constitution against Jansenius greatly benefited the defense of the
Catholic religion and the condemnation of error. The Jansenists left
this city today to go to Loreto, where their servants have been for
the last fifteen days. They promised the pope they would obey
promptly. Yet I have reason to doubt this, for they have said to all
their confederates they were never condemned in what they actually
hold, which is also the position of Jansenius. I know they are
ridiculous in saying so. Jansenius has been condemned, the proposi-
tions taken from his writings have been condemned, and even the
sense given to the five propositions by the Jansenists themselves
have been expressly and specifically condemned. Their interpreta-
tions have been condemned absolutely. Nevertheless, their persist-
ence in error may still find supporters, both in this country and
elsewhere. That is why we must work to disabuse the unlearned.
We should do all we can to publicize the bull, and see to its
ratification by the Parlement, in the dioceses, in the faculties of the
universities, with the king and the chancellor and keeper of the seal,
with the bishops, and the doctors.

I fear Monsieur de Saint Amour runs away with himself, and
does not tell things the way they happened, by saying they were not
fully heard. This has been answered several times. First, they had
the opportunity to inform the cardinals of the Congregation, either
orally or in writing, for an entire year. Second, they had access to
our material, as they themselves mentioned in their speech to the
pope. Third, there was no point to hearing them, or ourselves either
for that matter. It was a question of the doctrine taken from the book
of Jansenius which the pope had directed be examined most care-

32. The "Five Propositions" extracted from the book by Jansenius and denounced by Nicolas Comet
as containing the summary of the heretical doctrines found in Augustinus. Comet, born October
12, 1592, was a doctor and the syndic of the faculty of theology of Paris. He was a friend of
Vincent's. He died April 18, 1663. Bossuet, who had had him as a teacher, preached his funeral
oration.
fully. It was useless to hear them, for they brought up motives in their defense all found in Jansenius. Fourth, it is not the custom when a book is condemned, to receive other information than what comes from the book itself, and from people learned in the matter treated of in the book. Fifth, when the Jansenist doctors were given the opportunity to speak before the cardinals, for two, three, four or five times, as often as might be needed, they refused. Sixth, when they furnished documents, as requested, they were beside the point. They were designed to delay the proceedings, and thus delay the pronouncement against their heresy, to give them more time to spread it further.

As to the way they seek to avoid the effect of the bull, you have only to read what they say to condemn them. They came expressly to defend the propositions sent to the pope by the bishops, and to prevent their condemnation. They wanted to prevent the censure of the faculty also, although this was mild. They wrote three apologies for Jansenius. They interpret the propositions in the sense given them by Jansenius, and the propositions have no other meaning, if words mean what they signify to the one who first used them. The pope condemned them all as heretical, and they cannot be explained away. The propositions were condemned in the meaning they gave to them, and which they presented to the pope. *Ubi lex non distinguuit, nec nos distinguere debemus.* ["Where the law makes no distinctions, neither must we."]

You are aware that the nuncio has a brief for Her Majesty, in which the pope asks for the bull’s publication. You see the importance of this. There is also a brief for the bishops, as well. We will remain here until we get news of how the bull has been received in France. The intention here is to condemn the apologies for Jansenius, *Victorious Grace, Everyday Theology*, and others, after we see how the bull has been received.33

You will see from the enclosed that all the usual niceties of style have been omitted to make our point clearer. This gracious procedure obliges us the more to a respectful obedience, and we should do all in our power to have it accepted, just as the Jansenists will do all they can to prevent its acceptance. We must inform the queen of the care, effort, work, and kindness His Holiness has devoted to this, and make clear to her that her duty in conscience, her honor, and the security of the state of the king her son, are all involved on

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33. Noel La Lane, *La grâce victorieuse de Jésus-Christ*, 1650; and Jean Duverger de Hauranne [Saint Cyran], *Théologie famillière*, 1642.
this occasion. We have been wondering if we should write to her, since the ambassador said he was not going to write, deferring to us. We have also had the thought of writing to the cardinal. In the end we decided against it, for fear it would appear we were acting in self-interest. Far be it from us to do this. But we felt it would be better that others inform him, as you shall judge best.

From Rome, June 16, 1653. Your very humble and devoted servant, Hallier. 34

The second letter comes from Monsieur Lagault, written from Rome, June 15, 1653, as follows:

Monsieur, I did not have the time in my last letter to write adequately, for the bull against the Jansenists was finished only on the very evening the couriers were leaving. There is no better way to tell you the result than to say with Saint Paul: Regi saeculorum immortali, invisibili, soli Deo, honor et gloria ["To the King of ages, the immortal, the invisible, the only God, be honor and glory"]. 35 God worked so manifestly in this whole affair that to him alone must we give the praise. The pope himself recognized this, saying so in the congregations, where they sometimes remained in session for five hours. Except for his compassion for the theologians who could not remain standing any longer, they would have been willing to remain for eight or nine hours. He understood all so completely that he met in the evening with Cardinal [Fabio] Chigi, secretary of state, to go over all that had been said.

The hand of God appeared, too, in the three great difficulties the pope had to overcome: the people of rank who wanted him to leave things unsettled, and the others who wanted him to forego its consideration, under the pretext that it would notably compromise his health. I do not believe that such powerful complaints ever came from your side. Time will tell us more. Despite all this, he remained so firm in his determination that he did not hesitate for a single moment. Since this matter concerned the good of the Church, he always felt that he was determined to bring it to a conclusion. He had it so much at heart that when some of his relatives came to see him by way of diversion, he could talk of nothing else.

Every care was taken to remove all pretext for complaint. After twenty-five meetings of the congregation of cardinals, he had ten meetings, lasting in all over four hours. He then invited the Jansenists themselves, since they had requested it, though he was not

34. CED IV:610-13.
35. 1 Tim 1:17.
at all obliged to do so, especially since they had refused to appear before the cardinals. They behaved so poorly before the pope that he did not agree to a second session with them, for they simply wanted to draw things out, and would need, they said, up to twenty-five sessions to present their case. They did not discuss the issue at all. Instead, they railed against the Jesuits, attempting to prove they were the authors of more than fifty heresies.

The pope recognized their scheme, and refused to go along with it. They have no reason to complain, for we have had, ourselves, but a single audience with him. Besides, since coming to Rome they have had eight or nine with him. Even after the decision they had another, lasting more than an hour, in which they promised to obey. To tell you the truth, I doubt they will do so. They are returning immediately to France, despite the heat, where it may be surmised they will work to prevent the publication of the bull.

However, we will remain here by request of the cardinals, who have thought it best we remain until we have heard how the bull was received in France. We could possibly advise on further steps, but I do not believe anything further is to be said. Monsieur Hallier told me he sent you a copy of the bull, which explains why I do not enclose one with this letter. I have written to you at length for you to disabuse some people who probably have been badly misinformed.

I forgot to tell you that already some have tried to take advantage of the fact the bull was removed two and a half hours after it was put up, and this at the order of the pope. You should know, Monsieur, that this was done by design, after it was put up in manuscript form. The pope did not want any copies made until it was first sent to the courts of Europe and to the nuncios. He instructed the police not to allow it to be copied. At nightfall, as is the custom, he had it taken down, to prove that it had really been posted. Since then it has been sent to France, with a brief for the king, and another brief for the bishops. The pope sent an express courier to Poland, since it is so far away. I hope I shall be able to send you from here a further account of what has taken place.

Monsieur, please continue to thank God for having preserved the Church in France from falling further into Calvinism. Do not forget in your masses him who is, with all his heart, your very humble and obedient servant, Lagault.

Since writing the above, we today, the sixteenth, have thanked His Holiness, who received us in audience for more than two and a
half hours. He told us that we should know what he had done before coming to his decision: he had ordered prayers to be offered to God, both in public and in private; he mentioned the sessions he had held on the matter. He confirmed what I have already written, of the singular pleasure he had taken in the discussions, and the special and palpable help he had received from the Holy Spirit. Nothing theological was set forth which was not easily understood and retained. In addition, he told us the reasons the bull was given, point by point. Among other things he said that one morning, after recommending himself to God, he called a secretary, and dictated the bull in a single morning. He told us that these gentlemen whom I dare call the Jansenists (for I would like to believe there will be no more) came to thank him for his decision, and that their promise of submitting entirely to it moved him to tears. God grant they will keep this good resolution. He added that at their public audience they delivered a terrible invective against the Jesuits (these were the words he used), and nothing they said addressed the subject at hand.36

As soon as the constitution of our Holy Father the pope, Innocent X, was brought to France, Monsieur Vincent thought to himself how best to reap the fruit to be hoped for from its publication, which was chiefly the reconciliation and reunion of minds drawn away by the false glamour of this new doctrine. His first thought was to visit the superiors of several religious houses, and some doctors and other influential people most active in this affair, to urge them to do all in their power for the reconciliation of the vanquished party. He remarked to them that he felt they should temper public expressions of joy, and not make references in their sermons or conversations which might embarrass those supporters of the condemned doctrine of Jansenius. He feared this would only further aggravate them rather than win them over. The most expedient course would be to go out of their way to offer the hand of friendship to them in this most humiliating situation. This would also simplify their return when they saw themselves treated with such respect and charity. He assured them that for his part he would act in this way.

He did just as he had said, for he went to Port Royal to see some gentlemen who habitually lived there, to congratulate them on their submission to the pope, as they had done from the beginning, at least in appearance. He spoke with them openly for several hours, and with much esteem and affection. He later went to see some other important people of that party who also promised complete submission to the Holy See in what pertained to the condemned doctrine.

These charitable efforts of Monsieur Vincent did not have all the good effects he had hoped for. Their deeds did not conform to the fine words that they had uttered. Many of the Jansenists were at first touched and truly wished to submit to the judgment of the head of the Church. The pretexts and subterfuges of the main leaders of the sect, however, led a number to continue holding to the condemned doctrine, despite all the exterior forces and interior movements of grace which invited them to recognize and confess the truth.

Nevertheless, when the new constitution of our Holy Father, Pope Alexander VII, appeared, toward the end of 1656, confirming and explaining that of Innocent X, Monsieur Vincent, with his usual zeal, again began his visits and meetings with the leading members of the Jansenists. They showed no more submission to this new constitution than they had to the first. This led this faithful servant of God to see that nothing was to be gained in working with those so poorly disposed. He turned his thoughts and care to preserve the faith in those not contaminated, to warn them of the dangers of these new errors.

As charity demanded, he used his energy to keep the members of his own Congregation in the purity of the faith and the doctrine of the Church. He spoke several times to his community to impress upon them how much they were obliged to the goodness of God for having preserved them from these novelties, which were capable of corrupting and ruining their Congregation. He recommended that they pray for the peace of the Church, for the removal of these new errors, and for the conversion of those infected. He forbade them to read the books of Jansenius or to support either directly or indirectly their doctrine, nor any of the opinions likely to favor them. After all this, if he knew of anyone who belonged to the sect in any manner whatsoever, he removed him from the community as a gangrenous member, one likely to infect and corrupt the rest of the body.

After assuring the safety and security of his own confreres, he extended his solicitude to several communities of women, preserved by his counsel and charitable intervention from the contagion of these new errors. This was particularly true in several convents of nuns who owe their preservation, after God, to his zeal and charity.

We will add to this an example of his charity which extended not only to his own community but to people to whom he extended an affectionate helping hand. He did this to preserve in them their orthodox beliefs, or to help those who may have fallen, if they gave the least sign of wanting to return.

A doctor of the faculty of the Sorbonne had embraced Jansenism, not only

37. See CED VI:88-89.
by the attachment he had for this new doctrine, but even more so by the contacts he had formed with some leading and influential devotees of this party. The constitution of Innocent X had impressed him, and if it had not entirely converted him, it at least had shaken him. In his doubts and perplexities he arranged to make a retreat at Saint Lazare. He carefully examined himself on all the thoughts which came to his mind on this matter. He then finally admitted to Monsieur Vincent that he was ready to leave the Jansenists, if only the pope would enlighten him on several doubts he still harbored, which he wrote in a letter to His Holiness.

Monsieur Vincent was instrumental in obtaining a favorable response. This led the doctor to decide to renounce the condemned doctrine, but instead of following this inspiration promptly he paid too much attention to human respect, and preferred the glory of men to that which we owe to God. Monsieur Vincent was not to be put off. He urged him to act, but the reply was that he could not renounce a doctrine which God seemingly favored by miracles, which it was said were taking place at Port Royal. At this, Monsieur Vincent wrote him the following letter, and sent him the papers mentioned in the letter:

I am sending you the new constitution of our Holy Father the pope, which confirms that of Innocent X, and other popes who have condemned the new opinions of Jansenius. I believe, Monsieur, you will no longer find any room for doubt after its acceptance and publication by the prelates of the kingdom, assembled so often for this purpose. The assembly of the lower clergy has published a tract on the matter, which I also enclose, and finally, the censure of the Sorbonne, and the letter written at the direction of His Holiness to you.

I hope, Monsieur, that with all this you will give glory to God and edification to his Church, as all expect of you. If you wait longer we must fear that the evil spirit, who uses every subterfuge to avoid the truth, will imperceptibly put you in such a state you will not have the strength to return because you have not used the grace offered you for such a long time. I have never known God to have given such persuasive and powerful graces to any other of your party.

To say, Monsieur, that miracles of the holy thorn worked at Port Royal seem to show the divine approval of the doctrines held there, I recall to you the teaching of Saint Thomas. He wrote that God has never confirmed error by miracles, since truth cannot have any

38. Jean Des Lions, doctor of the Sorbonne and dean of Senlis. He had influence over Arnauld and the duke and duchess of Liancourt.
place with error, nor light with the dark. Who cannot see that the propositions supported by that party are errors, since they have been condemned? If then God works miracles, he does so not to justify false opinions, but to enhance his own glory in some other mysterious manner. 39

To wait for God to send you an angel to enlighten you further is useless. He sends you to the Church, and the Church assembled at Trent sends you to the Holy See for the matter at hand, as you can see from the last chapter of this council.

You cannot wait for Saint Augustine to come back to explain himself. Our Lord has told us that if we do not believe the scriptures we would not believe even the dead come back to life. If this saint were to come back, he would submit to the sovereign pontiff as he did on other occasions.

Should you await the judgment of some famous faculty of theology to decide these questions? Where would it be found? None is more learned in Christendom than that of the Sorbonne, of which you are a distinguished member.

Should you wait for a great doctor and good man to tell you what to do? Where will you find one in whom these two qualities are more evident than he to whom I speak?

It seems to me, Monsieur, that I hear you saying you should not decide too quickly, so that you might bring others of stature in with you. This is good, but the danger is that in thinking to save others from drowning you might be trapped and go down with them. 40 I say this mildly, since their salvation is as dear to me as my own, and I would willingly give up a thousand lives, if I had them, for their sake. Your example might be more effective in having them return than anything you might say. Considering all this, in the name of God, Monsieur, do not put off this step which would be so pleasing to the divine goodness. Your own salvation depends on it.

How displeasing it would be for you, Monsieur, if putting off your decision, you would be forced to take a stand, which is what the bishops are planning. This is why I beseech you anew, in the

39. At the same time that he was writing this letter, he encouraged the publication of a work, Defense de la verité catholique touchant les miracles. This work strongly attacked the veracity of the Port Royal "miracles."

40. This is what eventually happened to Jean Des Lions, who joined the duke and duchess of Liancourt in the Jansenist party.
name of our Lord, to take the step. Do not object that the most ignorant and abominable of men speaks this way to you, for what he says makes sense. If in the scriptures we read that beasts have spoken and evil men have prophesied, I too could be saying the truth, even though I am a beast and wicked.

May it please God to speak to you effectively, in making you see the good you should do. Besides being in the state that God asks of you, it is to be hoped that at your example a good part of these gentlemen would return from their erroneous ways. On the contrary, you may be the cause of their remaining in error if you delay your decision, and in this case I doubt if you would ever return. This would be a severe blow to me because of my esteem and affection for you, and having had the honor of serving you as I have, I would be extremely sorry to see you leave the Church. I hope our Lord would not permit such an unhappy event, and I often pray for this intention, I who remain, in his love, etc.41

By his response to this letter, this doctor gave once again some hope for his return. He waited only, it seemed, to find the time and circumstance suitable for this step, to bring some others with him back to the Church. Monsieur Vincent outlined a series of steps he should take. All these efforts were in vain, however, for this doctor remained in his heresy despite all the charitable efforts of Monsieur Vincent to bring him back.

We will finish this chapter by recalling a reply he gave to a man of honor and merit, much impressed by some of the more wealthy of the Jansenists, and their generosity, rather than with the more learned ones among them. He was in a sort of suspense, not daring to condemn in his heart those who showed themselves so generous and virtuous. This man, then, a close friend of Monsieur Vincent, came to see him one day, to ask if in some way Monsieur Vincent might soften his approach in dealing with the gentlemen at Port Royal. “Why,” he said, “must you push them so hard? Would it not be better to come to some kind of agreement? They are so inclined, if only they would be treated with more moderation, and I know of no one better than yourself to soften the harsh attitudes on either side and so bring about a reunion.”

Monsieur Vincent replied to this by saying:

When a dispute has been adjudicated, the only course to follow is to carry out the decision rendered. Before the gentlemen were condemned, they used all their energies to make falsehood triumph over truth. They took such pains in this that they could be stopped only with the greatest difficulty, and they were unwilling to concede

41. CED VI:266-70.
anything. Now that the Holy See has decided these questions to their
dissatisfaction, they have given different meanings to the constitu­
tion to avoid their effect. Although they pretended to submit to the
common father of the faithful, and to receive the constitution in the
true sense that condemned the propositions of Jansenius, their
writers continue to support these opinions and have put out books
and tracts to defend them. They have not said a single word
withdrawing their condemned opinions.

What union can we possibly have with them, if they do not have
a true and sincere intention of submission? What kind of moder­
ation can we show for what has been decided by the Church? These
are matters of the faith, which cannot be changed or compromised,
and so we cannot adjust our thinking to these gentlemen. They must
submit their minds and rejoin us in the one faith, by a true and
sincere submission to the head of the Church. Other than this,
Monsieur, we can do nothing but pray for their conversion. 42

This is a brief sketch of the firmness with which Monsieur Vincent always
opposed those who upheld the doctrines of the Jansenists. Since its condem­
nation by the Church, he always declared himself openly on the matter, and
felt that all true Catholics ought to do the same. He felt it to be a great evil
to deceive or to equivocate, and even worse to remain in a sort of indifference
or neutrality when it was a question of faith and religion. Although he always
advised that moderation govern all, and great charity mark dealings with the
adherents of the Jansenists in the hope of their conversion, he wished too
that this meekness be joined to firmness, and held that any new heresy must
not be flattered or pampered, no matter in whom it appeared. Although it is
not permitted to judge anyone, it is a greater evil through a false charity or
any other unworthy motive to accept those in heresy or suspected of heresy.
Not only is it not rash, but it is unjust and even impious to withholc1judgment
from what the Church has condemned, or even worse to support it. It is surely
an evil to wish to judge the Church herself, to condemn the judgments she
has given through the mouth of her head and her prelates.

Although Monsieur Vincent was moved by a true zeal against Jansenism
and did all he could to oppose it, he was able to distinguish the condemned
errors from laxism, which he never approved, as he showed on many occa­
sions. He always recommended his confreres attach themselves strongly to a
truly Christian morality, as taught in the Gospels and in the writings of the
fathers and doctors of the Church. He highly praised the bishops and the
Sorbonne who worked against moral laxity, just as much as against Jansenism.
He accepted graciously what the Holy See taught on both the one and the other.

42. CED XIII:167.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Monsieur Vincent’s Service to the King in the Council of His Majesty and Elsewhere During the Time of the Queen Mother’s Regency

WE COULD WELL include among the great accomplishments of Monsieur Vincent his tenure on the king’s Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs, and the services he rendered His Majesty. Besides the importance of the matters confided to him, which he always handled well, he showed on these occasions his strong character and eminent virtue. He should be the more appreciated in this, since one rarely finds in one person what was seen in him, that is, ready access to sovereigns coupled with a perfect detachment from all worldly interests. He combined political prudence with Christian simplicity, a great vigilance and active involvement in exterior concerns and an interior recollection and intimate union with God, the management of diverse matters of great importance and an uprightness never in doubt, the coming and going of all sorts of persons who came to see him, coupled with a serenity of disposition which showed itself in kindness and affability toward everyone. Lastly, he manifested a mind capable of the most important decisions in the service of his prince coupled with a will totally penetrated with the sentiments of a solid and perfect devotion to God.

These qualities of Monsieur Vincent were astonishing to those who saw them firsthand. In this chapter we will give some examples of them, even though he was reticent in speaking of his years of service to His Majesty. He held to the maxim once taught by an angel, Sacramentum Regis abscondere bonum est ["A king’s secret it is prudent to keep"].¹ We have been able to learn from other sources some episodes of the time of service of this great servant of God, whom divine Providence had led to this important position. Since all he did was under the inspiration of divine grace, we may speak openly of it, for the same heavenly spirit mentioned earlier also said: opera Dei revelare et confiteri honorificum est ["but the works of God are to be declared and made known"].²

¹. Tob 12:7.
². Ibid.
In 1643, after the death of King Louis XIII, of happy and triumphant memory, the queen mother [Anne of Austria] saw herself charged with the direction of this great kingdom during the minority of her son. She also recognized that to attract God's protection upon the precious child confided to her care, and also upon the entire state, she could do nothing better than to put religious matters into good order. She desired that God should rule in the hearts of her subjects, thus strengthening royal authority in the kingdom. To further this, she established a Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs, especially for granting those benefices at Her Majesty's disposition. Knowing of the virtue of Monsieur Vincent, and his other excellent qualities, she wanted him to become a member of this council.

We cannot adequately describe the surprise and astonishment of this humble servant of God at this appointment, nor the efforts he made to be dispensed from this service. It was as unbearable to him as it appeared honorable and brilliant in the eyes of others. Her Majesty persisted in her request, making it known that she was adamant in wanting him to give this service to God and to the king, her son. His humility gave way to obedience, believing that this request of the queen was a manifestation of God's will for him. This is why he renounced his own preferences in the matter, and he offered himself to God to do all that would be most pleasing to him.

He foresaw the great storms and violent shocks to which he would be exposed on this tempestuous sea of the court. He knew from experience that in sustaining the interests of justice and piety he would be the recipient of many recriminations and persecutions. He felt he could do nothing better than to abandon himself to divine Providence. He resolved to acquit himself faithfully and religiously in the position confided to him, and to preserve an inviolable fidelity to God and to the king, regardless of what might happen. 3

This resolution was well taken. After it became known that the queen sought his advice, some persons of high rank would come often to seek his favor and his recommendation. They would have obliged him to devote all his time to their business, were it not for his practice of not going to court

3. According to the testimony of Louis de Chandenier, Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld convinced Vincent to serve on the Council of Conscience for the sake of God's honor and the welfare of the French Church.
unless called for, and his conviction that as a priest he ought not to become involved in worldly affairs.

**SECTION TWO**

_Rules for Awarding Benefices, Adopted on the Recommendation of Monsieur Vincent_

After being appointed to the council in the way we have described, Monsieur Vincent felt the first order of business ought to be to set out some guidelines for the awarding of those benefices which depended upon nomination by the queen.

The main ones adopted were:

1. The queen would grant no pension for bishops and archbishops except in the only case foreseen by the law. This envisions that an officeholder, after serving for a long time, voluntarily resign from his office because of infirmity, old age, or other valid reason.

2. The queen would give no commission for abbeys except to those who, besides the other qualities required, will be at least eighteen years of age; sixteen years of age for priors, canons of cathedral churches, and fourteen years for canons of collegial churches.

3. No commission would be given for benefices that have devolved upon the crown, unless documents had been submitted in support of these requests. Certification must be presented regarding the life, morals, and abilities of those requesting these benefices. If the petitioners do not have the required qualities, others shall be chosen in whom these qualities do exist, and who can reestablish the devolved benefices.

4. There would be no assistant honorary abbots, not even provisional ones.

5. There would be no appointments to bishoprics, even as coadjutors, except for those ordained at least a year.

6. No coadjutors would be appointed to abbeys of women, unless it be known for certain that the rule is observed in these abbeys. The religious to be appointed to this position should be at least twenty-three years old, and of at least five years of profession.

It is easy enough to take good resolutions. Keeping them is something else. Monsieur Vincent did all he could to make sure they were strictly
observed. He often recalled them to mind. When he saw they were not being followed exactly, he had them reinstated. This allowed him to correct abuses which had slipped into the awarding of benefices and the handling of the administration of ecclesiastical goods. He did so freely but always respectfully. He complained only when he saw purely human considerations taking precedence over those referring to the service of God and the good of the Church.

This is not to say that he disregarded persons of birth and courage for ecclesiastical positions, and even for bishoprics, when birth and other qualities did not serve as a pretext for vanity, and if they had the competence, virtue, and other necessary dispositions.

In this connection he followed an old maxim: “Better fifty deer led by a lion than fifty lions led by a deer.” He lamented before God when he saw temporal interests prevail over spiritual considerations, to the prejudice of the service of God and to the disadvantage of his Church. Nevertheless, after doing what he felt it was his duty to do, he committed the rest to Providence and remained at peace.

SECTION THREE

The Care and Impartiality with Which Monsieur Vincent Acted Concerning Ecclesiastical Benefices

Since Cardinal Mazarin had been appointed by the queen as the head of the Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs, he gave as much time to it as his other duties allowed. When he summoned the council he asked for advice on the giving of bishoprics. Monsieur Vincent gave it with both respect and freedom. He spoke his opinions, before God, about the ability or lack of it, the merits or the deficiencies, of those who had been proposed. No regular day was set for the meeting of the council, and the meeting depended on the time available to the prime minister, who was often taken up with other important matters of state. For this reason, His Eminence often decided by himself, with the queen’s agreement, on the abbots and even bishops he judged would best serve the king. When he believed they presented no difficulty, he did not think it necessary to have them considered by the council.

All the same, there were many such lesser offices to be filled, either of
the regular or secular clergy or many resignations or changes to be considered, and other matters to regulate to prevent abuses or to put things in good order. Because of this, Monsieur Vincent, who was responsible for these, had much to report on at each meeting of the council.

In awarding benefices he felt it proper to look to the clergy attached to the court and to the chaplains of the army in preference to others, if he found them well qualified. He felt the officials in the service of Their Majesties who lived decently among the corruptions of the court deserved special consideration. Because some were not all they should be, however, and some already were well provided for but still asked for additional benefices and pensions, sometimes the most unworthy were better off than the more qualified. To bring a remedy to this disorder, he drew up a list of the chaplains, confessors, clerks, cantors, and other ecclesiastical officials of the house, chapel, and musical department of Their Majesties, adding the amounts they already were paid, or those not paid at all. He wanted to be sure to do all he could to have the available support evenly distributed among all.

In Normandy, the king had the right of appointment to benefices which were under lay patronage, but whose patron was a minor, and thus a ward of the crown. Monsieur Vincent was careful in awarding these benefices when they became vacant by resignation or death to make sure that they were granted to the most deserving. He was convinced that those whose duty it was to name those who would receive a benefice with a care of souls, were responsible before God, not only for all the evil done by unworthy pastors, but also for all of the good which remained undone by those who were unworthy and who had been granted the benefice in place of a more worthy candidate.

At this time many gentlemen, crippled during their wartime military service, urgently requested that they be awarded pensions from benefices as a reward for their services to the king. Monsieur Vincent gladly recommended to the cardinal and the queen their requests for pensions, but he strongly objected to these pensions being drawn from ecclesiastical sources. He felt that these could only rightly be used for ecclesiastical pensions.

On the one hand, this faithful councillor had his eyes open so as not to be taken by surprise in this matter of benefices, to the prejudice of the service of God and the honor of the Church. On the other, he was careful to oversee, as much as it was possible for him, the just distribution and use of ecclesiastical goods. The Church fathers called these the patrimony of the poor, and the price of the redemption from sin.
We have to admit that we live in a time when we can repeat the lament of Saint Bernard against those who in his day sought benefices for unworthy motives.

Where can we find someone who seeks, or someone who is sought out, to have ecclesiastical charges and dignities for the sole and sincere intention of offering himself to God, to serve him in true holiness of body and soul, and to work with greater fervor at his own salvation and that of others, by prayer and the ministry of preaching? On the contrary, do we not see it is ambition or the hope of enriching themselves that leads to all sorts of schemes, and sometimes of unlawful or even shameful ways to gain access to the treasury of Jesus Christ? Mothers and fathers are busy seeking benefices for their children even from their earliest years, sometimes even before they are born. Solicitations and repeated requests are made until they are heard, and often those receiving the most are the least grateful. On occasion they are downright ingrates.

In his time, Monsieur Vincent saw these same abuses and disorders, and others worse still, which deeply wounded his heart. In imitation of this great saint he was not content to complain in the sight of God, but used all his energy to combat these abuses. He opposed these disorders with no regard to human respect, nor did he trouble himself with the resentment powerful people felt, or their threats to himself and his community. The interests of God were incomparably more significant to him than any other consideration.

He was not able to hide his displeasure at the insistence with which some tried to promote their nomination to the episcopacy. They used every conceivable stratagem, making large donations to abbeys, and going to great expense to secure their nomination. This faithful servant of God, usually so sparing in his use of words, could not refrain from saying to one of his friends that he greatly feared this damnable traffic in sacred offices would attract the curse of God upon the entire kingdom.

A chaplain to the king, a good man, was urged by his relatives to speak about his years of service and his willingness to accept a bishopric. He was inclined to follow this advice, thinking that if he did not speak up or have others petition for him, he would be passed over in forgetfulness. He realized
this would be contrary to the humility and modesty suitable for a priest. He
would be surer of his own salvation if he would leave himself in the hands
of divine Providence. He was troubled in spirit over what course to follow,
and in this perplexity wrote to Monsieur Vincent for advice. This great
servant of God replied in these words:

Monsieur, I have received your letter with all the respect I owe
you, and with the esteem and thanks for the grace God has put into
your kindly heart. God alone, in face of the natural inclination of
man to advance himself, has given you the thought of the opposite.
He will give you the strength to carry out whatever is most agreeable
to him. In this, Monsieur, you are following the rule of the Church,
which does not allow anyone to push himself forward for ecclesi­
astical dignities, especially for the episcopacy. You imitate the Son
of God. Though he was the eternal priest, he did not come to
exercise this office on his own. He waited for his Father to send
him, even though he had been awaited for such a long time as the
“Desired of all the nations.”

You give a great example to the present generation, in which few
observe this rule or follow this example. You will have the conso­
lation, Monsieur, should it please the Lord to call you to this
ecclesiastical dignity, that it is truly a call from God, since it came
about with no human intervention. You would be sustained with
special graces of God, part of a true vocation, and if you fulfill the
duties of an apostolic life, you can anticipate a blessed eternity. We
see this in those prelates who have done nothing to push their own
case, and who honor God in themselves and in their work.

In closing, Monsieur, you will have no regrets at the hour of death
in having taken upon yourself the cares of a diocese, which other­
wise would seem unbearable. Indeed, I cannot write this except with
thanks to God, to see you in no way seeking this burden, and for his
having given you the disposition of not wanting to push yourself
forward. This is a grace which cannot be prized and cherished
enough.

Not only in the seeking of bishoprics, but in all kinds of other benefices,
some sought so earnestly that they went so far as to commit simony or to
reveal confidences. Monsieur Vincent used an extraordinary vigilance to
prevent this evil. When he came upon something of the sort he would first
warn the offender. If this did no good he would refuse them absolutely. Since
he was aware that the human malice is ingenious in hiding under various

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5. CED IV:77-78.
pretexts, he was most careful to be on guard against the camouflages of this unholy business. When he did not see clearly what was happening in the changes, resignations, or other modifications in the benefices sought, he would send away the petitioner until he could have a clearer insight into the matter. In addition, he kept careful watch on pensions, to see there was no abuse in them, and that they were not excessive, or too great a burden on the revenues of the benefice supporting them.

There was another evil committed in the quest for benefices which he sought to remedy as much as was in his power. Some sought to profit from the property of the Church, but not being able to do so legally, sought to achieve their goal by more devious means. This scheme was to threaten to have the benefice held by someone else declared vacant, and oblige the legitimate holder to pay ransom to stop the annoyance. If these unscrupulous persons could not gain title to a benefice, at least they hoped to get some financial benefit. Because these parasites on the property of the Church ordinarily hid their specious pretexts under the appearance of good to make their designs less hateful, more often than not Monsieur Vincent had to be most vigilant. He attempted to attack the evil at its root. He obliged those appealing to the council for the devolution of any benefice, before answering their petition, to justify and prove the causes and reasons upon which they based their claims. Those who could not do so he reported to the council, with the recommendation that these requests should not be honored, but should be rejected.

By this procedure he put a stop to a countless number of lawsuits at their very beginning. This prevented annoying vexations for many virtuous clergy, and even some pastors. Without this charitable protector they would have been obliged to abandon their flock and spend months, and sometimes entire years, in defending themselves in various courts from the injustices practiced against them.

Although the temporal part of benefices is not as significant as the spiritual, they still should not be neglected. They are goods offered to God, and the beneficiaries, their stewards and dispensers, are obliged to use them wisely. Nevertheless some productive abbeys were held by powerful persons content to accept the profits, but with little care for the buildings or for making needed repairs. Sometimes buildings and even churches were in

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6. Devolution is a legal claim made on a benefice on the basis of the alleged incapacity of its holder or on some default in his titles. Because of negligence like this by an inferior collator, the right of conferral of the benefice reverted after a certain amount of time to a superior collator, by “devolution.”

7. The award of an ecclesiastical benefice in trust, in commendam, to a lay person needed a canonical dispensation from regularity. The French term commendé (from Latin commenda, a protection or safeguard), was synonymous with a trust.
danger of falling into ruin. In seeing this, and wishing to remedy it, Monsieur Vincent had the king send a letter to the officials of the local Parlements, authorizing them to force the abbots, even by seizing their revenues, to make the necessary repairs.

SECTION FIVE

A Remarkable Example

Among many other examples which could be cited to show the concern of Monsieur Vincent that benefices, particularly those relating to episcopacy, be conferred only upon those worthy of the office, and who might be expected to fulfill its duties fittingly, we will speak of only one. This will enable us to see the virtue and mentality of this great servant of God.

At the time, the court was not in Paris. This occasioned Cardinal Mazarin to write the following letter to Monsieur Vincent:

These few lines are to inform you that Monsieur [Mathieu Mole] hurried here, as soon as the bishopric of [Bayeux] became available, to ask the queen that it should be conferred upon his son. She was happy to comply, for he has the requisite qualities, and Her Majesty was pleased to find such a suitable opportunity to thank the father, through his son, for his past services and his zeal for the welfare of the state. The queen promised me she would write to you, and I thought I should write, to ask you to contact this young man, to give him the instructions and advice you think necessary for properly carrying out this office.⁸

This letter concerned Monsieur Vincent greatly, for though he greatly respected anything coming from Her Majesty or her prime minister, he knew well that this priest nominated for the bishopric did not have the qualities needed for this charge. Besides, the diocese in question, one of the largest of its province, had been neglected by its previous bishops. It now needed a pastor who would live and work for revitalizing it. This could not be hoped for in the one selected. What could the faithful and zealous servant of God do to avert this disaster?

To appeal to the queen and the cardinal was too late, for the appointment

⁸ CED II:563-64.
had already been made. Besides, the court was in need of the loyalty of the father. Monsieur Vincent still felt he had to do something to prevent this appointment. It would be so prejudicial to the welfare of the poor diocese and to the salvation of both the father and the son. Since he enjoyed their friendship, he believed his duty demanded that he render a charitable service for them, the more pure and impartial in that he would run the risk of losing their affection.

He went to visit the father at his own home. He showed him that his son lacked all the good qualities needed for governing the diocese, and how important it was for himself and his son not to incur the wrath of God because of the evil results of such an appointment. To convince the father that he should not proceed with this matter, he foresaw the objections likely to be raised. He responded in advance to what fatherly love was apt to suggest. This good gentleman listened attentively to these remarks, saying he agreed with what had been said. He even thanked Monsieur Vincent for his trouble, promising he would give the matter further consideration.

Several days later Monsieur Vincent returned to his home on some other business and met with these words: "Oh, Monsieur, Oh, Monsieur Vincent, what sleepless nights you have caused me." He then spoke in detail of his house and its affairs, his advanced age, the number of his children and the obligation he was under to look to their settlement before he died, not to leave them unprovided for. He pointed out that his son would have virtuous and learned priests working with him, who would enable him to fulfill his duties as bishop. For all these reasons he felt that he had done well to obtain this appointment for him.

Monsieur Vincent had already spoken against all such human considerations, and said nothing more, leaving events in the care of divine Providence. Shortly after, God showed clearly how displeasing this whole episode was to him. He called from this world the new bishop, so recently elevated to this dignity. The father was left with the regret that he had not followed the advice given by Monsieur Vincent.9

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9. Edouard Mole, bishop from June 22, 1647 to April 6, 1652.
His Great Affection for the Service of the Prelates of the Church

Monsieur Vincent always displayed a singular respect for the dignity of the bishop, in whose person he recognized and honored the power and majesty of Jesus Christ. He made it a rule to obey and serve the bishops in all situations, as far as it was possible for him. Especially after his appointment to the council of the king, he was eager for opportunities to be of help, not even waiting to be asked. On his own initiative he took their part before the queen and the cardinal or other persons in authority, with greater devotion even than for the interests of his own confreres.

He strove to work out some accommodation between the two bishops, Rieux and Cupif, both of Leon in Brittany.10 The first had been removed from his see during the reign of Louis XIII, of glorious memory, but now sought to regain his seat by ousting his replacement, Bishop Cupif. He, for his part, had the backing of both the spiritual and temporal powers, and would not budge. This affair was the source of a sad division within the diocese, and of much talk in the entire Church in France. Finally, after many meetings, Bishop Rieux regained his seat and Bishop Cupif was named bishop of Dol, leaving both satisfied, and the difficulty resolved.

He also contributed much to the moving of the episcopal see from the town of Maillezais to La Rochelle. In former days it had been the refuge of heretics, and the sanctuary of enemies of the state. It had served, however, as an unwitting memorial to the piety of the late king by being the subject of his wrath, his courage, and his power, when he reduced this rebel city to his obedience. Since that time some had thought it should be made an episcopal city, to reestablish the Catholic religion with as great a majesty and justice as the seditious heretics had disgraced it in ignominy and irreligion. However, the execution of this praiseworthy design was reserved, by order of divine Providence, for the regency of the queen. By the advice of Monsieur Vincent, she chose Bishop Jacques Raoul, then bishop of Saintes, as the first bishop of La Rochelle. Bishop de Bethune of Maillezais11

10. Rene de Rieux, the bishop of Saint Pol de Leon, had compromised himself politically and had been forced to flee the country into exile. Since he did so without royal permission, a canonical process was begun to depose him as bishop. The Holy See commissioned four other bishops to decide, and he was formally deposed on May 31, 1635. After a long vacancy, the see was filled by Robert Cupif in 1639. De Rieux contested this in a lengthy suit which was not settled until 1648.

11. The dioceses of Maillezais and Lucon were created by the division of the diocese of Poitiers.
was rewarded by the archbishopric of Bordeaux for his willingness to agree to the change, and Monsieur Bassompierre was appointed to be bishop of Saintes. As part of the settlement, some of the benefices formerly depending on the now suppressed chapter of Maillezais were to be united to those of the canons of La Rochelle.

Monsieur Vincent's zeal for the service of the prelates became evident when there was need of the authority of the king and the protection of the chancellor against heretics. He invoked the help of each of these in enforcing the regulations limiting the places the heretics could meet or preach. He also did what he could to put a stop to this abuse among them: those who wished to marry a Catholic girl would feign conversion, but soon after the ceremony would return to their errors, making evident they had little faith, either divine or human. He encountered others who purchased certain important positions in various cities. They would pay two or three times their worth, and then would try to have themselves accepted at whatever price, despite edicts to the contrary. Monsieur Vincent did not hesitate to complain to the queen and the chancellor to prevent their being accepted. He also wrote, in the king’s name, to the legal authorities in the provinces to stop the many activities of the heretics. He recommended to them that they be active in supporting the rights of Catholics in the various lawsuits which arose in disputes with the heretics.

It would be wearying to the reader if we were to report here all the good offices the prelates received in many different situations from Monsieur Vincent. It is enough to say that he willingly accepted any request from the bishops, and did all he could to be of help. This might take the form of sustaining their legitimate interests, or supporting their lawful wishes. It might be the obtaining of protection from the authorities against certain annoyances, or possibly the giving of good advice when asked for, or when he saw it was necessary for the good of their dioceses. In all this he used much circumspection and reserve. His extreme humility and the respect he had for the episcopal dignity often made him keep his counsel or not reveal his own sentiments, of which he was ever distrustful. He was persuaded that bishops had a purer and more comprehensive light than his own, which he considered small and limited. It is true that on certain occasions his devotion for their service would override his humility, as we can see in this example with which we will conclude this section.

The great servant of God was aware of a major abuse introduced into the

Henri de Bethune had been its bishop since 1630. In 1646 he was named to be archbishop of Bordeaux. He took possession of this see in 1648, and died in 1680.

12. Louis de Bassompierre became the bishop of Saintes in 1648. He was a great supporter and patron of the Congregation in his diocese. At his death in 1676 he left his estate to the community and was buried at Saint Lazare.
Church in France, by what was called the "Appeal." It had been allowed at first to make sure the canons and ecclesiastical discipline were strictly followed, and to prevent slipshod methods and practices from being followed in the ecclesiastical courts. The practical results were quite the contrary, however, for the appeal was used to render ineffective the legitimate authority of the bishops. Its use allowed those who wished to remain untouched in their vices and defiance of all law. Monsieur Vincent often prayed before the Lord for some remedy for this state of affairs, whose pernicious effects were well known to him. Seeing the evil to be too deeply rooted to be completely corrected, he strove to diminish its bad effects by the helpful advice he gave to several bishops.

He pointed out to them that the first step in preventing this abuse was to establish good order in the ecclesiastical courts. They should have virtuous and capable priests in charge, well versed in the civil and canon law, well experienced in the procedures of the courts, irreproachable in their personal lives, inflexible in their judgments, and exact in observing all the formalities in use in the kingdom.

He wrote once to one of the bishops who had sought his advice, to make him understand how important it was to have the proper person in this office. He said in his letter:

One day I carried to the late Monsieur Mole, procurator general and first president, the complaint of several bishops. The Parlement had treated them badly for seeking to remedy the disorderly conduct of several priests. The bishops were so annoyed by the opposition that they had tearfully resolved to do nothing more, and to let things go on just as badly as ever. This wise magistrate told me that when the bishops or other officials are faulty in observing the formalities prescribed for ecclesiastical justice, the court is lenient in allowing appeals.

When the bishops or other authorities are careful to follow all the procedures, they are never opposed. He gave me this example: We are well aware that the official of Paris is capable and most careful in his judgments. When we get an appeal from his judgments, we never accept it. This is what we will do to all others also, if they are as carefully handled as his.¹³

¹³. CED VIII:170.
Some Important Services Given by Monsieur Vincent to Several Religious Orders

Monsieur Vincent’s esteem and appreciation for the religious state disposed him to render to its members whatever services he could, particularly when it was a question of reestablishing or maintaining good order in their houses. He was zealous for this, and seized every occasion he could in the king’s council, or elsewhere, to be of help. We can say without exaggeration that even with all the orders there are in France, not one failed to experience the effects of his charity. This might be felt by the order as a whole, by some of its members, by the protection or good opinion of the king which he strove to promote, or by other services he was able to render. He was particularly anxious to support the efforts of reformers, such as those of the communities of Saint Maur, Saint Bernard, Saint Anthony, the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, the Premonstratensians, and others. We will recall here only several examples of this, passing over many others in silence. We think it best to allow certain disorders to be buried in the tomb of silence. 14

An abbot, a religious of great virtue, attempted to reform his order in the face of obstacles raised by some persons in authority, and even against a prince enlisted in the struggle against him. He received much help and encouragement from Monsieur Vincent, and wrote a letter of appreciation to him, in 1644, in which he said:

It is surely necessary to look to God for the strength you show in defending the cause of God against the powers of the world. We rely solely on God and his Providence, and on your zeal, Monsieur. You are our only recourse on earth, and the sole support of our desolate order.

A non-reformed religious was elected abbot of an important foundation,

14. Francois de Maida, the superior general of the Minims, accorded Vincent de Paul an affiliation with his order in 1621 in honor of his services to the order. In Book One, ch. 32, there is an account of how he aided the Commander de Sillery in the reform of the houses and territories of the Order of Malta. During the canonization process, various abbots of the Premonstratensians testified to Vincent’s help in the reform of their order. In the reform of the order of the Canons Regular at Chancelade, Saint Vincent provided support to Alain de Solminihac, its abbot and superior. (CED III:223-24.) Vincent helped Dom Gregoire Tarrisse in his reform at the Benedictine Congregation of Saint Maur. He advised Charles Fremont, the reformer of the order of Grandmont. Cardinal de la Rocheleau, delegated by the Holy See to reform the French religious orders, called Vincent his “right arm” in this work. In speaking of Vincent and Dom Gregoire Tarrisse, he called them “my two saints.”
the motherhouse of the order, and important for the progress of the reform. He applied to the king for a confirmation of his election. Since Monsieur Vincent was well informed of the invalidity of this election, however, he did all he could to have it annulled, and to have a reformed abbot elected in his place. He wrote to a bishop friend as follows:

About a year ago I had the honor of writing about the election of N. as abbot of the abbey of N. I asked you to come to Paris to speak to the queen of the kind of person needed for this abbey. Because you were not able to come, you were good enough to tell me of some of the reasons that this election should not be accepted. Things have dragged out, especially on the complaints of two of the electors who were informed only after it was too late to attend. This caused the Parlement to nullify the election, much against the wishes of the one chosen, who had pressed so hard to have his election confirmed. Since he has the support of some powerful persons, there is reason to fear he may be reelected. This makes it so desirable for you to be here, to say a word to the queen, and to give weight to the reasons there are to prevent this evil. I know that Her Majesty, who esteems you highly, would be happy to have you come, and the Keeper of the Seals has approved my writing to you. I do so humbly, begging you to come as soon as you can, for the love of God. I do so, knowing how close the interests of God are to your heart. Perhaps, as you said in your letter to me, the whole reform of this house depends on this, as well as the reform of the daughter houses. Perhaps the Lord will attribute to you the merit of such a happy outcome, as one of the prelates of the kingdom with such zeal for the glory of his Church.15

Monsieur Vincent also did what he could to initiate the reform in orders, as here, when he wrote to the general of the order,16 enclosing a letter from the king:

Most Reverend Father,

His Majesty has written to Your Reverence because it was decided in the Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs, when one of the priories of your order in the diocese of [Lodeve] was vacant, that we consider one of your good religious by the name of Father [Fremont] for a pension. This would be on condition that the former rule be observed, as is done in some other of your houses, so that the pension should pass to his successors, according to this usage. When this was reported to Her Majesty she was pleased, and urged us to see it through.

16. Georges de Barny.
It is to be hoped, Father, that the good Lord would use you to rebuild such a holy order as yours, which has been so famous in the Church and such a blessing for this kingdom. This reform has begun under your rule, regaining for your order the same reputation it enjoyed in other times, now so much desired by men of good will.

The king wants to help. It likewise seems to be the will of God, seeing he has given you this good religious, as an appropriate instrument which Your Reverence could well employ. This would be especially true if you would appoint him to look after the houses of [Epoisses], [Thiers], and [Lodeve], with power to receive novices and professed members according to the traditional observance, all under your authority and direction.\(^{17}\)

I have no doubt that Your Reverence will carry out the wishes of His Majesty in something so reasonable. It tends to the glory of God and the control of an organization of which you are the leader. The Lord shall pour his own religious spirit upon you and your assistants also, so he may reign there for centuries to come. By this means your person and your zeal will be remembered to posterity, not to mention the merits Your Reverence shall have in the sight of God.\(^{18}\)

When an important abbey had been conferred on a young prince, still under the tutelage of his mother, Monsieur Vincent wrote to her to persuade her to allow the reform to be introduced into the abbey, which needed it badly. He wrote as follows:

Madame,

I take the liberty of writing to Your Highness, to renew my promise of obedience, with all possible humility and submission. I accompany in spirit the good religious who seeks the honor of doing you reverence. He will tell you of the disposition of the abbey of N., for receiving the reform, and together with the appropriate means of achieving it. He is of good reputation and is of a most respectable family. I trust, Madame, that Your Highness will have the goodness to hear him, first because I know of your great zeal for the glory of God to which you are so committed that you involve even those persons who have the honor of belonging to you. Second, if you do so, Your Highness will cause Jesus Christ to be better honored and served in that monastery which should not be in the state it is now, as will be explained by the courier with this letter.

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17. This letter had its intended effect. The reform that Fremont introduced was not limited to those three priories, but was extended to many others.

Third, the late bishop of N. had so much at heart the introduction of the reform into this abbey that he wrote me several times about it. I am sure he would have carried this out but for the opposition of one of the leading religious of the abbey, with much influence over the others. Unfortunately, he died before he could carry out his plans. Perhaps, Madame, God has allowed this delay, to reserve to the abbot, your son, and to Your Highness, the merit of this great accomplishment.\(^{19}\)

Monsieur Vincent worked actively not only in introducing the reform, but also in restoring peace and union in those religious houses where he saw differences and divisions. He did all in his power to remedy those situations. Since he always acted with great prudence and circumspection in those cases in which he strove to unite divided parties, he arranged to have some virtuous persons, armed with the authority of the king, visit the houses to learn the truth. He would listen to both sides in disputes so as to be able to take the best means for restoring harmony, as he did on several occasions.

He arranged for some prelates to attend the general chapters of orders, when he saw this to be necessary, to hinder by their presence and authority certain religious who seemed to stir up trouble. He also wanted to make sure that each religious had perfect liberty in the voting, and that the order as a whole would take the necessary steps for the welfare of the entire group. Afterward, the prelates would report to the king that the elections and discussions were canonical in every detail. The king would then approve the elections and pay no more attention to any complaints raised against those elected.

Several times he was requested to mediate disputes between religious houses. He received letters from superiors general of different orders from Rome on three or four occasions. They thanked him for the help he had given to their communities, and for his intercession with Her Majesty in obtaining her protection. They looked on him as their guardian angel.

He was much afflicted to notice the decline of a certain order to such a deplorable state that he saw no way it could be redeemed. At this same time, a religious of another order, unhappy with his own community, wrote to ask his advice about transferring to the first one mentioned above. This is the reply he received from Monsieur Vincent:

> I would never advise anyone to join the so-called religious order of N., much less a doctor, professor of theology, and a great preacher like yourself. It is in disarray, not an order, a body with no sense of direction and no head. Its members live entirely independently of one another. I once met the Keeper of the Seals in his

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\(^{19}\) CED V:381.
library. He told me he was looking up the origin and development of this group in France, but he had been unable to find anything about them. In a word, it is a ghost of an order. It serves only as a refuge for libertines and rogues who, to escape the yoke of obedience, join this imaginary order to live under no restraints. This is why I judge these persons to be in bad conscience, and I pray our Lord would preserve you from such frivolity.  

This letter disabused this poor tempted religious, and opened his eyes to the precipice he was facing. He came to his senses, and resolved to persevere in his own congregation.

Another religious, noted both within and outside his order for his virtue and for his having preached in the most celebrated pulpits of the kingdom, once spoke to Monsieur Vincent of the extent of his work, the austerity of his rule, and the lessening of his strength. All this caused him to fear that he could not expect to continue long in his service to the Church. He had thought of a remedy to prolong his service. He was to be made a suffragan to the archbishop of Reims, because the dignity of bishop would dispense him from the obligation of fasting and other austerities of his order. This in turn would preserve his strength for preaching, and allow him to continue with more vigor and effect. He asked Monsieur Vincent for his advice, and if he thought well of it, to approach the king for his appointment to this position. He promised he would supply several recommendations from noteworthy friends to support his candidacy.

At once, Monsieur Vincent realized that this was a temptation for the good religious. He made this clear in the response he gave to this letter. In it he first showed the regard he had for him personally, and the esteem he had for his order. Then he congratulated him on the many talents given him by God for preaching, and the edification he had given up to this point to the entire order. He added this:

I have no doubt that you would do marvelously well in the episcopal office if God called you to it. He has made it evident, however, that he wants you in your present position by the success he has given to your efforts, and he not suggested that you should change. If Providence would wish you to be a bishop, it would not speak to you to bring it about. It would inspire those whose responsibility it is to name people to charges and ecclesiastical dignities to choose you, although you would have made no overtures yourself. Your calling, then, would be pure and assured, whereas if you propose yourself you could not hope to have the blessing of God in such a charge. This should hardly be desired or

pursued by a soul as humble as yours. Besides, reverend father, what harm you would do to your order, to deprive it of one of its chief supports, who sustains it by his teaching and example. If you open this door you will lead others to follow or at least to lose their taste for the practice of penance. They will not lack pretexts to soften and lessen it to the prejudice of the rule. Nature does not like austerities. If you ask it, it will reply they are too much, and that they must be avoided if one wants to live a long life to serve God more. Our Lord said of all this: He who loves his life shall lose it, but he who hates it shall save it. You know better than I what this means, and I would not have dared write my opinions on this if you had not asked me.

Perhaps you have not thought of the crown that awaits you. O God, how beautiful it shall be! You have already done so much, reverend Father, to gain this crown, and perhaps there remains but little more to do. You must persevere in the path you have entered, for it leads to life. You have already surmounted great difficulties. You should take courage, and trust that God will give you the grace to overcome those which remain. My suggestion would be to forego preaching for a while to regain your health. You are still able to do much good for the service of God and for your congregation. It is one of the holiest and most edifying of all in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Lastly, Monsieur Vincent extended his concern to the temporal affairs of religious communities as well as to the spiritual. Several times he helped in obtaining for various religious houses and hospitals the rents due them from the royal lands, which were in arrears because of the expenses of the wars. He became their advocate before the queen and the cardinal to obtain satisfactory payments for them. He took special pains to protect the hospitals on the frontiers of the kingdom, which were threatened by the soldiers, and saw to the support of several others through the gifts and privileges accorded them.

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22. CED IV:18-19.
Saint Cyprian rightly remarked that the more sublime the glory of religious virgins consecrated to God, the more care should be taken of them.\(^2^3\) Their loss is frequent and easy, as their sex is weak, and their constancy in good is more difficult and rarer than among men. This caused Monsieur Vincent to extend his regard for the religious life especially to the abbeys and convents of women. He sought to preserve them in their discipline if it already was in vigor, or to restore it if it had been lost.

He was particularly careful, as much as he could, to preserve the right of election in the abbeys where it was traditional, and he strongly opposed the pretensions of some religious. With no hope of being named abbess by election because of their lack of ability or merit, they hoped to attain the office through the authority of the king or the influence of their relatives. He took a position in favor of those elected for a three-year term, if this was the custom in their convent, opposing those who sought a mandate from the king for a lifetime appointment.

One day a virtuous bishop had overseen the election of a fine religious as the abbess of a convent in his diocese. In seeking the confirmation of the election by the king, he tried to persuade Monsieur Vincent of the superiority of a perpetual appointment over the three-year term. In contrast to his usual dislike for innovations going against the canonically established practices in religious communities, he argued with humility and respect that the triennial elections were much to be preferred. This was especially so for women, since they are more inclined to change and more likely to fail in major responsibilities once they saw themselves in office for life.

When an abbey of women depending on the king's nomination became vacant, schemes and intrigues ordinarily began for the choosing of women of birth or position for abbess. Not satisfied with their worldly success, but carrying their family ambition even to the holiest places, they bent all their efforts to have their daughters, sisters, or nieces placed in charge within the cloister. We read often of the strange requests made to Monsieur Vincent. He knew only too well that the good or bad discipline of religious houses usually reflects the attitudes of the superior, and he totally disregarded these pressures built on human

\(^2^3\) PL 4:443.
respect. He remained firm in insisting that only the most capable, most experienced, and most exact in regular observance be chosen abbess.

A gentleman had a daughter in an abbey where the previous abbess, her aunt, had just died. He came to Saint Lazare to complain that Monsieur Vincent was preventing his daughter from succeeding to the office, just as the aunt had succeeded another aunt before her. The patience of Monsieur Vincent served only to provoke his anger and resentment. The gentleman blamed him and scolded him, and even threatened, yelling and shouting like a man out of his head. This lasted an hour or more.

Monsieur Vincent had been told that this abbey was a sort of hereditary benefice of his house. To deny it to his daughter was, in the eyes of this gentleman, a great wrong. The husband, wife, and the entire family were accustomed to spend several periods each year in the abbey as a sort of vacation home. They lived there at the expense of the community, greatly disturbing the functioning of the abbey. All the religious murmured and complained about this, and once the abbey became vacant they insisted on having another superior, someone other than this niece. Monsieur Vincent was well informed of the qualities of the pretender to the chair. He answered the father mildly and respectfully, saying the daughter was too young. He added that he was obliged in conscience to advise the queen to choose the one most capable and most suitable for the office. After this, he listened to all the invectives of the father, letting him pour out all his pent-up anger upon him with unbelievable patience. He then accompanied him to the door, happy to have been abused and covered with opprobrium for upholding the interests of the Lord.

Often enough some abbesses with ties to their families, and who had a sister, niece, or cousin as a religious, would ask to have them appointed as assistant, under pretext of age or infirmity. Monsieur Vincent, ever on his guard against flesh and blood, was never quick to agree to this request, unless it were truly necessary. He was adamant on this, since when a vacancy developed through death the sisters were to have full liberty to choose the most virtuous and capable one to maintain good order if it existed, or to restore it if it did not.

If an abbess resigned her charge, and provided testimonial letters for the ability and good morals of the one in whose favor the resignation had been made, he would be slow to accept all that had been said. To his way of thinking, the testimonial letters could not always be relied on here. He would take steps to learn the qualities of the person being recommended. If he found the choice well made and likely to be advantageous to the abbey, he would accept the resignation, otherwise not.

At times some trouble would slip into convents of women, either division among themselves or some other trouble. He would try his best to correct
the difficulty. He would often send some virtuous and experienced visitors, under royal authority, to examine the difficulty, or reestablish the cloister if it had been neglected, or take care of some other needs. He would have Their Majesties write to the superior of these convents, and to the bishop of the locality, to look into the matter.

A certain abbey was in turmoil, and the superior was not able to resolve it despite all her best efforts. When Monsieur Vincent was called upon to help, he sent as visitor an abbot of the same order, a wise and zealous man. He wrote to Monsieur Vincent that the case could not be rectified unless the women were given a different confessor, one with the gift of calming spirits and maintaining peace. Monsieur Vincent requested a highly respected and virtuous priest, gifted in the direction of religious women, to serve God as a confessor in this abbey. He did so with much blessing, little by little restoring peace, and uniting all elements of the community.

In some convents of women the evil spirit had gained a foothold under the pretext of some revelations supposedly made to the superior. The imaginations of these superiors were inflamed by the angel of darkness. They claimed that God had revealed to them extraordinary ways of leading souls to perfection, and even for reforming the Church. They proposed many other curious doctrines, many reminiscent of those of the Illuminati. 24

When Monsieur Vincent was alerted to this, he had some meek and virtuous persons selected to visit these houses. They were to become aware of the abuses and diabolic illusions which sometimes had deceived many persons of all conditions and of both sexes. By this means the evil was brought to light, and it pleased God to stop its spread.

SECTION NINE

Various Other Activities of Monsieur Vincent While on the Council of the King

The zeal of Monsieur Vincent for everything concerning the service and honor of God made him attentive to those occasions when he might further this service or prevent anything that might oppose it. He used his good

24. The "Enlightened," a group of spiritual persons in Spain in the sixteenth century, characterized by a retired life of contemplation, prayer, and mystical visions. Some in the movement were doctrinally and spiritually unbalanced.
reputation in this way on the king’s council, judging that day a happy one in which he could prevent some ill or promote some good.

During the war years he tried to prevent the disorders committed by the soldiers on all sides, particularly the profanations of churches and disrespect for persons consecrated to God. Seeing it was impossible to prevent this evil entirely, he tried to lessen it. When all else failed he had recourse to God in prayer and penance, invoking the help of his grace and mercy both for those who suffered these ills and for those who committed them.

Another disorder offensive to good morals was that of certain actors in the theaters who presented not only indecent, but scandalous topics. These could not be spoken, heard, or seen without offending God. When Monsieur Vincent was informed of this, he recognized the pernicious effects this license was apt to produce. His remonstrances led to their being completely suppressed.

The troubles of the times and various activities against the welfare of the state obliged the king to confine those guilty or even suspect to the Bastille. They received there everything they needed, but no provision existed there for their spiritual welfare. Monsieur Vincent persuaded a priest of the Conference of Ecclesiastics held at Saint Lazare to take it upon himself to visit these prisoners and to speak to them. Morning and evening prayers were arranged, as well as some other religious practices, to the great spiritual benefit of their souls.

The demon, the enemy of peace, spread discord and provoked war in the kingdom, and sowed the seeds of disobedience and rebellion against the service of the king. He also incited some to rebel against God himself, and to attack religion in various ways. Among other things, there were those who sought to spread the maxims and damnable errors of the Illuminati. When Monsieur Vincent saw this, which had begun to spread in many places in France, especially in Paris and the diocese of Bazas, he applied such a prompt and effective remedy that this heresy was stifled in the cradle before it could do much harm to the Church.

Many seized upon the sense of freedom during the troubled times of the Fronde to permit anyone to say what he liked about religion or the state. This opened the door to another pernicious evil. This was the writing and publishing of all sorts of libels, even against faith and good morals. Monsieur Vincent spoke against this in the council and had this abuse reproved. The order was given to search out and seize such evil books, and the printers and bookstores were forbidden to publish or sell them.

This saintly man used all his energy in speaking and advising, entreating and remonstrating, against the damnable practice of dueling. This was finally happily eradicated through the piety of the queen and by the zeal and
authority of the king. He from his earliest years, like a Christian Hercules, had the strength and happiness to slay this dragon. His predecessor on the throne, Saint Louis, despite his laws and ordinances against this monster, was never able to achieve this. God reserved the glory of this victory to our great monarch, and marked the first years of his reign by this heroic triumph. It has saved the bodies and souls of thousands of French gentlemen and spared an infinity of noble families from ruin and utter unhappiness. For this they are eternally grateful to him who brought about their happiness and salvation.

Monsieur Vincent did what he could to root out blasphemy, causing the ordinances to be renewed against this detestable crime. He proposed other measures which might have stopped it entirely. Although he did not live to see the effects of these measures, he must surely have gained the merit of having attempted to prevent this evil. It is to be hoped that God will someday hear the ardent prayers he offered for this, and that he will inspire our incomparable monarch [Louis XIV] to take more effective means, even fire and the sword if he judges well of it, in imitation of Saint Louis, his predecessor, to purify the state from this infernal gangrene, which infects and corrupts it in many places, including those most important and most noble.

SECTION TEN

Monsieur Vincent Preserved Always an Inviolable Fidelity to the King and a Constant Devotion to His Service, Even During Most Perilous and Difficult Times

It does not suffice to give to God the things which pertain to God, for in keeping with the maxim of the Gospel we must also give to Caesar the things which pertain to Caesar. The same law which binds us to adore God, to obey him, and to love him above all else, also requires that we honor and respect kings. They are images of his sovereign majesty upon earth, and we are to give them the affection and service due them, and keep an inviolable fidelity to them. Christian princes have an advantage over all other monarchs who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Their subjects are attached to them, not only by the bonds of the laws, or by the fear of their sovereign power, or by the favors they might expect from their liberality, but by stronger and nobler bonds. These come from divine law, and from the tenets of their religion.
They cannot fail in their duty to the king without contravening God’s will. The obedience, respect, and fidelity they give to him are not founded on him alone, but on God. He regards as being done for himself what is done for those he has established upon earth as his visible representatives in the governing of peoples. It follows that among the subjects of a Christian prince those who are the most faithful, obedient, and attached to his service are those who are the most virtuous, those most united to God by grace and charity. On the other hand, from those who are lacking in what they owe to God, we should not expect a consistent fidelity, nor a sincere attachment to the service of their prince.

With this understanding, it should not be difficult to infer from what has been said here in Book Two and even in Book One, that with Monsieur Vincent’s fidelity in carrying out the will of God, and his zeal for God’s honor and glory, he should have shown such fidelity to the king and such singular attachment to his service. These qualities depend upon his relationship with God. The measure of the affection and fidelity to one’s prince is found in one’s attachment to God.

Besides this very strong general consideration, we can produce other proofs, more particular and no less convincing if we recount how this saintly man proved himself a servant of the king during the most difficult and perilous times. He risked his material welfare, his life, and his entire Congregation, in showing himself faithful to the service of His Majesty.

The deplorable state of affairs in France during 1649, 1652, etc., are still fresh in memory. We could say of those times that by a secret judgment of Providence, God had permitted the depths of the abyss, spoken of in the holy Scriptures, to be opened and its noxious vapors spread over the entire kingdom.

It filled the minds of the French with a darkness so obscure that some among them lost all sense of the duty they owed their sovereign. Even though they may have retained an affection for him personally, their actions betrayed this sentiment. While thinking they were working and fighting for his service, their armies were disputing his authority by killing some of his most faithful servants, and despoiling and ruining all parts of his kingdom.

Just as a bright star shines the more brilliantly when surrounded by clouds which serve only to emphasize its light, we could say these troubles of the nation served to allow the perfection of his fidelity to the king and his zeal in his service to appear. During those deplorable times, confusion was so great in many places that most loyal Frenchmen and those most attached to the interests of their prince, felt they could only keep quiet and groan in silence. They knew well anything they may have said would have served only to make things worse. Prudence suggested quiet, to avoid worse
troubles. Monsieur Vincent, on the contrary, always so prudent and circum­spect, acted differently. He openly declared himself a servant of the king, and promised obedience to his directives. Not content with assuming this posture for himself, he strove to have others share his attitude. His voice could be heard only where he was, but his letters to various people carried his message, especially those to bishops, as was reported in Book One. In them he persuaded the bishops to remain in their dioceses and to use their influence to confirm their people in obedience to the king.

He showed his fidelity to the king and his zeal for his service when, at the risk of his own welfare and that of his Company, he went to find Their Majesties at Saint Germain en Laye after they left Paris, to offer them his services. He left his house of Saint Lazare and all his dear confreres as a prey to their enemies. After the example of their father, they, too, suffered with patience and even with joy, seeing themselves despoiled of their goods and maltreated on this occasion.

What makes his commitment to the service of Their Majesties shine forth still more clearly is his thought of giving some advice that he felt was helpful and even necessary in the affairs of state. He did so despite his fear that he would not be favorably received by those holding the reins of government. He ran the risk of losing favor at court, but he preferred this, and even disgrace in the eyes of Their Majesties, than to fail in what he saw as an opportunity to be of service. Her Majesty the queen appreciated his sincere heart and received his suggestions well. Cardinal Mazarin gave him a favorable audience, well aware that he had no other goal than to be of help. Even though they did not follow his advice, this in no way diminished the appreciation his fidelity and affection merited. It was recognized that he had the courage to risk his standing in court, rather than fail in giving a suggestion he felt was helpful for the good of the kingdom.

SECTION ELEVEN

_Monsieur Vincent Served the King With an Entire Disregard for All Personal Self-interest_

We in no way wish to blame those who serve the king in the hope that His Majesty would reward them for their faithful service. On the contrary, we would say it is neither just nor reasonable to blame such a person. This
would benefit the state. Just as the law sets out punishments for those who rebel against the will of the sovereign, it should also sanction his favors being given to those who serve him faithfully. Just as the fear of punishment holds the dissolute to their duty, so the hope of reward is a still greater spur for the good to act in such a way as to win favors from the prince.

Although it is permitted and even praiseworthy to serve the prince faithfully in the hope of recompense from his generosity, we must admit there is an even more excellent disposition, one nobler and more perfect, that is, to have in view in serving the king only the good of his service. Even more excellent would be the attitude, in fulfilling one’s duties, of seeing in the king God himself, and therefore serving him with the sole view that this service is pleasing to God. This would lead one to have as the sole motive in serving the king that this is pleasing to God and is accomplishing what one knows to be his holy will.

Would we not have reason to say with the wise man of Scripture, speaking of him who did not seek after gold, nor put his trust in riches: Quis est hic, et laudabimus eum? [“Who is he that we may praise him?”] Who is this admirable person who has mastered this most uncontrollable of all the passions? Where can we meet him, so we can praise him as he deserves? Happily, he has been found. Despite the corruption of the age, France has had the glory of producing in our day a masterpiece of virtue in the person of Vincent de Paul. It can truly be said that his heart never sought after gold, nor did he put his trust and his affections in riches. Although his duties brought him in close contact with the source of rich treasures and magnificent rewards, he paid no attention to these possibilities. He had in view only the faithful service of his king, which would in turn redound to the glory of God. This was the sole motive which led him to accept the appointment and duties assigned to him. This was the bond that held him attached to the service of Their Majesties, even in most difficult times. This motive of giving glory to God in faithfully serving his prince gave him the strength, constancy, and perseverance in his service, amid all the contradictions, calumnies, and persecutions he had to undergo, and amid the dangers his position entailed.

First, when the queen mother at the beginning of the regency did him the honor of calling him to the Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs, he accepted solely out of the obedience he felt God willed that he should give to the wishes of Her Majesty. His zeal to promote the interests of religion and to procure greater glory for God made him accept this call, despite the extreme reluctance suggested by his humility, and by all that he foresaw would disturb his peace of mind and the desire he had, at his age, to live out his days in peace.

In his position he had favorable opportunities to advance the temporal interests of his Congregation, if he wished to do so, and as he could have done most legally. It might have seemed, even, that the charity he owed his own confreres may have suggested this. Since many benefices passed through his hands, it would not have been difficult to direct some to the houses of his own Congregation, many of which were just in initial stages of establishment, and badly in need of help. Many of them could hardly support their service to God and to the Church without help, especially since their efforts in favor of the poor were always given without charge.

Despite this need, he never accepted benefices for his own houses. He never sought, directly or indirectly, any such help for them. If he did allow some benefices to be conferred on the seminaries, this was done at the insistence of the benefactors, who had the right to designate the recipients of their favors. Sometimes these charitable persons had to use as much persuasion to have him accept these gifts as some others used in attempts to obtain them. His purpose in accepting these benefices was not to enrich his houses, nor to put them at their ease, but to use the revenues faithfully for teaching and forming those called to ministries in the Church.

One of his closest friends came to him one day and offered a large sum (we know it was close to one hundred thousand livres) given by others, but on the condition that he would support their position in some advice that they had given to the council. This request seemed reasonable enough to them since it would not cost the people anything even if it was in some way prejudicial to the interests of the clergy. This holy man made no other reply but to raise his eyes to heaven, and sigh: “God save us. I would rather die than to say a single word on this matter.”

Second, just as he never took any temporal profit from the service he gave Their Majesties, he never sought the help of powerful people who might have been able to help him. This was not because he thought it was a virtue to be rude and cruel like those who enjoy offending those in high places. On the contrary, he always treated these persons with much respect, and sought to please them even in trivial matters, but with this reservation, that God must first be pleased. If he saw that what was asked of him was in keeping with the orders and the will of God, he would agree easily and with good grace. If he saw what was asked was not agreeable to God’s law, no human respect nor fear of any disgrace or evil whatever would move him. He had no regard to the position of those he refused, nor did their threats sway him.

26. According to the testimony of Claude Le Pelletier, Michel Le Tellier, a minister of state, said: “I have had many dealings with Monsieur Vincent. He has done more good works in France on behalf of religion that anyone I know, but I particularly remember that while he was a member of the Council of Conscience he never sought any advantage for his own personal interests, those of his Congregation, or those of the ecclesiastical houses he had established.”
He thought nothing of the ills or persecution that might come, but looked solely to God whom he sought to please, and whose displeasure alone he feared.

Third, his disinterest was seen not only in never seeking advantages but still more in suffering willingly the losses which came about, as we have seen, because of his service to Their Majesties. Remarkably, for all the losses he suffered during the wars, and for the poor treatment he had received from the bad will of some who resented his devotion to the service of the king, he was never heard to utter the least complaint, nor did he ever seek the least reimbursement for his losses. What is even more remarkable is that by his unselfish charity he turned aside the gifts which the queen, in her goodness, wished to give him, in favor of others, when he could do so without violating justice and charity.

We must surely say he served his king with complete disregard for self-interest. Monsieur Vincent practiced this virtue to an heroic degree, the more admirable in that it is so rarely seen today in the courts of princes.

SECTION TWELVE

Monsieur Vincent’s Prudence and Circumspection In His Service of the King

The government of the state and the service of a sovereign are of such importance that they should be confided not only to well qualified and faithful persons, but also to those alone who are prudent and discreet, of sound mind and solid judgment. They should have a background of experience equal to the importance of the things committed to their care. Also, not all those with reputations of piety have these natural qualities, but among virtuous people some have received these qualities from God. They are able to put them to good use in the service of their prince and for the good of the state. Just as it would be imprudent to think the advice of the pious man should be followed in whatever situation just because we imagine that all he suggests must be good and useful, so too it would be equally foolish, and possibly unjust, to reject or suspect the advice of a good man because of his reputation for piety, as though piety could not be found with prudence, and as though piety was somehow incompatible with serving God and one’s king.
Some believe and try to persuade others that whoever performs exercises of piety and is devoted to the service of God (the so-called "devout," whom they decry so vehemently) is unfit for service of the king, or for the conduct of state affairs. Their concern for heavenly things would make them unsuitable for being in charge of mundane matters. The "devout" often are moved by a zeal, if not indiscreet at least too impetuous, and give advice based not on whether it is useful but whether it seems to them to be good. This would eventually be most prejudicial to the service of the prince and the good of the state. To their mind the man of virtue is so suspect that he ought to be looked upon as a disguised spy, or as someone in the pay of a foreign prince or an enemy of the state.

Those who wish to appear less doctrinaire might admit that a virtuous man might have a true and sincere dedication to the service of his prince, and show steadfast fidelity, and even serve him with complete lack of self-interest. Even then he would not be acknowledged as having the discretion and prudence required for important affairs, since his rules of piety might not accord with the maxims of politics.

If things are like this, as those who think this way say they are, advising a king or prince is most unfortunate. Royalty would then be reduced to excluding from their court the most virtuous of their subjects, or to be constantly on their guard against them as persons suspect, whose advice may harm the good of the state. If it be true, as we said before, that those most united to God by virtue and especially charity, have a more sincere appreciation and a more constant fidelity for the service of their prince, they would be the very ones he must exclude from his service. Instead he should commit the care of most important affairs of his realm and take the advice of those whom he trusts less.

It is not difficult to see the falsity of such a position by the example of several great princes. They have trusted in their councils and confided the direction of their realms to various persons renowned for their virtue and piety. By their experience and wisdom they have been most successful. By their advice and faithful service they have contributed greatly to the good of the state.

Not to wander too far from our subject, we have only to recall him whose memory is still fresh, the great servant of God, Vincent de Paul. He joined piety to wisdom, zeal to discretion, the science of the saints to the knowledge necessary to serve his prince. We will relate here only some scattered events which will show clearly that he had in a high degree those excellent qualities needed as counselor to the king.

Evidently, one of the most necessary dispositions to have in handling important affairs of state is a free spirit, unencumbered with uncontrolled affections and passions. These secure the understanding and prevent one from
seeing the true state of affairs and likely consequences of actions. All those
who knew Monsieur Vincent agree that whether by grace or by a natural
disposition he seemed entirely free from uncontrolled emotion or erratic
behavior, something found in few other men. If these impressions were felt by
him, he had acquired such mastery over himself and all the movements of his
soul that nothing appeared externally, either in his gestures, his words, or even
his features. They remained calm and serene, even in the face of affronts and
most trying insults. What ordinarily would cause strong reaction in others were
the very occasions when he seemed most calm and most self-possessed,
speaking and acting with great circumspection.

Another feature of his behavior which added to his wise and prudent
manner was slowness in giving an opinion. He decided slowly, especially
in matters of moment, but gave himself time and leisure to consider all the
circumstances, to weigh the reasons for and against, and to foresee the
consequences of decisions. This resulted in his advice being solid and
assured, which could be followed with no fear of being deceived. He held
to this saying from an ancient writer: “Nothing is so injurious in the
consideration of great events as to proceed with too great haste. This haste
prevents our seeing, and even more so, foreseeing, all that must be consid­
ered before giving good advice. We must deliberate and take resolutions
with leisure, but once decided, we must act on what has been determined.”27

After he had maturely considered something, taking into account all the
reasons suggested by others and those which came to his own mind, he came
to a conclusion and gave his advice accordingly. Later, if it did not turn out
the way he thought it would, he did not worry, but remained at peace. He
held to the principle of an ancient father, “It is proper for the wise to judge
things, not by how they turn out, but by the intention and design with which
they were begun. It is a common error to think that only those things that
have succeeded have been well begun.”28

Another disposition of Monsieur Vincent was noted as a sign of his
prudence and something that helped perfect that virtue. This was his silence,
an important trait in those who manage important affairs. He was never heard
to speak of what had occurred in the council, except when absolutely
necessary to divulge it. He kept under the seal of silence not only the secrets
he had been entrusted with, but everything else he saw no necessity to reveal.
In his familiar conversations with others when he came back from court, he
spoke no more of the things that had been discussed than if he were returning
from the cell of a Carthusian.

27. Abelly has joined two sources: Livy, Histories, 31.32.2 and 22.39.22, with Aristotle, Ethics.
28. Abelly has joined two sources: Isidore of Seville, Epistle 205, Book 3; and Boethius, De
consolatione philosophiae, Book 1, prosa 4.
Even though he exercised this circumspection and prudence and remained firm in his advice, he was so moderate in his views that he never pushed them heatedly. He was not of the type which always finds a way to contradict the opinions of others because the idea did not originate with himself. He not only was outwardly deferential to those over him in rank, but submitted his judgment as well when he could do so with no reproach of his own conscience. He never criticized others for their way of looking at things, and never complained. After saying what he felt he had to say, he remained respectful and silent, leaving the outcome of events in the hands of Providence.

The chief foundation of his prudence was God's will, manifested by his law and in the Gospel. He held it as an inviolable principle never to take any position contrary to the divine will. As a father of the Church commented, he considered God's will as the sure guide for any advice he was to give or decision he had to make. He followed, to the best of his ability and as the nature of the business to be decided would allow, the maxims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which he accepted as the fountain of all true wisdom. He found in this source the light for his mind and the basis for the advice he gave to others with such notable benediction.

We could add to these various reflections many different examples of this rare and distinctive prudence that he displayed in the most trying and difficult circumstances. We could also illustrate the marvelous circumspection and moderation with which he acted while in the king's council, never failing to say what he felt was needed, yet with all the respect and submission he felt he owed to Their Majesties. We shall not do so, however, to avoid an annoying repetition. Undoubtedly each reader can supply on this subject for himself from what has been said in this last chapter and all through the two preceding books.

Monsieur Vincent was gifted by both nature and grace with a great prudence. This was a torch leading others by right and safe paths among a multitude of occupations and circumstances in which Providence had placed him. He acted with such integrity, moderation, and wisdom that during life he happily succeeded in all he undertook for the glory of God and in the service of those who represented God upon earth. After his death, his memory remains in benediction among them.

End of Book Two.