Venerable Servant, Book 3

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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 THREE

New City Press
The life of the venerable servant of God Vincent de Paul: (divided into three books) / by Louis Abelly; [edited by John E. Rybolt; translated by William Quinn; introduction by Stafford Poole]. Includes bibliographical references and index.

Published in the United States by New City Press
86 Mayflower Avenue, New Rochelle, New York 10801
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Abelly, Louis, 1604-1691.
[Vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Vincent de Paul. English]
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; [edited by John E. Rybolt; translated by William Quinn; introduction by Stafford Poole]. Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 1-56548-052-X : $49.00
BX4700.V6A48 1993
271'.7702—dc20
[B] 93-9446

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

We have already spoken fully of the virtues of Monsieur Vincent in the two preceding books, which cover his life and his main works, since we can truly say that his life was a fabric of the virtues which influenced his conduct and his most important works and activities. However, much remains to be said on the topic which did not seem suitable for any other section of this work. We have thought it necessary then to add this third book to illustrate more clearly the virtues of this holy man. We would like to present his mind and his practice, in the hope readers will draw much light for their own edification. We hope this third and final book will be no less agreeable and useful to readers serious about perfection than the two preceding ones. One of the fruits hoped for in reading this work is motivation for readers to practice these same virtues. We first should praise God for all the graces he gave to his faithful servant, Vincent de Paul, and through him to the Church. The reader will see here both examples and the motivation for them in the life of Monsieur Vincent.

Imitating the saints is one of the chief duties we owe them, and one of the happy fruits which recalling their virtues ought to produce in us. Otherwise, we would have reason to fear that this reading will cause us only confusion and even condemnation if we have before our eyes such marvelous exemplars and do not attempt to imitate them. The same is true, if seeing the path these great persons took on their way to God, we fail in our courage and do not follow them.

Pious readers who would profit from the reading of this third book ought to examine themselves at the close of each chapter to determine if they lack the virtue described there. They should see what God is asking of them according to their state and disposition. After forming good resolutions on this matter, they should then invoke the help of God’s mercy in putting them into practice.

The great Saint Jerome, in writing the life of Saint Paula, invoked (as he tells us, himself) the guardian angel of his subject. It would not be amiss for those who read the life of Vincent de Paul to implore the help of the blessed spirit who was given by God as his protector, and who upheld him, helped, and strengthened him in all his activities. By his help we may hope to obtain the graces and strength necessary to follow this great servant of God who walked the path of virtue with such giant steps. We hope also to come one day to share that prize we confidently believe he has already attained, that is to say, the possession and enjoyment of the glory and happiness which shall never end.
BOOK THREE

His Virtues
Some General Observations on the Virtues of Monsieur Vincent

BEFORE SPEAKING in detail of the virtues of Monsieur Vincent, we have thought it necessary to make several remarks about four or five of the remarkable aspects of his practice of them.

First, Monsieur Vincent in his practice of the virtues never strove for the extraordinary or the singular. He always gave himself to the practice of those virtues considered common, such as humility, patience, graciousness, mortification, support of the neighbor, and love of the poor or other disadvantaged. These virtues are common, but his practice of them was uncommon. He embellished these precious stones of the heavenly Jerusalem by the excellent dispositions he brought to their practice. He exercised these virtues under the inspiration of grace and with the best of intentions. He looked to Jesus Christ as the exemplar of all virtue, strove to conform himself to this model, and faithfully sought the glory of God as the sole end of all his actions.

Second, his life of virtue had no limits. He had received from God a great and noble heart which allowed him to embrace all the virtues simultaneously, and to practice them in an eminent degree. What is particularly noteworthy is that in cases where the virtues seemed to be opposed to each other, he still excelled in each, as in his humility. His humility was profound and was accompanied by a great contempt of self, yet he had great courage when he had to sustain the interests of God. His strength of mind allowed him to devote himself to the greatest projects, but he also showed a marvelous adaptation toward the weaknesses of the most rustic people. He was able to join together the roles of both Martha and Mary in uniting contemplation to action without detriment to either. People often noted his serenity and tranquility. They shone forth in his countenance even in the midst of a multitude of business preoccupations or interruptions from all sorts of persons attracted by his generosity. The following chapters will enable us to see how all the virtues were united in his heart to an extraordinary degree.

Third, he was not content merely to know the definition of virtue. He sought to put it into practice. His sentiments agreed with the father of the Church who said: “The most assured way of acquiring the virtues is by work and patience. This roots them in our hearts.”¹ He also went on to say: “We

¹. Lactantius, PL 6.1:383.
easily lose those virtues which we have acquired without labor or at little cost. The virtues which have taken deep root in the heart are those battered by the storms of temptation, and practiced despite difficulty and the repugnance of nature."

Fourth, he was truly one of those who hungered and thirsted for justice. He was insatiable in his acquisition of the perfection of the virtues, and one can truly say that he was among those who continually hungered and thirsted for justice. He never believed that he had done enough for such a noble task. In imitation of the apostle he put aside all thought of what good had been done, to press on to that height of perfection to which God had called him.²

Fifth, although he used all his ingenuity to conceal his gifts, his life of virtue was well known to all who lived with him. He alone was unaware of his own goodness, for his humility seemed to be a veil hiding this from his own eyes. He was unlike that person spoken of in the Apocalypse,³ for he was rich and abounding in virtue and heavenly gifts, and yet thought of himself as poor, indigent, miserable, and bereft of all spiritual gifts. In this way his most usual expression when he had occasion to refer to himself was to say "this miserable man." Although he was so innocent and holy, and even though good works filled his days, he never spoke of himself except in the most degrading terms, usually saying how great his need was for the mercy of God because of all the abominations of his life.

Here was a person who truly possessed a treasure in his virtues, and this treasure was even more secure in that it was hidden from him. He took as great pains to hide from the eyes of others, and even from himself, those gifts received from God, as vain people do to publicize the virtues they think they have, but which often exist only falsely and deceitfully in their imagination.

² Phil 3:13.
³ Rev 3:17.
CHAPTER TWO

Monsieur Vincent's faith

Faith is the foundation of the other virtues and the strength of the spiritual edifice rests mainly on this mysterious foundation. As a result, here in Book Three, where we wish to study the admirable edifice of the virtues in Monsieur Vincent, we will begin with a consideration of faith. This wise architect placed it as the foundation of all the virtuous practices and all he did in God’s service.

Just as trees buffeted by winds and shaken by storms put down deeper roots, we may say the same of Monsieur Vincent’s faith. God permitted him, early in his life, to be tried with temptations and trials relating to this virtue. By the help of God’s grace he emerged victorious in these struggles, fortified in his faith rather than weakened, for God allowed these trials to strengthen and perfect this virtue in him. After these temptations he became not only stronger in faith but also more enlightened (as he himself declared on several occasions), so that he possessed this virtue as fully as is given to someone in this life.

One of his most extreme remedies against temptations against faith was to write out and sign a profession of faith, and to carry this over his heart. He begged our Lord to accept his gesture, so that every time he was tempted he placed his hand over his heart, as a sign that he rejected the temptation, and that he was once again resolved to live until his last breath in the faith of the Church and to believe firmly all the truths that she taught.

Not only was his faith strong, it was pure and simple. It was not based on study or experience but rather on the first truth alone, God himself, and on the authority of his Church. He reproved those who wished to examine too closely the truths of faith either by the subtlety of their mind or in the light of their learning. He used the comparison of looking at the sun. The more directly you look at it the less you see. Those who more and more studied the truths of faith risked understanding less and less. “It is enough,” he used to say, “that we believe what the Church proposes to us, and submit our minds to this truth.”

For this reason he was always ready to give perfect obedience to the decisions of the Church, which he received with great respect and a sincere humility. He believed everything decided by the Church’s authority. One day he said to his community:

The Church, which is the kingdom of God, inspires those who
govern the faithful, and helps them in their lives. Her Holy Spirit
presides in the councils. From this Spirit comes the lights spread
over the earth, forming the saints, judging the wicked, resolving
doubts, proclaiming the truth, denouncing errors, pointing out the
way the whole Church and each one of the faithful in particular must
follow to assure his salvation.¹

He was often said to have thanked God for preserving in him the integrity
of the faith in an age known for its errors and scandalous opinions, and for
giving him the grace of never having taken up any position contrary to that
of the Church. Despite all the dangerous situations in which he found
himself, he never strayed from the right path, but by the special protection
of God he preserved the true faith.

Monsieur Vincent did not hold his faith locked up in his mind, for his
perfect charity made his beliefs evident to everyone. We have earlier seen
the zeal with which he catechized and preached, especially in places where
the people were most in need of instruction, such as in the villages and among
the poor. These people are ordinarily those least instructed in the truths of
the faith. He applied here the words of the prophet: “I believed, and I have
spoken, for the faith has loosened my tongue, and the knowledge of the truth
which God has revealed to me obliges me to announce this to others.” ² He
was not content to do this alone. He influenced all those that he could to join
him in taking up this charitable work. He established a congregation com­
pletely dedicated to cultivating this faith in the most unfertile lands. By the
grace of God his fellow workers in this Company have produced an abundant
harvest.

The fruit of his faith was not limited to the poor who lived in ignorance
of the truths of salvation. He also served many others who felt tempted
against this virtue. A virtuous priest has related how his spirit was once
greatly agitated because of his doubts about a particular article of the creed,
and how he discussed this with Monsieur Vincent. The words of this holy
man brought peace to his troubled spirit, something not achieved by the
advice and exhortations of many other distinguished persons whom he had
consulted.

The virtue of faith moved Monsieur Vincent to devote himself to teaching
and explaining the truths of our holy religion, but he was also vigorous and
courageous in opposing all errors. We saw in Book Two³ how zealous he
was in opposing the new heresy of Jansenius. One of his chief weapons in
this battle was prayer, which he used always. Even before the decisions of

¹. CED XII:133.
². See Ps 116:10.
³. Ch. 12.
the Church, when questions of grace were all the rage in the salons of Paris, and the adherents of the new doctrines were publishing book after book on the subject to propagate their opinions, he had recourse to God, the Father of lights. At this time he said to one of his confidants, "For the past three months I have meditated on the doctrine of grace. Every day God gave me new insights, leading me farther and farther away from the dangerous opinions so prevalent in our world today."4

As we have already said, he was most vigilant that the weeds of this new doctrine not be sown in his Congregation. A superior of one of the missions has stated that from the time when Monsieur Vincent first studied theology, he had often looked into this question. His study had given him a violent distaste for these pernicious novelties. He had even removed a director of studies, as some in the Congregation are aware, because he gave reason for his orthodoxy to be suspect. Despite the pleadings of those who studied under this director, that he should be restored to his office, Monsieur Vincent never consented. When this group of students came to his room with this same request, he would not listen and sent them away with a severe reprimand.5

Another priest of his Congregation has told of the occasion when, without realizing it, he let a remark slip out that could have been construed as favoring the errors condemned by the Church. Monsieur Vincent summoned him privately to give him a chance to explain himself. He did so with complete satisfaction, but Monsieur Vincent spoke to him as he had spoken to others on similar occasions:

You must realize, Monsieur, that this new error of Jansenism is one of the most dangerous in the history of the Church. One of the things I most bless and particularly thank God for is that he has never allowed those who first professed these doctrines, some of whom I knew well and who were my friends, to convince me of their thinking. I can hardly exaggerate the pains they went to and the arguments they used, but my answer was, among others, the authority of the Council of Trent, which manifestly opposed their teachings. In face of their persistence, instead of responding to them, I recited the Creed to myself. This is how I firmly persevered in Catholic belief. Even to my old age, I have always had a secret fear in my soul, and I have not dreaded anything else as much, that I might be swept away by some heresy and be drowned in some novelties of belief.6

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4. During the course of the canonization investigations, Antoine Durand testified that he had heard Vincent say these words one day in a conference to the community. See Summarium no. 21, p. 52.
5. This confere was a professor at Saint Lazare named Guilbert. See also CED IV: 355-56.
6. This quotation is an extract from a letter submitted to the investigation by Michel Caset, who
He said this on several occasions. A virtuous person, who died before he did, declared that Monsieur Vincent was the first to make him see what really was involved in the doctrine of the Jansenists. He developed a detestation of this heresy long before the errors were officially recognized and condemned.

At length, when the condemnation of the doctrine of the Jansenists contained in the five propositions was sent from Rome, and the late archbishop of Paris had it published throughout his diocese, Monsieur Vincent said to his community:

We must thank God for the protection he has given his Church, especially in France, to purify it of the errors which threatened to throw it into such great disarray. God had given me the grace to be able to discern between error and truth, not that I have any sense of vain accomplishment in this, nor any spiteful joy in seeing that my judgment conforms to that of the Holy Apostolic See. I well recognize that this judgment comes purely from God’s mercy, for which he must be given glory.7

Besides this purity, simplicity, and firmness in the faith in which he excelled, we must also say that he possessed the fullness of this virtue. Not only did faith inform his mind, but it filled his heart and animated his actions, words, affections, and thoughts. It made him act in everything according to the truths and teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What most Christians do by habit, by natural motivation, or by human reason, he did by the principles of faith. It is, according to the words of the prophet “a lamp to my hand to lead me and direct my steps in the paths of justice.”8 Without a doubt he received from God this special gift of applying the light of faith to all occasions and circumstances, and directing and undertaking even temporal and secular affairs only by motives inspired by faith, in the light of faith, and with the supernatural goals proposed by faith.

He was not content only to direct himself by this spirit of faith in all that he undertook. He inspired others, as much as he could, especially those under his direction, to act similarly. In this connection, Mademoiselle Le Gras, foundress and first superior of the Daughters of Charity, of whom we have spoken in Books One and Two, one day expressed a certain anxiety about this charitable institute, of which Monsieur Vincent was the spiritual father. He replied to her:

I always see some purely human sentiments in you when you think that all is lost, or when you see me ill. O woman of little faith,

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7. CED XI:156.
you have such little confidence and acceptance of the direction and example of Jesus Christ. This savior of the world cares for the entire Church. You are responsible for a mere handful of women, whom his Providence has brought together, and yet you think he will forsake you. Alas, Mademoiselle, you must humble yourself before God for this lack of trust. 9

He often said that a lack of progress in the virtues and the little success we have in the things of God comes from our not being motivated enough by the light of faith, and by relying on motives coming from human reason. He said one day:

No, no, eternal truths alone can fill the heart and lead us with assurance. Believe me, we must base ourselves solidly and confidently on one of the perfections of God, such as his goodness, his providence, his truth, his immensity. I am saying that in order to progress greatly in a short time, we must build on these divine foundations. This does not mean that we should not use sound and pressing reasons to guide our actions, but only that they should be subordinate to the truths of faith. Experience shows us that preachers who appeal to truths of faith do more for souls than those who fill their sermons with mere human and philosophical wisdom. The light of faith is always accompanied by a certain heavenly unction that diffuses itself secretly in the hearts of those who listen. From this we can judge that it is necessary, as much for our own progress as for the salvation of others, to follow always the light of faith in all things. 10

He also held the maxim that things should not be judged solely from the outside and according to their appearance, but by what they are in the sight of God. He recalled the words of the apostle, quae videntur, temporalia sunt; quae autem non videntur, aeterna sunt. ["What is seen is transitory; what is unseen lasts forever."] 11 He said:

I ought not consider a poor peasant, or a poor woman according to external appearances, nor according to what seems on the surface to be their disposition. Often enough, being so crude and earthy, they do not present themselves as respectable or reasonable beings. But turn the medal over and by the light of faith you will see that the Son of God, who chose to be poor, is present here in these poor people. During his passion, he seemed to be a fool to the gentiles, and a scandal for the Jews, and in all this he called himself the

9. CED II:158.
11. 2 Cor 4:18.
Evangelizer of the poor: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* ["He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor"]/sup.\textsuperscript{12} O God, how beautiful are the poor if we see them in God, and in light of the esteem Jesus Christ had for them. If we see them only according to the flesh and with a worldly spirit, they truly seem miserable.\textsuperscript{13}

Lastly, to understand how great and perfect the faith of Monsieur Vincent really was, we should look to all his other virtues. His faith was the root of them all. For as Saint Ambrose said: "We may judge the vigor and perfection of this mystical tree by considering the quantity and excellence of the fruits it has produced."\textsuperscript{14} We will speak of them in the following chapters.

\textsuperscript{12} Luke 4:18.
\textsuperscript{13} CED XI:32.
\textsuperscript{14} PL 14.1.1:132-35.
CHAPTER THREE

His Hope and Confidence in God

If we say that the faith of Monsieur Vincent was great, we must also add that his hope was no less perfect. In imitation of the Father of all believers he often hoped against hope itself, by which we mean that he hoped in God when according to all human expectations he ought to have despaired. Just as his faith was simple and pure, founded on the truth of God alone, so his hope was not based on the considerations and reasonings of human nature but solely on the mercy and goodness of God.

Whenever there was a question of undertaking something for the service of God, after invoking his guidance and perceiving his will, he confidently relied on his infinite goodness. In carrying out his projects he used all the conventional human resources, yet he did not rely on these, but only on the help he anticipated from God. Once he had undertaken a project in this spirit, he expected that God would help him and his Company. Should one of his confreres, through a lack of hope and trust or because of human prudence sometimes points out the difficulty or even impossibility of achieving the purpose of the project, he would usually say, “Let us leave that to our Lord, for it is his work. It pleased him to begin it, so we must be sure that he will bring it to fruition in the way he deems best.” He would sometimes encourage those who doubted: “Have courage, trust in our Lord. He is our inspiration and our help in this work we have begun and to which he has called us.”

Writing one day to a superior of one of the missions of the Congregation, he said:

I sympathize with you that your labor is so difficult, and has become even more so because of the sickness of some of your confreres. The good God has brought this about, and doubtless he will give you added strength to bear this added burden. He is your strength, and will be your reward for the extraordinary efforts you display on this occasion. Believe me, three men are worth more than ten when our Lord takes charge. He does help when human means are taken away, especially when he asks us to do more than is humanly possible. We pray, however, that in his divine goodness he will restore your sick priests to health and fill your community with great trust in his mercy.¹

¹. CED IV:115-16.
To cultivate the perfect confidence in God that he recommended so often to his confreres, he urged them to have a low opinion of themselves. They should also be convinced that they could accomplish nothing by themselves, unless it were to ruin God's designs. Thus by being so thoroughly convinced of their own powerlessness, they were to develop an entire and perfect dependence on the guidance of God and on the effects of his grace. For this gift they were to have constant recourse to him in prayer. Writing to one of his priests he said:

I thank God that you have learned the art of humbling yourself by recognizing and speaking about your faults. You are right to think of yourself as unfit for many works, for on this foundation our Lord establishes his grace to accomplish his designs toward us. When you allow yourself to think of your own insufficiency, you then must also recall his adorable bounty. You truly have good reason to be wary of yourself, but you have even greater reason to trust in God. If you feel yourself drawn to evil, believe that God draws you even more to the good, and he can effect it in you and by you. Please meditate on this. During the day allow your mind to reflect on this principle so that, after reflecting on your own weakness, you may turn to his help. Think of his infinite mercy more than of your own unworthiness, of his guidance more than of your own weakness. Abandon yourself into his paternal arms in the hope that he will work through you, blessing the works you do in his name.²

When Monsieur Vincent sent his priests and brothers to the farthest and most difficult missions in foreign lands, his chief recommendation was that they fill their hearts with a true and perfect confidence in God. He said to them:

Go, gentlemen, in the name of our Lord, for it is he who sends you. You begin this voyage and this mission for his service and his glory. He will guide, help, and protect you. We hope for this from his infinite goodness. Remain always dependent upon his guidance. Have recourse to him everywhere and in every encounter. Throw yourselves into his arms, recognizing him as your loving Father, completely confident that he will help you and bless your work.

Lastly, even in all the greatest and most difficult enterprises which caused him such trouble and cost him so much, once this holy man had ascertained the will of God he plunged ahead. He was undeterred by any obstacle, believing this truth which he often repeated, "Divine Providence will never fail us in those things we undertake by its direction." He devoted himself

² CED V:164-65.
even more to those great undertakings which he saw as being more difficult and painful.

His confidence in God was also apparent when he saw the poverty and pressing needs of some of the houses and communities of his Congregation. Once, a superior of one of his houses wrote to tell him of the great difficulties that had arisen because of the poor crops and the resulting high cost of living. Monsieur Vincent replied to him:

You must not be overwhelmed if there is a bad year, or even several bad ones in a row. God is abundant in riches. You have lacked nothing up to now, so why do you fear? Does he not take care of the sparrows, who neither sow nor reap? How much greater will his goodness be toward his servants? Naturally, you want to have all your supplies stored away to be assured of having everything you desire. Yet I think spiritually you would do better to find the occasion to depend on God alone, as a truly poor person, for the Lord is generous and infinitely wealthy. God wishes to have pity on his poor people who are so ready to complain at a time of scarcity, since they do not know how to use adversity well, nor do they seek first the kingdom of God and his justice. They do not make themselves worthy of those things necessary to the present life over and above what is given to them for eternal life. ³

It became known that one day the treasurer of the house of Saint Lazare came to tell him that there was not a sou left in the house to cover either the ordinary or the extraordinary expenses arising during the ordination retreats about to begin. Full of confidence in God, he raised his voice: "What good news! God be blessed! Fine, now we will see if we have confidence in God." One of his priest friends spoke to him one day about the large expense these ordination retreats must entail. He thought that the house of Saint Lazare was surely put to great inconvenience and could no longer support such a responsibility. He suggested that perhaps each ordinand should be charged something for his stay at Saint Lazare. Monsieur Vincent replied, with a smile, "When we have spent all we have for our Lord and nothing remains, then we will leave the key under the door and go."

Also, some of his own community remonstrated with him on the large debts incurred because of the clergy conferences and other works of charity centered at Saint Lazare. It was pointed out to him that the community was in danger of financial ruin if he did not curtail his charities and limit the number of people who came for retreats. His reply to this was, "The treasures of God's Providence are inexhaustible, and our distrust of God does him no honor. If our Company of the Mission is destroyed, it will not be by poverty but by wealth."

³. CED VII: 156-57.
He said practically the same thing to a lawyer of the Parlement of Paris who was making a retreat at Saint Lazare. He was surprised to see so many people in the dining room, besides the large number who normally lived there. His curiosity led him to ask Monsieur Vincent how he managed to feed so many. He answered, "Monsieur, the treasury of God's Providence is large. We must put our cares and concerns into his hands, for he will never fail to provide our food, as he has promised." He added these words of the psalmist he especially savored: Oculi omnium in te sperant, Domine, et tu das illis escam in tempore opportuno. Aperis tu manum tuam, et imples omne animal benedictione ['The eyes of all look hopefully to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing'].

Once the house of Saint Lazare experienced a serious loss while he was absent. When Monsieur Vincent was informed of this, he wrote to the community:

All that God does he does for the best, so we must hope that this loss will profit us, since it comes from God. All things work for good for the just. We have been told that the one who receives adversities from the hand of God must receive them with joy and blessing. Gentlemen and my brothers, please thank God for what has happened, for this loss, and for the disposition he has inspired in us to accept this loss for the sake of his love. It is a great loss, but he knows how to turn it to our profit by means we are now unaware of, but which we will surely see one day. I hope the way everyone reacted to this unexpected accident will serve as the foundation for the grace God will give us so that in the future, we may make good use of any troubles which he may send.

Several of his friends suggested that he appeal the loss by having recourse to the legal remedy which they proposed. He refused, and among the reasons he gave in a letter to one of them, he included the following:

We have good reason to hope that if we seek first the kingdom of God, as Jesus Christ teaches us in the Gospel, we will want for nothing. If, on the one hand the world deprives us of something, you can be sure that, on the other, God will make it up to us. This we have already experienced with this present loss, for God has inspired a friend to make a gift to us that covers almost all we lost.

We should report here a remarkable letter on this same topic which Monsieur Vincent wrote to one of his priests who had taken charge of a

4. Ps 145:15-16, a prayer used as grace before meals.
5. CED VII:251-52.
certain farm. After giving him some general directions about its management, he concluded: “There you are, with many directions about temporal affairs. May it please God that they not distract you from spiritual affairs. May his Holy Spirit, which cares for the needs of all creatures of the entire world down to the smallest insect, dwell in you. Oh, Monsieur, we must apply ourselves well if we are to participate fully in this Holy Spirit.”

SECTION ONE

Continuation of the Same Topic

If, as we have just seen, the Monsieur Vincent’s confidence in God was great in the pressing needs which he and his community experienced, it was no less firm in the reverses, difficulties, and other annoying and threatening things that happened to him. It was noticed that no matter what occurred, or in what difficulties he found himself, he was never beaten down or discouraged, but was always full of trust in God. He enjoyed a constant evenness of spirit and a perfect abandonment to his divine Providence. He seemed pleased to be put in such disturbing situations, to give himself the opportunity to put himself more completely and absolutely into the hands of divine Providence.

A superior of one of the main houses of the Congregation alerted him to some intrigues against the community that seemingly threatened to harm it. Even some highly placed persons supported the community’s adversaries. Monsieur Vincent replied, in this manner:

As to the intrigues against us, pray God to spare us from this spirit. If we blame others for harboring this defect, it is only reasonable for us to avoid the same fault. This is a fault against divine Providence which makes one unworthy of the care God has for all. Let us remain completely dependent upon him, in the confidence that if we do so, God will bring good from all that people may do or say against us. Yes, Monsieur, even when everyone works against us they will be able to achieve only what pleases God, in whom we have put our trust. Please adopt these sentiments and preserve them, so that you never even bother to think about these useless worries.

7. CED 1:475.
8. CED IV:393-94.
One more thing showed his perfect confidence in God. This was the preservation and spread of his Congregation. Even though its welfare was dearer to him than life itself, he depended entirely on God for all that concerned its development and safety. To assure himself that this dependence was absolute and his confidence complete, he never acted in any way to obtain any benefices, houses, or establishments, nor even to attract any candidates for the Congregation. He preferred to rely on Providence alone. When offered gifts he was more inclined to accept the lesser rather than the greater. When there was a question of admitting someone to the community, he hesitated more to receive persons of some distinction or of some renown in the world than he did for accepting those of the lower class. He did not make a distinction between persons, but he was most cautious of doing anything based on mere natural impulses or from a mere human respect. He feared he might be circumventing the direction of the Providence of God.

For this same reason he was on his guard in the face of anything out of the ordinary. He was uneasy even with gifted spirits, unless he saw that these people were endowed with a true and sincere humility. He felt that those not blessed with abundant natural talents, or those who had not acquired a special competence, were more apt to place their trust in God. Thus they would be better suited to the Congregation, where they would succeed with greater blessings than the other more gifted ones who were likely to trust more in themselves and less in God. A prelate who had often remarked on this trait in Monsieur Vincent, said on one occasion: “This principle, introduced by him into the Congregation, of not favoring gifts of nature or fortune unless they were joined to virtue and subservient to grace, was one of the major means by which God inspired him to preserve his Congregation in the purity of its spirit.”

Monsieur Vincent often recommended to his confreres not to solicit anything for themselves or for the Congregation, whether position, comforts, or favors, but simply to accept with humility and thanks whatever God sent them. He wanted them to put out of their minds all worry or pressures about their needs or their occupations, so that, after taking a reasonable and moderate care of these things, they would leave everything to the good pleasure of divine Providence. He wrote the following to a priest of the Congregation who was substituting for the superior of the house in Rome during his absence.

Every day you give me reason to praise God for your affection for our Congregation, and for your attention to the affairs of your house. I praise him with all my heart, and yet I am also obliged to tell you, as our Lord told Martha, that there is a bit too much worry on your part. Only one thing is necessary, and that is to trust more in God and to his direction than you now do. Anticipation is good
when it is accepting, but it goes to excess when we worry about avoiding something we foresee. We expect more from our own insights than we do from Providence. We think we will accomplish much by substituting our blindness for his light, and by putting our trust in human prudence rather than in his word. Our divine Savior assures us in the Gospel that not a sparrow, nor even a hair of our head, will fall to the ground without his permission. Yet you fear that our little Company will fail if we do not take this or that precaution, if we do not do one thing or another, so much so that you fear that if we fail to do these things others will build on our ruins. As soon as someone raises an objection against us, we must answer it. If someone seems ready to steal our followers, we must get ahead of him, or else all will be lost.

This is what I sense when I read your letters, and what is worse, your lively spirit leads you to do what you say, thinking you have enough insight yourself without needing to consult others. Oh, Monsieur, how unsuited this is to a missionary! It would be better if a hundred missions were concluded by others, rather than to have prevented a single one. If our zeal is genuine we ought to be glad to see anyone prophesy, to see God sending new workers into his Church, or to see the reputation of others grow and ours decrease. Monsieur, please have greater confidence in God, let him steer our little ship. If it is useful to him he will save it from shipwreck. Neither the might nor the multitude of the other vessels will cause it to founder. On the contrary, it will sail along with them with greater assurance as long as it keeps to its course and does not interfere with the others.9

At the time of the approval of the Congregation by Rome and the royal letters patent for the establishment of the community at Saint Lazare, the two approvals on which the future of the community depended but which had aroused strong opposition, Monsieur Vincent had such confidence in God that he wrote these remarkable words to one of the priests of his Congregation:

I fear only my own sins, and not the outcome of the business at Rome and Paris concerning the success of the bulls and the affairs of Saint Lazare. Sooner or later everything will work out. Qui timent Dominum sperent in eo, adjutor eorum et protector eorum est ["Let those who fear the Lord trust in him; he is their help and their shield"].10

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We should remark that he did not speak of the future success of these matters with a presumptuous certitude. He feared only his own sins and he placed no reliance on himself. He relied only on his perfect confidence that God, who had brought his small Congregation into being, would not abandon it, but would bring it to its perfection. He was often heard to say: "Once God has begun to do good to a creature he will continue to do so to the end unless it makes itself unworthy of his help."

We should add here what he said one day to his community, in the early days of the Congregation, exhorting them to have a perfect confidence in God.

Have trust in God, gentlemen and my brothers, but have it completely and perfectly. You can be sure that having begun this work in us he will bring it to fulfillment. I ask you, who began this Congregation? Who called us to the missions, the ordination retreats, the clergy conferences, the retreats? Was it I? Not at all. Was it Monsieur Portail whom God sent to join me in the beginning? Not at all, for we never thought of these things, we never even considered them. Then who is the author of all this? It is God in his paternal Providence and his goodness. We are but wretched workmen, poor ignoramuses. Among us there are few or none of the nobility, no one powerful, learned, or capable of anything. God alone does everything, and he does it with people like ourselves, so all glory should be given to him alone.

Put all your confidence in him, then. If we place our confidence in men, or on some gift of nature or fortune, then God will withdraw from us. But, someone will say, we need friends, both for ourselves and for our community. Oh, my brothers, be on your guard against such thoughts, lest you be fooled. Seek God alone, and he will give you friends and everything else besides. Would you like to know why we will sometimes fail in what we do? It is because we rely upon ourselves. When a preacher, superior, or confessor relies too much on his own prudence, learning, or his own gifts, what happens? God withdraws, and leaves him to himself, and whatever he does produces no fruit. This makes him see his own uselessness, and he learns through his own experience that no matter how talented he may be, he can do nothing without God.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{11}\) *CED* XI:38-39.
What made Monsieur Vincent's trust even more excellent and perfect was that he attached himself to God alone and he wished to depend solely on his Providence. In imitation of Saint Francis, he wanted God to be his all. Concerning this, it was remarked that no matter what talent or quality he saw in the priests of his Congregation, or whatever notable support or service they gave to the Congregation or to Saint Lazare, his usual place of residence, and despite the esteem, love, and tenderness he might have for them, he did not attach himself to any of them. On many occasions he would send those he most esteemed and cherished to the most distant places, or to those missions which were the most dangerous. Even though these particular priests might be the ones who seemed to be necessary or useful to the running of the house, he would willingly sacrifice their companionship when he saw they could render greater service to our Lord in some other place. He would deprive himself of their love as a sacrifice to God of what was most dear to him, in imitation of the holy patriarch Abraham. He based his hopes for the preservation and growth of his Congregation not on human means but solely on the Providence of God, in whom alone he put all his trust and on whom he wished to depend entirely and absolutely.

Monsieur Vincent once gave a talk on the sacrifice of the patriarch Abraham to illustrate the lesson of perfect confidence which the members of the Company should always have in God. This is what he said on that occasion:

Do you recall this great patriarch to whom God had promised he would populate the whole world through the son he had given him? This same son was to be sacrificed, so the question naturally arose, if Abraham killed his son, how could God fulfill his promise? This holy man was so committed to carrying out the will of God that he prepared himself to carry out this order without troubling himself about anything else. It was as though he said to himself, it is up to God to decide about that. My duty is to obey his command, and I know he will fulfill his promise. But how? I surely do not know, but he is all-powerful. I will offer what is dearest to me in all the world, because that is his will. Is he not my only son? No matter. In taking the life of this child, will I not take from God the possibility of fulfilling his word? That may be, but he desires this, so it must
be done. God has told me, if I save my son, my heritage shall be blessed. Yes, but he has also told me to put him to death. I shall obey, come what may, and I shall hope in his promises.

Admire this trust that does not concern itself with grief about what might happen. It does not matter that he is deeply moved. His hope is that all will be for the best, since God has ordered this. Why, gentlemen, do we not have this same trust, leaving to God the care of all that concerns us, and simply do what he asks of us?

Again, in this regard, do we not admire the fidelity of the children of Jonadab, son of Rechab? God inspired this good man to live differently than other men of his time, not living in a house but in a tent or shelter. He left all he had, and went to the country, where he planted no vines nor drank any wine, and he remained faithful to this all his lifetime. He forbade his children to sow wheat or other grains, to plant trees, or to lay out a garden. Here he was, without bread, wheat, or fruits. What will you live on, poor Jonadab? Do you think you and your family can live on fresh air? He said to himself, we will eat what God sends us.

This is a crude example. Even the poorest religious do not carry their mortification as far as this. All the same, this man trusted so completely that he deprived himself and his family of life’s necessities in order to rely absolutely and completely on divine Providence. This family lived this way for three hundred and fifty years, that is to say, he and his children and his children’s children.

This pleased God so, that, when he complained to Jeremiah of the hard hearts of the people given over to their pleasures, God said: go to these people, and tell them of a man who acts differently. Jeremiah called the Rechabites to come and manifest the great abstinence of the father and his sons. For this, he had bread and wine and goblets placed upon the table. Jeremiah said that God had ordered him to tell them they should drink the wine, but the Rechabites replied they had been ordered not to drink, and for these many years they have not touched wine, for their fathers had forbidden it.

If this father trusted and was without worry that God would see to the support of his family, if his children would remain so faithful to the wishes of their parents, gentlemen, what trust should we not have that God will provide for us, in whatever state we find ourselves? What is our fidelity to our rules in comparison with these children who, though not obliged to do so, still lived in such

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poverty? O my God, gentlemen! O my God, brothers! Ask his infinite goodness for this trust in all that concerns us. If we are faithful to this, we will lack nothing. He will live in us, he will guide, defend, and love us. What we do and say will be pleasing to him.

Do you not see the birds of the air that neither sow nor reap? God takes care of them, providing them with both food and clothing. His Providence extends even to the plants of the fields, such as the lilies, so clothed that not even Solomon in all his glory had the like. If God so looks after the birds and plants, why do you not rely on a God who is so good and so generous? Why do you count on yourself more than on him, even though you well know he can do all and you can do nothing? Yet you rely on your own efforts rather than on his goodness, on your poverty rather than his abundance. Oh the misery of man!

I will nevertheless say here that superiors must look after the needs of everyone, and provide what is necessary. God sees to the needs of all his creatures, down to the smallest mite. In the same way, he wills also that superiors and other officers, as instruments of his Providence, should watch to see that nothing necessary is lacking, neither to the priests, clerics, or brothers, nor to the hundred, two hundred, or three hundred or more persons both great and lowly who may be with us. But you yourselves, my brothers, must rely on the loving care of his Providence. Be content with what he sends, and do not worry if the community is lacking this or that. You must first seek the kingdom of God, and his infinite wisdom will supply all the rest.

Finally, I once asked a Carthusian, the prior of his house, if he called the house council together to discuss temporal affairs. “We call the superior and the procurator, but all the rest do not concern themselves with these things. They occupy themselves only with the praise of God, and with what obedience and our rules require.” We have the same practice, thanks be to God, and we must hold to it. We are obliged to own some things to take care of the needs of all. There was a time when the Son of God sent his disciples out without money or provisions, but he later found it helpful to have something to maintain his group and to help the poor. The apostles continued this practice, and Saint Paul tells us how he worked to gather money that could then be distributed to other Christians. Superiors must look after temporal matters, but their concern must never distract them from their attention to the virtues. They must act so that the spiritual life remains in vigor in their houses, and God reigns over all. This must be the first of their concerns.13

13. CED XII:139-43.
SECTION THREE

Monsieur Vincent’s Thoughts on the Confidence We Should Have in God

In the previous section we recalled the words Monsieur Vincent used in addressing his community on the subject of the confidence we ought to have in God. It will not be inappropriate if we now recount the way he testified to this same virtue in his dealings with the various persons he met.

He wrote one day to a person who had sent him greetings on his feast day:

I thank you for your devotion to my holy patron. I pray that God will reward your faith, which my own misery and unworthiness could not obtain for you. This very morning I was so involved with business that I could hardly make my meditation, and even when I did, it was only with many distractions. Judge from this how little you can depend on my prayers on this holy day. This does not discourage me however, for I put my confidence in God, and surely not in my own preparation or my own efforts. I wish with all my heart that you would do the same, for the throne of the goodness and mercy of God is founded on our own unworthiness. If we rely on his goodness, we will never be disappointed, as he himself assures us in the holy Gospels.14

In another letter to this same person, he wrote:

Put out of your mind all that can cause you pain, for God will take care of you. You cannot continue to act this way without (so to speak) saddening the heart of God, for he will see that you do not trust in him enough. Please trust him, and you shall see the fulfillment of all your heart desires. Once again, I repeat, put aside all thought of the mistrust which occasionally creeps into your mind. Why is your soul not filled with confidence, since you are, by the mercy of our Lord, his beloved daughter.15

In another letter to this same person, he said:

What treasures are hidden in his holy Providence! And how those who follow it and not stride before it honor our Lord. Recently I heard of one of the leading persons in the realm, who learned this lesson through his own experience. He tried to do only a few things on his own initiative, and instead of being successful they turned

14. CED II:289-90. The correspondent was surely Louise de Marillac.
15. CED I:90.
out to his loss. Isn't it reasonable that you would want your servant
to do only what you told her, or what was in keeping with your
orders? If this makes sense in one person dealing with another, how
much more is it so in the dealings of a creature with her Creator?16

One day someone asked him if it were possible to offend by having too
much of the hope and confidence we should have in God. He replied:

Just as we cannot have too much faith in the truths of the faith,
so too we cannot trust in God too much. We might, indeed, err in
hoping for things that he has not promised, or in hoping for
something he conditionally promised, while not fulfilling the con-
ditions. For example, when a sinner hopes for pardon without
forgiving his brother, or when someone asks for mercy without
willing to undergo conversion. To hope to be victorious over
temptation, while not rejecting the suggestions of the devil, would
be both false and illusory. True hope can never be excessive since
it is founded on the goodness of God and on the merits of Jesus
Christ.

One day he came upon some of his confreres who seemed depressed and
discouraged because of their imperfections. He said to them by way of
encouragement:

We have the seed of the all-powerful God within us. This should
be the source of our hope, encouraging us to place all our confidence
in him, despite our own poverty. No, it should not surprise us to see
our own misery, for each of us has his own fair share. It is good to
be aware of this, but we should not be unduly disturbed. When the
thought of our imperfections tends to discourage us, we should
turn it aside, and increase our confidence in God, abandoning ourselves
into his paternal hands.

This holy man was so attentive to the Providence of God that in all his
affairs he acted quite differently than those around him. Others seemed to
bustle about, taking every possible measure to safeguard themselves from
all possible accidents. They were preparing for any reverses and adversity
by using letters, giving orders, making changes, and using all human
resources promptly and without limit. They sought to conceal their lack of
confidence and submission to divine Providence in the excuse that God acts
through secondary causes. Monsieur Vincent was guided by a purer light
and by a more assured principle of not having recourse to human means until
the last possible moment. This allowed divine Providence to show its
intention, and to bring things to the most propitious moment for action. His
actions were motivated by the knowledge that God always works for the

good, and that the less there is of the human in any affair, the more there will be of the divine.

When he saw the divine will clearly manifested for him to put his hand to some enterprise, he did so with complete peace and with little concern for the outcome. He left to God’s guidance whatever would come about, good or bad. He did not think back about what he might have done, or worry about what had happened. He was content with the testimony of his good conscience, that he had striven to conform himself entirely to the will of God in what he had done. This left no room for regrets, but rather only for thanks and blessing to God for his goodness.

A well-placed priest of good reputation was greatly troubled by thoughts of despair. He wrote to Monsieur Vincent from the remote place where he was working in hopes of gaining some relief and some remedy. The reply he received gives us a good opportunity to appreciate his sentiments about the confidence one must have in God:

Since writing your letter to me, I hope that God has dispersed the clouds that have caused you such pain. In this hope I will say only a word or two in passing about your difficulties. It seems that you are in some doubt whether you are among the number of the predestined. I would answer that no one knows infallibly of his own salvation without a special revelation from God. Yet, according to the testimony of Saint Paul, it is possible to know the true children of God if there are signs to show it. By the grace of God, I see these signs in you, Monsieur. In the same letter where you tell me you do not see these signs, I find many, and the long association I have had with you shows me others. Believe me, Monsieur, I know of no soul more given to God than yourself, nor a heart more separated from evil and committed to the good than your own. You will say that you don’t see it this way. I will reply that God does not always allow his own to discern their own purity of heart among the movements of their corrupt nature, so that they may live in humility. Their treasure is better preserved by being hidden.

The holy apostle had seen the beauties of heaven, but he was not justified by this, for he continued to experience darkness and struggle within himself. He had such confidence in God, though, that he felt nothing would ever be able to separate himself from the love of Jesus Christ. This example ought to suffice, Monsieur, to help you live in peace amid your darkness, with an entire and perfect confidence in the infinite goodness of God. To bring about your salvation, God invites you to abandon yourself into the arms of his Providence. Allow him to lead you in his paternal love. He does
love you, and he would no more reject a good man such as yourself than he would forsake an evil person who trusted in his mercy. 17

Speaking one day to his community on this same topic, of confidence in God, he said:

A true Missionary ought never be concerned about material things. He should cast all his care upon the Providence of the Lord, being entirely convinced that if he is moved by charity and is steadfast in his confidence he will always be under the protection of God. No evil will come upon him, nor will he lack anything, even when it seems that all is lost. This thought does not come from me, but is contained in holy Scripture, which says: *Qui habitat in adjutorio altissimi, in protectione Dei coeli commorabitur* ["He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, will abide in the shadow of the Almighty"]. 18 Whoever lives this teaching on confidence in God shall always have a special protection from him. He may be sure that no evil will come upon him, because all things will work for his good. He will lack nothing, since God will give himself to him and bringing all that is necessary for both soul and body. And so it is, my brothers, you must be convinced that as long as you remain firm in this trust, not only will you be preserved from all evil, but you will be filled with all good things. 19

We will finish this chapter with an extract of a conference Monsieur Vincent gave to the Daughters of Charity. He sought to inspire them with this same confidence in God in the midst of all the contradictions and dangerous situations in which they might find themselves in their service to the poor.

You will often find, my daughters, that the wrath of God comes suddenly and violently upon many sinners before they have an opportunity for repentance and conversion. You will see many innocent people die as well, but you will be saved. Yes, my daughters, God will see to your safety because you serve the poor. 20

In the next part of his conference he reflected on the effects of this special protection of God manifested on two remarkable occasions.

The first of these was the time in the faubourg Saint Germain when an almost new house collapsed at the very moment a Daughter of Charity was bringing something to a poor person living there. She was caught between two floors, and by all appearances ought to have been crushed in the ruins, as were the thirty people who

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18. Ps 91:1.
lived there. Everyone died except an infant who survived with only an injury. This Daughter of Charity was saved as though by a miracle. Still clutching the heavy pot in her hand, she found a corner of a room which did not fall, though all the rest tumbled about her. By a sort of second miracle, all sorts of debris fell around her, beams and heavy stone, bureaus, tables, and other furniture, but she remained unharmed. She left these ruins, safe and sound.21

The second occasion was in the house of the Daughters of Charity when suddenly a beam gave way. By the Providence of God there was no one either below or above the room where this happened, although a short while before there had been several. Mademoiselle le Gras herself, their first superior and foundress, had just left the room. This was another marvelous protection God extended to her.

At this point, Monsieur Vincent raised his voice to say:

Ah, my daughters, what reasons we have for confidence in God! We have read about a man walking in the open fields who was killed by a turtle dropped on his head by an eagle. And we saw today how a Daughter of Charity walked out of the ruins of a house, safe and sound. What do you make of this? Is this not a sign of God’s affection for you as the pupil of his eye? O my daughters, if you have this holy confidence in your hearts, God will preserve you no matter where you shall be.22

22. CED IX:249.
CHAPTER FOUR

His Love of God

THE LOVE of God has its home in the heart, and its most noble and perfect manifestations are known only to the one who practices them, and to God who by his grace is the source. Hence, it is very true that to know fully the love of God which animated Monsieur Vincent it would be necessary for us to find this out from the Holy Spirit, who alone knows which of his divine inspirations were operative in his servant, and the cooperation he gave to them. Since we will have to wait for that until the day of judgment when God will reveal the secrets of hearts, we have to be content to speak only of those few sparks of that sacred fire that appeared outwardly in his life.

According to the testimony of the beloved disciple, an assured sign of the perfect love of God is the observance of his law and fidelity to his word.\(^1\) Using this criterion, we can truthfully say that Monsieur Vincent loved God greatly. He was so faithful to his law and so careful to follow his holy word, that those who lived with him and observed his conduct most carefully assure us that only an angel could have been more exact in this than he. He was so watchful of himself, mortified in his passions, balanced in his judgment, circumspect in his words, prudent in his conduct, exact in his practices of piety, and finally, so perfectly united to God as best we can judge from the outside, that the full extent of his love of God becomes clear. It filled his heart and reigned over all the powers of his soul and even over his body, governing all its movements and operations according to that eternal law which is the source of all justice and holiness.

One might say that his entire life was a continuous sacrifice made to God, not only of the honors, comforts, pleasures, and other goods of the world, but also of all that he had received from the generous hands of God: his special insights, affections, liberty, and everything else put at God’s disposition. The greatest joy of his heart was to ponder the incomprehensible glory which resided in the godhead, God’s ineffable love for him, and the infinite perfections embodied in the unity and simplicity of his divine essence.

His most ardent and constant wish was that God would become better and better known, adored, served, obeyed, and glorified in all places and by all creatures. Indeed all that Monsieur Vincent did and said tended to no other end than to engender, to the full extent of his capabilities, this same divine

\(^1\) John 5:3.
love in all hearts, and particularly in those of his confreres. These men admired and experienced the grace of the perfect charity that was in him, and which was felt by everyone who came into his presence. This led his confreres to listen with great esteem and devotion to everything he said. They sought to preserve even his least remarks, all the while having to admit that his words as they were spoken had a totally different effect from what was merely preserved on paper. The sentiments of his heart flowed into his words. They gave them a unique force and energy, so that they became words of grace, penetrating the hearts of those who heard him.

In this regard, a person of great virtue, now deceased, was present at a conference he gave to the women of the Confraternity of Charity of the city of Paris. She was so moved by what she heard that she remarked to some others present, “Ah, ladies, can we not say, as did the disciples at Emmaus, that our hearts burned with the love of God while Monsieur Vincent spoke to us? As for myself, while I have not been too attentive to the things of God, I must say that my heart is overflowing with the truth of what this holy man has said to us.”

Another woman replied: “You must not be surprised, for he is an angel of the Lord. He allows the love of God which burns in his heart to appear on his lips as burning coals.” Another woman who was present added, “That is true, and his only goal is to have us share in this same love of God.”

Another time several prelates were in attendance at a clergy conference being given at Saint Lazare. At the end of his talk Monsieur Vincent deferred to them, as was his custom whenever a prelate was present. All those present begged him to continue, but as he had excused himself, the oldest of the prelates said: “Monsieur Vincent, you must not in your humility deprive the Company of the sentiments with which God has inspired you on this topic. There is such an unction of the Holy Spirit in your words that we all are touched, and so all of us here present ask you to share your thoughts with us. A word from your lips means more than anything we might have to say.”

The great love that Monsieur Vincent had for God was shown particularly in the uprightness and purity of his intentions, in which he always and solely sought the greater glory of his divine Majesty. He did everything, even that which appeared trivial, with a view of pleasing God, and of doing what he believed would be most agreeable to him. He often said that God does not pay as much attention to our external actions as he does to the love and purity of the intentions with which we act. The little things done for God are not so inclined to be motivated by vanity and pride as are others which are more

2. Collet, Vie II:112, identifies her as Madame de Lamoignon.
3. Marie Louise de Gonzague, duchess of Mantua, later queen of Poland.
4. The speaker is not identified, but Collet, Vie II:112-13, records several similar remarks.
important, but which too often go up in smoke. He also said that to please God in great actions we must first accustom ourselves to pleasing him in lesser ones.

One day one of his confreres was accused before the community of having done something through a desire for human respect. Moved by his love of God, Monsieur Vincent said: “It would be better to be tied hand and foot and thrown into a raging fire than to do anything merely to please others.” He then began to speak on the one hand of some of the perfections of God, and on the other, of the faults, imperfections, and misery of human beings. He emphasized the folly of those who fail to work for God, and who lose the merit of all their time and trouble by having only base and human motives in view. He added these worthy and remarkable words:

Always honor the perfections of God. Let us take as our goal the perfection most opposed to our own imperfections, as for example, his meekness and mercy opposed to our anger, his wisdom as contrasted to our blindness, his grandeur and infinite majesty so superior to our baseness and vileness, his infinite goodness so opposed to our meanness. Let us strive to do all our actions to honor and glorify the perfection most contrary to our defects.⁵

He added that this intention should be the soul of all our actions, greatly increasing their price and value. He used the familiar comparison of the clothes reserved by princes and lords for special days of celebration. These were not admired so much because of the cloth they were made of, but because of the brocade, pearls, and other precious gems that adorned them. In the same way we should not be content to do good deeds, but we should enrich them with noble and holy intentions, doing them solely to please and glorify God.

This same integrity of intention which he often had on his lips and always in his heart, were the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, as expressed in the Gospel, “seek first the kingdom of God.”⁶ He used to say:

O Lord, these words urge us to allow God to reign in us, and to cooperate with him in extending and increasing the kingdom of God in the conquest of souls for him. Is it not a great honor for us to be called to help in this great and important design? Do we not become like the angels, whose sole occupation is the promotion of the kingdom of God? What possible position could be more desirable than ours, to be engaged in extending the kingdom of God? What remains for us, my brothers, but to respond worthily to such a holy and sanctifying vocation?⁷

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⁵ *CED XI:63-64.*
⁶ *Matt 6:33.*
⁷ Abelly’s version differs considerably from *CED XII:130-31.*
CHAPTER FIVE

His Conformity to the Will of God

When Saint Basil was once asked how a person could show his love of God, he responded that it was in doing all he could, and even more than he could if we may speak this way, to accomplish continually, in all things, the holy will of God with an ardent desire for procuring his honor and glory. It was with good reason that he said this, since the union accomplished by love is mainly a union of hearts and wills. A person can never make his love of God more apparent than when he perfectly conforms his own will to God’s.

This is what Monsieur Vincent practiced with so much holiness. As a result, it could be said this conformity of his own will to the will of God was the moving force and the overriding virtue of this holy man, shedding its light on all his other virtues. It was the master virtue controlling all the other faculties of his soul and even of his body. It was the prime motive of his exercises of piety, of all the holy practices of religion, and of all his actions. Whenever he knelt in God’s presence in his mental prayer or was attentive to his presence, he could say with Saint Paul, “Lord, what would you have me do?” If he was so anxious to consult God, to listen to him, and to use such circumspection in discerning the true inspirations coming from his Spirit, in contrast to the false inspirations from the demon or the disordered movements of human nature, it was to discern the will of God with more assurance, and to dispose himself better to accomplish it. If he strongly rejected the teachings of the world to embrace those of the Gospel, if he renounced himself so perfectly to embrace the cross with such affection, and if he abandoned himself to do and suffer all for God, it was to conform himself most perfectly to the will of his divine Master. He had such high regard for this disposition of soul that he once said: “Whoever conforms himself in everything to the will of God and takes his pleasure in it leads a truly angelic life upon earth. He can even be said to be living the very life of Jesus Christ.”

On another occasion he said: “Our Lord unites himself continually to those virtuous souls who remain faithfully and constantly united to his holy will, to those who choose or do not choose according to his wishes.”

1. PG 31.3:1223.
3. CED 1:233.
he was so filled and penetrated with this important truth, and knew from his own experience all the graces and blessings flowing from this conformity to the will of God, he sought to inspire this same sentiment in others, particularly in the members of his own Congregation. He even left them a precise regulation on the point, as follows:

Since the holy practice of doing always and in everything the will of God is an assured means of acquiring Christian perfection, each one should do all he possibly can to familiarize himself with it. It would be helpful to consider these four steps: (1) To accomplish promptly the things we have been directed to do, and to flee from those forbidden, with the thought that this command or restriction comes to us from God, the Church, or our superiors, or even through the rules and constitutions. (2) In indifferent things, choosing those things more repugnant to human nature rather than those more pleasing, unless they happen to be necessary. They were to be chosen then, not indeed because they are pleasing to our senses, but solely because they are pleasing to God. If some indifferent things come up, being neither agreeable nor disagreeable in themselves, then we should accept either one, indifferently, as coming from the hand of divine Providence. (3) As to those unforeseen things which happen to us, such as afflictions or consolations, whether bodily or spiritual, we should receive them with an equanimity of spirit, as coming from the fatherly hand of our Lord. (4) Doing everything for the sole motive of the good pleasure of God, imitating in this as far as we can, our Lord Jesus Christ, who always acted this way, as he said himself in these words reported in the Gospel: “I always do the things which my Father has commanded me.”

He considered this practice as a sure remedy for all ills. When he was asked how one should correct oneself of some fault, such as impatience or some other imperfection, or how to overcome some temptation, or how to preserve peace of soul in the midst of losses and sufferings, he would say that the secret was to conform oneself to the will of God. He insisted that this holy practice should be followed courageously, and that God’s holy and divine will should be sought out perseveringly. He would not allow any lessening of this attitude. He wished the will of God to be the usual concern of the soul, as if it were the air it breathed, and the happiness to which it aspired. Once, speaking to his confreres on this topic, he said:

The perfection of love does not consist in ecstasies, but in fulfilling the will of God. Whoever would be the most perfect of all is the one who has best conformed his own will to God’s in such a way that no

4. John 8:29; Common Rules 2,3.
distinction remains between his own will and God’s. Whoever would excel on this point would be the most perfect. When our Lord wished to instruct the man spoken of in the Gospel about how best to arrive at perfection, he said: “if anyone wishes to come after me, let him renounce himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” Now I ask you, who renounces himself more, or who carries the cross of mortification better, or follows Jesus Christ more perfectly than he who seeks to follow the will of God rather than his own will? Scripture says somewhere that the one who adheres to God is one spirit with him. Again I ask, who adheres more perfectly to God than he who does the will of this same God and not his own, who wills and does nothing but what God wills? Oh what a means for acquiring quickly in this life a great treasure of grace.

On another occasion, he wrote to a priest of the Congregation, a victim of a serious accident:

What can we do? We must will what divine Providence wills, and not anything else. This thought came to me this very morning in my wretched mental prayer. I experienced a great yearning to accept all that comes, whether good or bad, whether the evil around us or personal sufferings, just as God wills, and just as he sends them to us. It seems to me that this practice is most necessary for missionaries, and is likely to produce marvelous results. We must strive to acquire this disposition of having our wills conform to God’s. Among the great benefits of this, surely peace of soul will not be the least.

On another occasion, reflecting on the third petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Fiat voluntas tua sicut in caelo et in terra, (“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”), he said:

By these words, our Lord wished to teach us that just as the angels and the blessed in heaven accomplish the holy and adorable will of God, so too he wishes those of us still on earth to apply ourselves to this same attitude with as much love and perfection as is possible for us. He gave us the example of this himself. He came from heaven to earth just to do the will of God his Father in accomplishing the work of our redemption, and he delighted in doing what he knew to be most pleasing to God, at the time and in the way he recognized as being in conformity with his will.

6. 1 Cor 6:17.
7. CED XI:317.
8. CED VI:476.
9. Matt 6:10
10. CED XI:313.
Monsieur Vincent showed his appreciation of and fidelity to this holy practice in an almost unique way. He never took up any work or sought any temporal advantage for his Congregation unless he clearly recognized this was in keeping with the will of God. Even then he acted only if he was strongly urged to do so by others. He was always careful to conserve the resources divine Providence had given his Company because God so willed it, but he never went ahead to seek out such benefits. He did not bother himself with these matters or seek them out. Neither did he even seek to have recruits for his community, although it would certainly have been permissible and even praiseworthy to persuade others to enter a state in which they could better serve God, provided this was being done through a pure zeal for his glory. The practice of this holy man was to await the good pleasure of God and follow it faithfully, but never to run ahead of it. This is a rare enough virtue. He was so filled with the desire that the will of God rule his heart and rule over all those dependent upon him that he took it as a maxim to spare no expense, no trouble, not even life itself, when it was a question of accomplishing this most holy will.

He found it hard to accept that those called by God to a state or profession of holiness would sometimes decide on their own, even with good or reasonable pretexts, to move on to something else. This is what he wrote to a pastor in this quandary, who had been thinking of resigning his responsibility:

I would counsel you not to be too hasty. What you are about to do merits serious consideration. I would be chagrined if you had taken a final step without praying to God, and consulting Monsieur Duval, or Monsieur Coqueret, or both. It is a question of knowing if God wills you to leave the wife he has given you.11

The superiors of the houses of his Congregation have remarked that in all his letters he recommended nothing more often than this conformity in all events to the good pleasure of God. Several of them had written to him to alert him of threatened legal proceedings, or the dangers posed by malicious persons to their goods, property, and houses. His usual response was that nothing could come about except by the designs of God. God was, after all,

11. Michel Alix, pastor of Saint Ouen L'Aumone; see CED I:190.
the master, not only of temporal possessions, but of our very lives, and so could dispose of them just as he saw fit.

When suffering from spiritual aridity or bodily infirmities, he recommended that all should live in submission to the will of God. Those in this condition should be content to remain in the state in which God was pleased to place them, and they should not even desire to be relieved unless it became clear that this would be agreeable to him. He used to say it was the noblest and most excellent practice he knew of upon earth, for both lay persons and priests alike.

When one of the leading and most useful priests of the Congregation fell sick and was in danger of death, Mademoiselle le Gras, superior of the Daughters of Charity, was very affected by the possibility of his death. Monsieur Vincent wrote to her as follows:

You must act against what causes pain, break its spirit, or soften it, to prepare the heart for what will come. It seems that our Lord is about to take his portion of our little Company. It belongs entirely to him, I devoutly hope, to use as he wills. In my own case, my greatest wish is to hope for nothing except the accomplishment of his holy will. I cannot express how far advanced our dear sick confere is in this holy practice. It seems our Lord wants to call him where he can continue this practice throughout all eternity. May he give us a like submission of reason and feeling to his adorable will! He shall be the source of both our reason and feeling if we serve him alone. Let us pray that you and I may always have this same desire to be in union with him, since in this way we already experience paradise in this life.12

On another occasion, seeing a good lady in great anxiety over what was to become of her son, he wrote:

Give both the son and the mother to our Lord, and you will both profit. Allow him to accomplish his will in you and in him. In your spiritual exercises, strive to attend to his will without wishing anything else. This is all you need to do to give yourself wholly to God. How little it takes to become holy. The highest and almost the only means is to strive always in all things to do the will of God.13

This same lady took sick on one occasion. She wrote to Monsieur Vincent, asking him to reveal to her the sickness of her soul, which she felt was the cause of her bodily ailment. He responded:

I cannot tell you any other cause of your illness except that it is in the designs of God. Adore his will without trying to understand

12. CED 1:586-87; he refers to Antoine Portail.
13. The recipient is Louise de Marillac; CED II:36; Abelly has edited the original.
why God is pleased to have you in a state of such sufferings. It is most glorious to abandon ourselves to his guidance, without seeking to know the reason for his actions. His holy will itself is his reason, since his reason is his will. Embrace this sentiment, as Isaac accepted the will of Abraham, and as Jesus Christ did that of his Father. 14

He himself had taken this practice of conformity to the will of God so much to heart that he rejoiced to see evidence of this sentiment among his confreres. He wrote to one of them:

God be praised that you are ready to do his holy will in everything, and to live and die wherever he calls you. This is what we find in true servants of God, in truly apostolic men, who stop at nothing. This is a mark of God’s true children, ever ready to respond to the designs of such a worthy Father. I thank him for you with a great sentiment of tenderness and gratitude as I ask of his divine bounty. I am persuaded that a heart as prepared as yours is, will receive heavenly graces in abundance to accomplish much good upon earth. 15

The will of God is known in two ways: either in those events we have no control over, those which depend solely on his good pleasure, such as sicknesses, losses, or other accidents of life, or those which his commandments or his counsels reveal to us. These tell us what things are pleasing to him, but they still leave us with full liberty to respond as we see fit. The second way we know the will of God is through the interior movements of his inspirations. Monsieur Vincent made it a personal rule to respond to either indication of God’s will. First, he kept himself in a disposition of submission to God’s will even in the most serious accidents that might happen, since those were ordained or at least permitted by God. His disposition and resolution was to receive and accept these events. He did so, not only with patience and submission, but with affection and joy. He remained content to see God’s holy will accomplished in himself, and that all God’s directives would be faithfully carried out.

In those matters where he was at liberty to act, he sought always to do what he felt was most agreeable to God. He formed his intention at the beginning of each action, saying within himself: “My God, I do this, or I leave that, because I believe it to be your holy will and agreeable to you.” From time to time he renewed this sentiment, so that always and everywhere he would accept the will of God faithfully and religiously. He called this practice the “treasure of the Christian,” because it embodied mortification,

15. CED IV:446-47.
indifference, self-denial, imitation of Jesus Christ, union with God, and in
general all the virtues, since they are virtues only when they are agreeable
to God in conformity to his will. He is the source and rule of all perfection.

Coming to know the will of God in interior inspirations is always difficult,
for it is easy to be deceived. Self-love can disguise the inclinations of human
nature as movements of the Holy Spirit. Monsieur Vincent used to say that
we should put a pinch of salt on these movements so as not to be fooled. He
meant we have to discern carefully, not trusting our own mind or inclination.

This is what he once said to his confreres on this subject:

Among the multitude of thoughts and inclinations that incessantly arise within us, many appear to be good, but do not come from God and are not pleasing to him. How, then, should one discern these? We must look at them carefully, have recourse to God in prayer, and ask for his light. We must reflect on the motives, purposes, and means, to see if all these are in keeping with his good pleasure. We must talk over our ideas with prudent persons, and take the advice of those placed over us. These persons are the depositories of the treasures of the wisdom and grace of God. In doing what they suggest, we are carrying out the will of God.¹⁶

Speaking one day to his community, he made some important remarks on this matter.

I imagine that some present here have today undertaken some actions which in themselves are good and holy, but which may have been rejected by God because they were done through the natural movement of their own will. Is this not what the prophet said, speaking for God: “I do not want your fasts which you think honor me, for they do just the opposite. When you fast, you are doing your own will, and this spoils and compromises your offering.”¹⁷ We could say the same of other works of piety, in which the addition of our own will spoils our devotions, our missions, our penances, etc. For the past twenty years, I have never read this epistle in the mass, taken from the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, without being very upset. What must we do, if we are not to waste our time and our efforts? We must never act through self-motivation, inclination, humor, or imaginings, but rather accustom and habituate ourselves to fulfill the will of God in everything, never just in some things. This is the effect of grace which makes the person and his actions pleasing to God.¹⁸

¹⁶. CED XII:436-37.
¹⁷. Isa 1:11, and 58:3-4.
¹⁸. CED XII:155-56.
We shall finish this chapter by considering a devout reflection which this holy man made one day on the happiness of a Christian confirmed in this practice of conformity to the will of God.

Notice the holy dispositions in which he lives, and the blessings which accompany all he does. He is committed to God, to him alone, and God leads him in everything and by everything. He could say with the prophet: *Tenuisti manum dexteram meam, et in voluntate tua deduxisti me* ["With your counsel you guide me, and in the end you will receive me in glory”].\(^{19}\) God holds him, so to speak, by his right hand, and he accepts this divine guidance with complete submission. For tomorrow, the following week, the whole year, and his entire life, you will see him living in peace and tranquility, and in an uninterrupted movement toward God. Everywhere he spreads in the souls of his neighbor the happy spirit with which he himself is filled. If you compare him with those who follow their own inclinations you will see how filled with light he is, how fruitful in his work. He makes notable progress, and all his words have strength and energy. God blesses all his undertakings and accomplishes by his grace the designs God has for him. The advice he gives to others and all his actions give great edification. On the other hand, when we look at those attached to their own inclinations and pleasure, their thoughts are worldly, their words those of slaves, and their works lifeless. All this comes from their being attached to creatures. These allow nature to influence their souls, while grace acts in those who raise their hearts to God and aspire only to accomplish his will.\(^ {20}\)

### SECTION TWO

*His Perfect Acceptance of the Will of God by an Entire Resignation and Indifference*

The love of God and a perfect conformity to his will appear chiefly in afflictions and sufferings, whether physical or mental. At that point, the human heart accepts whatever comes from his divine goodness, not with patience alone, but with peace, joy, and love, because such is his will and pleasure.

\(^{19}\) Ps 73:23-24.  
\(^{20}\) *CED XI*:46-47.
This is first seen by a resignation, in which our will moves us to place ourselves entirely into the hands of God, rising above all natural repugnances and submitting ourselves perfectly to the good pleasure of his divine Majesty.

Monsieur Vincent did this in the face of all the crosses and sufferings by which God tried his virtue. In all these unfortunate occurrences his only response was: "God be blessed. May the name of God be blessed." This refrain showed the disposition of his heart, which was always resigned to the will of God. He had such a high esteem for this virtue that he once remarked to one of his confreres, on the occasion of a most serious accident affecting the welfare of the Congregation: "An act of resignation and acceptance of the will of God is worth more than a hundred thousand temporal successes."

Speaking to his confreres on this topic on another occasion, he first explained the difference between God’s putting someone into a particular state, and his merely allowing something to happen.

The first case may be considered as the will of God, while in the second case God permits the events to unfold. We may consider a loss, a sickness, a contradiction, boredom, or dryness, all of which come directly from the will of God, as an example of the first. What happens as a result of sin or disobedience to his commands comes to us with his permission. In these circumstances we must humble ourselves and do all we can, by the grace of God, to rise from the state into which we have fallen. We should also be on our guard against further relapses. The first sort of situation comes directly from God’s will. We must accept it and resign ourselves to God’s good pleasure, to suffer what he sends, as much and for as long as it pleases him. This, gentlemen and my brothers, is the great lesson we learn from the Son of God. Those who learn it well are in the most advanced class in the school of the Lord. I know of nothing more holy, or nothing more perfect than this resignation, which leads to an entire emptying of self and a complete indifference to all the states into which we may be led, sin excepted. Let us strive, then, to hold to this, and pray God to give us the grace to remain always in this state of holy indifference.21

From this conference we can see the high degree to which he practiced this spirit of resignation and how he recommended it to others. This led him to a complete indifference which united his heart perfectly to the good pleasure of God, not so much by overcoming the movements of nature but

21. CED XI:45-46
rather by a simple and loving acceptance, doing all for the love of the will of God. He willed nothing but what God willed. In this sentiment he received with equal affection whatever came from the hand of God, whether it be sickness or health, loss or gain.

He spoke of these things to his community:

Indifference is a state of virtue which leads us to be so detached from creatures and so united to the will of the Creator that we are almost totally freed from any desire for one thing rather than another. I said a state of virtue, not simply a virtue which occurs within that state. This state of virtue is active, leading the heart to be detached from all that would hold it captive, because otherwise it would not be a virtue. This virtue is not only excellent, but is also of singular usefulness in helping us to advance in the spiritual life. It could even be said to be necessary for all those who wish to serve God perfectly. Could we seek the kingdom of God and devote ourselves to the conversion of sinners and the salvation of souls if we were attached to our own ease and convenience? How could we accomplish the will of God if we followed the movements of our own will? How could we renounce ourselves, according to the counsel of our Lord, if we sought the esteem and applause of others? How could we be detached from all things, if we did not have the courage to leave a trinket which binds us? You see, then, how much we need this holy indifference, and how much we must give ourselves to God to acquire it, if we wish to avoid becoming slaves to our own selves, or to say it better, slaves to an animal. He who allows himself to be led and dominated by his animal nature does not deserve to be called a man, but rather an animal.

Indifference shares in the nature of perfect love or, to say it better, it is an activity of that perfect love which leads the will to all that is best and destroys all that stands in the way. Fire not only warms, but also destroys all that it touches. In the same way, according to the thought of one of the saints, indifference is the origin of all the virtues and the death of all vices.

The soul in a state of perfect indifference is compared by the prophet to a beast of burden. This animal is just as indifferent about carrying one thing as another, by being guided by a rich man or by a poor man, to be part of a noble establishment or to be in a wretched stable. Everything is the same to it. It is ready for whatever is asked of it. It walks, it stops; it turns to the left, or to the right; it suffers; it works night and day. Gentlemen and my brothers, how detached we must become, detached from our own judgment, our own will,
our own inclinations, from all that is not of God. We must be disposed to accept all the orders of his holy will. That is the way the saints acted.

O great Saint Peter, you said it so well, and made it so evident, when you recognized your Master on the shore of the sea at the word of the beloved disciple, Dominus est ["It is the Lord"].

At once you threw yourself into the water to go to him. You did not remain in the boat, nor hold on to your shirt, or even to your life, but looked only to the divine Savior, who was everything to you. And you, great apostle Saint Paul, by the special grace given you at the time of your conversion, you practiced this virtue of indifference so admirably when you said: Domine, quid me vis facere? Lord, what would you have me do? This statement reflects a marvelous conversion and a detachment which could be achieved only by grace. He had in a single moment separated himself from the law he had known, from his mission, from his pretensions and his own ideas, and was raised to such a perfect state that he was ready for and indifferent to all God wished from him. If these great saints appreciated and practiced this virtue of indifference, we ought to follow their example. Missionaries are no longer their own. They belong to Jesus Christ who wishes to use them as he wills, and they are prepared to suffer following his example. "Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you," he said to his disciples, and "as they have persecuted me, so they will persecute you."

After all these considerations, must we not empty our hearts of all other affections but that of Jesus Christ, and our wills of everything else but obedience? It seems to me that I see you all disposed in this way, and I trust that God will give you this grace. Yes, O my God, I myself first of all hope for this. I am in great need of this grace because of my miseries and all my attachments which I seem powerless to break and which make me say in my old age, like David, "Lord, have mercy upon me." You will be edified, my brothers, if I tell you of some of our older confreres who have asked to be sent to the Indies, and among those who have asked, some are sick. Where do they get the courage? Does it not come from a free heart which desires only that God be known and adored in all places? Nothing holds them back or attracts them but his holy will. And the rest of us, brothers, though we are so numerous, if we were

not held back by some unhappy attachments, each of us could say in his heart, “My God, I give myself to you to be sent to any place on the earth where my superiors judge I could best proclaim your holy name. When it is time for me to die, I shall be ready, knowing that my salvation is in obedience, and obedience is your holy will.” Those who have not yet accepted these sentiments ought to examine closely those things which restrain them. In this way, by a continu­ous interior and exterior mortification, they may, with the grace of God, come to the freedom of the children of God, which is found in holy indifference.26

Monsieur Vincent did not limit his exhortations to his confreres in general, but spoke personally to each one on this subject as circumstances dictated. Writing to one of them, he said:

You are aware that the Gospel says that the workers called at the later hour received the same pay as those who had worked the whole day. In the same way, you shall merit as much by awaiting in patience the will of the Master as if you were working, since you are ready to stay or to leave, all the while awaiting his will. God be praised for this holy indifference. It makes you a fit instrument for the works of God.27

He wrote to another:

I thank God greatly for the dispositions he has inspired in you to be willing to go into the foreign mission if you are sent, or not to go if you are asked to stay. Holy indifference in all things is a mark of the perfect. Yours gives me hope that God shall be glorified in you and by you, as I pray with all my heart will happen. I ask you, Monsieur, to beg God for the grace that we both might abandon ourselves entirely to his adorable direction. We must serve him as he wishes, and renounce our own wills, either about where we work or what we do. It is enough if we are totally given to God as his beloved children, being honored to bear the name of servants of the Gospel, by which our Lord wants to be known and served. What difference does it make how or where, as long as we act in this way? Assuredly this will come about if we allow him to act in us.28

He said to another confrere:

Oh, Monsieur, what a beautiful attribute holy indifference is for a Missionary. It makes him so pleasing to God, and brings the Lord to prefer him to all other workers in whom he does not find this

26. CED XII:227-44. Abelly's version differs from that of Coste.
27. CED V:525.
28. CED V:393-94.
indifference to accomplish his designs. If we finally arrive at this state of being deprived of all self-will, we would then be ready to accomplish the will of God, that holy will which the angels adore and in which human beings find all their happiness.\footnote{CED IV:340.}

This true servant of God was not satisfied to exhort others to practice this virtue, but practiced it himself most perfectly. It appeared on all occasions that his heart was so detached from all that was not of God and so firmly attached to his holy will, that everyone could recognize he had attained the highest degree of this heroic virtue. We will give here two examples, sketches which will enable the reader to judge his holy dispositions in this regard.

The first example is his indifference to all that affected him in his sicknesses, especially in the illness which led to his death. He approached his end well aware of his condition. He even stated that he knew he was slowly dying, but he was in such a state of perfect indifference that whether he lived or died, suffered or was cured, it was all the same to him. Neither in health nor in sickness was any of this apparent. He never said a single word to the contrary. He was even indifferent to the medicines and remedies given him. Although he mentioned those remedies which seemed to worsen his condition, he took whatever the physicians decided would be best for him. He seemed as unperturbed by the bad effects of some of the prescribed remedies as by the good effects of others which were more successful. He was seemingly content to accept whatever came about, provided only that God’s good pleasure be accomplished, the only object of his desires and joy.

The second example is his indifference regarding the affairs of his Congregation, especially since the preservation of this holy work was more dear to him than his own life. He regarded the accomplishment of the will of God as incomparably superior even to this, so that he looked upon the continued existence and growth of the Congregation as desirable only in so far as God willed it so. He took no step, nor did he say a single word in its favor, except in agreement with the manifestation of the divine will.

Someone once wrote him that he could never expect his Congregation to flourish unless there was a constant supply of worthy candidates, and that this could be assured only by having the Congregation established in the larger cities. He replied in these words:

\begin{quote}
We may not take any steps to establish ourselves anywhere if we are to remain faithful to the ways of God and to the traditions of the Congregation. Up to the present, Providence has directed us to the places where we are, with no activity on our part, directly or indirectly, to choose a place for ourselves. This resignation to God which keeps us in dependence on his direction is most agreeable to
\end{quote}
him, especially because it is so contrary to mere human prudence. Under the pretext of zeal and the glory of God, those human sentiments often undertake projects God does not inspire and which he will not bless. He is aware of what is suitable for us, and will provide it in good time, if as true children we abandon ourselves to our dear Father. Certainly, if we are convinced of our own unworthiness, we will hesitate about intruding upon the harvest of others before we have been invited to do so. We should be careful not to push ourselves ahead of other workers to whom God has reserved this field of activity. 30

Once a matter which promised to favor the Congregation was proposed to him, and one of his priests urged him to agree. He gave this response:

I think we should allow this matter to simmer for the time being. This will allow the inclinations of human nature to lessen, even at the expense of the possible advantages of a prompt decision. It will help us develop holy indifference, and allow our Lord to manifest his will while we offer our prayers for this intention. We can be sure that, if he wishes it, it shall come about. A delay will not prevent this, and the less there is of ourselves in this, the more will he make it his own. 31

He tenderly and cordially loved all the members of the Congregation, especially those who were working diligently and successfully in the vineyard of the Lord. When death came to any one of them he felt the loss deeply. Still, he practiced an admirable indifference on these occasions. He did not ask God to preserve their lives except when it was in keeping with his will and for his greater glory. This was evident on an occasion when several members of the Congregation were stricken with the plague. Among them was one who was most dear to him because of his great service to the Church, which he did even to the extent of endangering his own life. He recommended all the sick to the prayers of the community. Speaking of this particular confrere, he said:

We pray that God will deign to preserve his life, but we submit entirely to his divine will. We must believe, for it is true, that his sickness and that of the others, and all else that happens to our Company, is done under God's direction and for the greater prosperity of our Congregation. This is why, in praying God to restore good health to our sick confreres, or to come to our help in any other way, it is always on the condition that it be in keeping with his good pleasure and for his greater glory. 32

30. CED VI:308.
31. CED V:534.
32. CED XI:47-48. The confrere is not identified.
Another time, speaking of the death of a person who had greatly loved the community, he said:

I have no doubt you have been much affected by the death of this person who was so dear to us. But God be praised, you have told me that God has done well to take him from us, and you would not have it otherwise, since this has evidently been his holy will.\footnote{CED XI:100. Person not identified.}

This almost perfect indifference shone forth most brilliantly on the occasion when the plague in Genoa, in 1654, took five or six of the best workers of the Company. This is how he announced this loss to the community. After exhorting them to confide in God, whatever the situation, he spoke of the sad news.

How true it is, gentlemen, that we should have a great confidence in God and place ourselves entirely in his hands. We believe that his Providence arranges everything for our greater good no matter what should come about through his will or permission! Yes, what God gives us or what he takes from us is for our benefit, since it is according to his will, and his good pleasure is our hope and our happiness. In this spirit I must tell you of an affliction that has come to us. I must say in all honesty that it is one of the greatest tragedies that could happen. We have lost the main support of our house in Genoa. Monsieur N., [Etienne Blatiron] our superior there, and such a great servant of God, is dead. And this is not all. Good Monsieur N., [Nicolas Duport] who served the plague-stricken with such joy, who had such love for his neighbor, and such zeal and fervor for helping in the salvation of souls, has fallen victim to the plague. One of our Italian priests, [Domenico Boccone] a most virtuous and good missionary, has also died. Monsieur N., [Antoine Tratebas] a true servant of God, a good missionary and a man of all the virtues, is also dead. And Monsieur N., [Francois Vincent] whom you well know to be the equal in all this to the others, is also dead. Monsieur N., [Jean (Mc)Ennery] a wise, pious, and exemplary man, is dead. Gentlemen and my brothers, the contagious disease has taken all these men. God has called them to himself.

O Savior Jesus, what a loss and what an affliction! It is now that we must resign ourselves in everything to the will of God. Otherwise what else could we do but lament and grieve uselessly for the loss of these most zealous proponents of the glory of God. Instead, in resignation, after allowing our tears, we must raise our hearts and minds to God, praise him, and bless him for these losses, since they come as expressions of his most holy will. Can we say, gentlemen
and my brothers, that we have lost those whom God has called? No, they have not been lost, and we must believe the ashes of these good missionaries will be the seed of others. We must hold it as certain that God will never take back the graces he has given them. He will give these same graces to those with the zeal to go to take their place. 34

34. CED XI:428-32; Abelly’s text differs considerably from Coste’s, who gives both for comparison. In addition, the event took place in 1657, not in 1654, Abelly’s date. The total number of confreres lost was six.
CHAPTER SIX

His Constant Attention to the Presence of God

The grandeur and perfection of Monsieur Vincent’s love for God was seen not only in his perfect submission to all that he commanded, but also in the close attention he gave to the presence of his divine majesty. It is a characteristic of love to desire and to seek out the presence of the beloved, and to take pleasure in his company, in being in his sight, and speaking with him. Monsieur Vincent’s dedication to God was such (as we learn from a very virtuous priest who knew him well and observed him during many years) that it is easy to see that his spirit was continually attentive to the presence of God. He was never seen to be distracted by the press of business or the duties he was obliged to attend to, but he was always recollected and self-possessed. It was remarked that he ordinarily would not respond at once when asked something, especially if it were a matter of some importance. He would instead pause briefly to raise his mind to God to ask his light and grace, so as to do everything in keeping with his will and for his greater glory.

This same priest has recalled that he had sometimes seen Monsieur Vincent contemplating a crucifix held in his hands for hours on end. On other occasions when news of some disaster was brought to him, or the happier news of some unexpected event, a serene expression appeared on his face, the sole indication of his continued absorption in the presence of God. In this connection, he used to say: “one cannot hope for much from someone who does not continually converse with God. Further, if someone does not serve the Lord as they should, it is because they are not attached enough to God, and have not asked for his grace with perfect confidence.”

When he had to go to the city, he did so with great recollection, walking in the presence of God, praising him, and praying to him silently in his heart. In his later years when he had to use the carriage, he always took a companion with him. Not only did he remain interiorly recollected, with his eyes closed, but usually he pulled the curtains, so he could not see out or be seen, so as to be undisturbed in his recollection of God.

He had the pious custom of uncovering his head and making the sign of the cross whenever he heard the sound of the clock marking the hours and the quarter hours. He did this whether alone or in the company of others, in the house or in the city. He used to say this practice was helpful in renewing the recollection of the presence of God, and in reminding oneself of the
resolutions taken during morning mental prayer. He introduced this practice into his Company, which has continued it to this day in places where they can do so.

Since he knew from his own experience the graces and benefits of interior recollection, and of this attention to the presence of God, he urged this practice upon others as much as he could. He put up, in various places in the cloister of Saint Lazare, signs written in large letters, GOD SEES ALL, so that the missionaries and others visiting might be reminded of his holy presence. He appreciated this practice so much that he used to say, "If a person could be found who truly understood this practice, and who was faithful in following it, he would soon reach a high degree of sanctity."

He was alert to allow the things of nature to raise his mind to God. He did not stop at considering external beauty or the particular beauty of the created object. Rather, he immediately raised his mind to the consideration of the perfection of its Creator. When he saw the fields covered with grain, or trees loaded with fruit, he immediately thought of the inexhaustible riches of God, or he praised him for his goodness in supplying by his Providence the food needed by his creatures. When he saw flowers, or any other beautiful object, he took the opportunity to contemplate the perfections and beauty of God. He would say in his heart these words later found in his own handwriting: "What then compares to the beauty of God, the source of all beauty and of the perfection of his creatures? Do not the flowers, the birds, the stars, the moon, and the sun borrow their attraction and their beauty from him?"

He once told his community that he had visited a sick woman suffering from a constant headache. She endured this with such great patience that he seemed to see on her face a certain grace which revealed that God was present in her sufferings. He was so moved by the sight he could not help exclaiming: "Oh, the happy state of those who suffer for the love of God! How agreeable this is in his sight, since his own Son crowned the heroic actions of his holy life with terrible sufferings which brought him to death."

He added on this occasion that just a few days before he had chanced to be in a room lined with mirrors, so much so that even a fly could not escape notice, no matter where it might go. This led him to think: "If men have found a way to see everything that happens, even to the smallest movement of a tiny insect, how much more must we believe that we are always in the sight of the divine mirror of God's all-seeing vision, especially the good works of his faithful, such as their patience, humility, conformity to the will of God, and all the other virtues."

1. CED XIII:143.
2. CED XI:409.
3. CED XI:409.
We shall finish this chapter with these remarks which he made in speaking to his community.

The thought of the presence of God helps us in the practice of fulfilling his holy will. The memory of the divine presence grows in the mind, little by little, and by his grace becomes habitual with us. We become, as it were, enlivened by this divine presence. My brothers, how many persons there are, even in the world, who almost never lose their sense of God's presence? I, myself, a few days ago met a person who was aware of having been distracted only three times during the day. These people will be our judges. They will condemn us before the judgment seat of God's divine majesty for our forgetfulness, since we have no other duty but to love him and to show this love by our attention and our service of him. Let us pray that our Lord will give us the grace to say, like him, *Cibus meus est, ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me*, my food and my life is to do the will of God. Let us beseech him to give us always a hunger and thirst for his justice.

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4. John 4:34.
5. *CED* XII:163-64.
CHAPTER SEVEN

His Mental Prayer

MEDITATION is like a precious manna which God gives to his faithful to preserve and perfect the life of their souls. It is like a heavenly dew, causing all the virtues to grow in their hearts. We are not surprised to learn that Monsieur Vincent had such a great esteem for this exercise, and a great desire to give himself to it and to encourage others in its practice.

First, every morning he never failed to devote an hour to his mental prayer, whatever other business he might have to do, or wherever he was. He preferred this practice to all other good works, unless the others were required or were absolutely necessary. He used this time to consecrate the first moments of the day to God, and to dispose himself to use the rest of the day well. He made this prayer in the church together with all his community. Sometimes he was unsuccessful in hiding the gifts of the Holy Spirit in his prayer, with sighs that revealed the ardor of his love of God, enough to move even the most tepid souls to devotion.

He prescribed this holy exercise for his Congregation, and wished that everyone would make his mental prayer each day. He said that even the sick could do so if they used the method he taught. In this prayer more attention was to be given to the affections of the will than to the understanding of the intellect, all done peacefully in the presence of God. Repeated acts of resignation, conformity to the divine will, contrition for sin, patience, confidence in the divine goodness, thanksgiving for God's benefits, the love of God, and similar sentiments were all to be elicited in this prayer.

Besides this scheduled morning mental prayer, he made others during the day and in the evening, depending on the time allowed by his other duties. He first felt obliged to carry out the responsibilities of his position and to serve his neighbor. He looked upon himself as a man for others, not free to use his time and person otherwise than in the fulfillment of the duties of the state to which God had called him.

After his dedication to his own salvation, he gave himself to the service of the Church and the salvation of souls. He recognized, however, that he could not succeed in this service of others or in any of his other work, except by the grace of God received in his mental prayer. When he had even a brief respite in work, or some interruption in sleep, he turned to his practice of mental prayer. He had a special devotion of praying in the presence of the
blessed sacrament, where he was in such a devout posture and where he seemed so recollected that he edified all who saw him.

The masters of the spiritual life usually distinguish between two types of meditation (we are speaking here of prayer made privately and solely by use of the mind): the one, called the ordinary form of prayer, which anyone may practice, consists of considerations, affections, and resolutions. The second type of prayer is more subtle, more intimate, and more sublime. To this prayer God calls those he wills and when he wills.

This form of prayer depends on the action of the Holy Spirit rather than on the industry or efforts of the human person. We have not been able to discover exactly what form of prayer Monsieur Vincent used, whether the ordinary or the extraordinary form. His humility always hid as much as it could the gifts he had received from God. What we cannot safely say in any detail, however, we can say in general. His prayer must have been quite perfect, as we can infer from the excellent dispositions he brought to prayer and the fruits he drew from it. These are the two marks by which we may judge the quality and the perfection of his mental prayer. He respected the opinions of some modern authors on the excellence of the extraordinary way of praying treated in their books, and he spoke of the admirable influence of God in inexplicable ways upon certain elite souls. Nevertheless, he held to the maxim of the apostle not to believe too easily every spirit, but rather to test them, to see if they are from God.\(^1\) He understood well that Satan often appears as an angel of light, deceiving many by his specious and evil suggestions.

His long experience in directing souls led him sometimes to say to his close friends that there were methods of prayer which appear elevated and quite perfect, but which in reality are mere illusions. For this reason he ordinarily advised that the more humble way should be followed. The lower was to remain the safest until God directed the soul to another method, which God would then illumine by his own light to allow the soul, as Scripture says, to arrive at a perfect day.\(^2\) He felt that God should make this decision. It was a sign of great temerity, and a sort of presumption and even illusion, to decide for oneself to depart from the ordinary method of prayer to walk the unfamiliar path under the pretext of arriving at a higher level of perfection. Perfection, of course, does not consist in the method of praying a person follows, but in charity. Thus perfection may be greater and more fervent in a soul praying according to the ordinary method, than in another who flatters himself that he is following a more lofty method of prayer, but who neglects to work at the correction of his own vices and the acquisition of the virtues.

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1. 1 John 4:1.
necessary for him. He may even spend his entire life living with some notable imperfections.

He preferred to judge the quality and goodness of mental prayer by the dispositions brought to it, and by the fruits it produced. He used to say: "the best virtues are humility, the recognition of one's nothingness before God, the mortification of the passions and the unregulated movements of nature, interior recollection, uprightness and simplicity of heart, attention to the presence of God, entire dependence upon his will, and frequent reminders to oneself of God's goodness."

As much as he recommended these holy dispositions to others, he himself put them into practice, preparing his soul to receive in prayer the lights and grace which God was ready to pour out upon him. The primary and most excellent fruits of his mental prayer are unknown to us, for he drew a veil of silence over them all. We would have to be resigned to this lack of knowledge were it not that he sometimes appeared like another Moses, if not totally radiant. He at least had the same fervor and love as Moses when he came from his encounter with the divine majesty. It would be easy to judge from the words that came from the abundance of his heart as he left this holy exercise, what must have been the effects of his prayer. Besides that, we can truly say that the virtues he practiced throughout his life, his humility, patience, mortification, charity, and in general all he did for the glory and service of God, were fruits of his prayer.

Since he knew from his own experience how profitable and salutary the holy exercise of mental prayer was to help in advancing in the spiritual life, and of perfecting oneself in all the virtues, he was very concerned to extend this appreciation to others. He recommended this exercise, and had others recommend it during the ordination retreats, to those who were about to receive the sacrament of holy orders. He believed the candidates would never succeed if they were not men of prayer. He did the same for those who came to Saint Lazare to make their retreat, since he saw that one of the main fruits they could take away with them was to have been well instructed in how to make mental prayer, and having the firm resolution of being faithful to it all their life. He showed this same enthusiasm in his clergy conferences, and with the Ladies of Charity in their meetings, not to mention his own Congregation.

He wanted his Missionaries to be men of prayer, as much for their personal advancement as for the ability to be of real service to others. He was most anxious that his confreres should progress in their practice of this holy exercise.

Give me a man of prayer, and he will be able to do everything.

He will be able to say with the apostle that he can do all in him who
strengthens him and who gives him support. The Congregation of the Mission will continue in existence only as long as mental prayer shall be practiced. Mental prayer is the impregnable rampart which will protect the Missionaries from all sorts of attacks. It is like a mystical arsenal, a tower of David, which will be the source of their arms, not only to defend themselves, but to attack and rout all the opponents of the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

He was not satisfied just to recommend this holy exercise to his confreres but he took the trouble to train them himself, despite the press of so much other business with which he was preoccupied. He arranged for them, from time to time, usually twice a week, to “repeat” their mental prayer before the assembled community, that is to share the lights and sentiments they had experienced in mental prayer. On each occasion he would call upon three or four confreres to speak for the mutual edification of all, as well as to give the newcomers not yet adept at this exercise a model of how to practice it.

He was deeply moved by these repetitions of mental prayer. He never failed to attend them and often spent many hours in this exercise. Whenever he was on a trip in the company of some lay people, he would persuade them to spend a little time in mental prayer, and then share the good thoughts and sentiments they had received during the prayer. This closed the door to useless conversations, and opened it to pious conversations in which the fruits of the meditation were shared among all the travelers. A woman of great virtue learned this practice from Monsieur Vincent, and later put it into use with her own domestic servants. She recounted once how a manservant, reporting on his prayer, told how he thought about our Lord’s love for the poor. He felt that he ought to do something for them, but not having anything to give them, he felt he could at least show them greater consideration. He resolved to speak more graciously when he had the opportunity to meet any of them, and even doff his hat to them. Monsieur Vincent sometimes used this example to show that persons of all ranks could learn to meditate, and that those who were faithful to this prayer became better at it. Also, in this holy exercise God inspired virtuous actions which were often unheeded at other times.

He particularly recommended the practice of mental prayer to those obliged to preach to others, to catechize, or to give spiritual direction to souls. This is how he expressed himself, in writing to one of his priests:

Mental prayer is the great book for the preacher. In this prayer you will descend into the depths of the divine truths of which the Eternal Word is the source, to give them to the people. It is greatly

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4. CED XI:83-84.
desirable that the Missionaries deeply love this holy exercise of mental prayer. Without it, they will produce little or no fruit. By prayer they will make themselves fit to touch hearts and convert souls. I pray that our Lord confirm you in the practice of this virtue.5

Above all, he counseled the prayer of affection and of practical application. This form of prayer results in forming good resolutions based on simple considerations, but does not stop at these, except by a positive influence of the Holy Spirit directing the soul to rest there. To convey the difference between the application of the mind made in mental prayer and the movements of grace received in it, he used the comparison of a ship powered either by oars or by sail. He said the oars were not used except when the wind failed. When the wind was favorable, the ship moved more easily and more quickly. In the same way, considerations of the mind were to be used when there was no obvious inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When this heavenly wind did blow, the proper course was to abandon oneself to its direction.

On another occasion he compared the subjects of meditation to different kinds of shops: in some, only a single kind of merchandise was on display, while others carried many different sorts of goods. In some subjects of meditation, only a single virtue is stressed while others refer to a whole treasury of virtues. An example of this would be the mysteries of the nativity, and the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. To profit from these subjects, our Lord should be adored in the state in which the mystery presents him. He should be admired, praised, and thanked for the graces he merited for us, at the same time that we also present to him our misery and our needs, asking the help and grace we need to imitate and practice the virtue he has taught us.

He encouraged those who endured a dryness or sterility in their mental prayer to persevere, in imitation of our Lord who factus in agonia, prolixius orabat, in his anguish prayed with all the greater intensity.6 He said we must look upon mental prayer as a gift from God, and urgently ask the grace to make it well, saying with the apostles, Domine, doce nos orare: Lord, teach us how we ought to pray to you.7 We should await this grace from his goodness with humility and patience.

Once, speaking to his community on prayer, he said:

Prayer is a sermon we preach to ourselves, to convince ourselves of the need we have to turn to God, to cooperate with his grace, to root out vices from our souls, and to replace them with virtues. In mental prayer we must particularly apply ourselves to combating

5. CED VII:156.
the passion or evil inclination to which we are especially addicted, and we must mortify this tendency, for when we do, the rest is easy. We must fight forcefully, but act calmly, not breaking our head in trying to force anything or to be too subtle. Though we have to lift our minds to God, we must above all listen to him speaking to us, for one single word from him is better than a thousand reasons and all the speculations of our minds. We must from time to time raise our hearts to God, conscious of our nothingness, awaiting his speaking to our heart, uttering a word which leads to eternal life. It is only what God inspires, what comes from him, that is useful for us. What we receive from God we must give to our neighbor after the example of Jesus Christ who, speaking of himself, said: "I say only what the Father has taught me."8

He had the custom of never failing to make an annual retreat of at least eight days, no matter what pressing business or duties he had. During this time he put the affairs of the house into other hands, so as to give himself completely to mental prayer and recollection. He did so in imitation of our Savior who went into the desert as an example to those who were later to preach the Gospel.

Once, when he asked for prayers from his confreres for some priests making their retreat, he spoke of these spiritual exercises. Although he did not speak of himself on this occasion, we can infer the esteem he had for these practices:

Let us pray to God for those who have begun their retreat, so that he may be pleased to renew them interiorly, making them die to their own selves, to be filled with his Holy Spirit. Yes, a retreat well made is a total renewal. The one who makes it well should be entirely renewed. He no longer remains what he was, but becomes a new man. Let us pray that God will give us this new spirit of revitalization, so that by his grace we may put off the old Adam to be clothed with the new, Jesus Christ, and so that in all things we might accomplish his most holy will.9

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Holy Scripture, speaking of the prophet Samuel, says that not a single one of his words went unheeded. We might say the same, in some sense, of the words of Monsieur Vincent. They were all animated by the Son of God and blessed by his grace, affecting all who heard them. They were heard by the ear but penetrated to the heart. For this reason we have felt the Catholic reader would be consoled and edified if we would insert here some of the counsels and instructions he gave at various times to his community on the subject of prayer. These were carefully recorded by some among them. Although the servant of God spoke extemporaneously as the occasion demanded, the simplicity with which he spoke like a father speaking to his children gave his words a particular effect, leading well-disposed souls to draw great profit from them.

Those who make their mental prayer well are recognized not only by the way they speak of it, but even better by their actions by which they show the fruit they have gathered from their prayer. We can also say the same thing about those who act unsatisfactorily, because it is easy to see that the first is making great progress, while the latter slips back. To derive profit from mental prayer you must prepare for it. Those who neglect this preparation or who come to prayer simply by habit and because the others are there are greatly mistaken. As the sage says, Ante orationem praepara animam tuam ["before going to prayer, prepare your soul"].

Mental prayer is a raising of the mind to God to present our needs to him and to implore his mercy and grace. It is only reasonable, before appearing before his sublime majesty, that you should prepare yourself. We must think to ourselves, What am I about to do? Before whom am I to appear? What do I wish to say to him? What grace am I going to ask for? Through laziness or lack of energy we may neglect to think of these things, or, on the contrary we may possibly be overly worried about other matters and so fail in our preparation. We should remedy this fault. We must also control our imagination, so

10. 1 Sam 3:19.
prone to wander, and focus it on the presence of God, without straining to do this, however, for excess in this is not good.

Mental prayer has three parts, and everyone knows their order and method. We should follow this method. The subject may be an object of our senses or an abstraction. If it is sensible, such as a mystery of the faith, we should represent it to ourselves, paying attention to all its parts and circumstances. If it should concern an abstract subject, such as a virtue, we should think of what the virtue consists in, its properties, marks, effects, the acts which compose it, and the means of putting it into practice. It would be good to consider the reason for practicing this virtue, and pay the most attention to those motives which most appeal to us. We should think of passages of holy Scripture or the fathers which bear upon the subject. It is good to reflect upon these, but we should not seek to recall too many of these passages, for what good would it do to amass many passages and reasons, unless it were to enlighten the mind or to clarify our thought, but then this would become more a study than a prayer.

When you want to start a fire, you use a flint, and as soon as the tinder catches fire you light a candle. You would be foolish to continue striking the flint after the candle is lit. So too, when the soul is enlightened by these considerations, why seek others, and continue to strike our minds again and again for other reasons or other thoughts? Do you not see that it is a waste of time to do this? You should strive to move the will and to excite the affections by the beauty of the virtue to be acquired or the hatefulfulness of the opposite vice. This is not too hard to do, for the will seeks the light of understanding, and naturally turns to what it sees as good and desirable.

This is still not enough. We have to go beyond good sentiments to make good resolutions to work at acquiring the virtue, to put it into practice, and to do acts proper to it. This is the important point and it is the fruit to be gathered from prayer. We should not take our resolutions lightly, but rather repeat them to ourselves and fix them solidly in our heart. It is good to foresee the obstacles that may arise to stand in our way, and the means that would be helpful for putting them into execution. We should determine to avoid the one and be determined to practice the other.

In this regard it is not necessary and often not expedient to have lofty sentiments about the virtue we are seeking, or even the desire to have these sentiments. This desire to feel the virtues, which are
purely spiritual qualities, can sometimes harm and pain the mind. Excessive efforts only upset the brain and cause headaches. In the same way, acts of the will that are repeated too often or too forcefully dry up and weaken the heart. We should be moderate in all things, and excess is to be avoided in all things but especially in mental prayer. We must act in gentle moderation, always preserving peace of mind and heart.\(^{12}\)

Another time he explained the difference between thoughts that arise spontaneously and those inspired by God.

Notice the difference between the light of a fire and that which comes from the sun. During the night when a fire glows, we see objects by its light, yet we see them only imperfectly because this light is limited. The sun, on the other hand, lights the entire world, giving life to everything. It allows us to see beyond that which is merely exterior, to penetrate into the interior, and it makes all things fruitful and fertile according to their proper nature. The thoughts and considerations which come from our own reflections are feeble lights, showing us only the outside of things, and nothing else. The lights of grace which the Sun of Justice shines into our souls penetrate to the innermost depths of our heart, bringing forth marvelous fruits. We must then ask God to enlighten us himself, and to inspire in us what pleases him. All these lofty and studied considerations are in no way to be called mental prayer. We must act in moderation and gently, always preserving peace of mind and heart.

Those who stop and delight themselves in these lofty considerations are like the preacher who prides himself on his beautiful sermons. He delights in seeing the audience so taken up with what he says. Evidently the Holy Spirit is not at all present here, but instead it is the spirit of pride which enlightens his understanding and produces all these fine thoughts. To say it more accurately, in this case the demon himself inspires him and makes him speak as he does. It is much the same with mental prayer when we seek those fine considerations or those extraordinary thoughts, especially when they are sought only for the sake of impressing others when they make a repetition of their meditation. This is a sort of blasphemy, an idolatry of the mind, for when meeting God in mental prayer you are seeking only what will cater to your pride. You take up this holy time of prayer to seek your own satisfaction, and in taking pleasure in your own thoughts, you offer sacrifice to the idol of your own vanity.

\(^{12}\) CED XI:403-07.
Alas, my brothers, be on guard against such foolishness. We must recognize that we are all filled with misery. We must seek only what will further humble ourselves and bring us to the solid practice of virtue. We must abase ourselves in mental prayer to the point of nothingness, and in making a repetition on our prayer we must speak our thoughts most humbly. If some thoughts should come to us which seem good, we should be most cautious in accepting them lest the spirit of pride be their source, or even the demon inspire them. This is why we must always humble ourselves profoundly when good thoughts come to us in our mental prayer, in our preaching, or in our conversation with others.

Alas, the Son of God could have overwhelmed everyone by his divine eloquence, but he did not choose to do so. Instead, when teaching the truths of the Gospel he always used common words and expressions, ones that were familiar to his hearers. He preferred to be reviled and despised rather than be praised and esteemed. You see, my brothers, how we must imitate him and control the proud thoughts that come to us in mental prayer and elsewhere. We must follow humbly in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, using simple and understandable words. When God allows it, be at peace when what you say is not accepted or you are rejected or mocked. You must be convinced that without a true and sincere humility you will benefit neither yourself nor others.  

A member of the community gave a repetition on his mental prayer for the day. He said that he doubted that he should make any more resolutions because he was unfaithful in putting them into practice. Monsieur Vincent took the floor and said:

We must not neglect making resolutions in our mental prayer just because we have been negligent in carrying out previous ones we have taken. It is similar to eating, for we should not stop doing this even if it seems that we are not drawing any benefit from it. Making resolutions is one of the most important parts of our mental prayer, and perhaps even the most important. We must give our attention to making resolutions, and not to the reasoning or thoughts we might have. The main fruit of prayer consists of personal resolutions strongly and firmly made. They should be resolutions which you are convinced of and which you prepare to execute, taking into account the obstacles to be overcome. And yet, even this is not all we have to do.

Our resolutions are by their nature both physical and moral

actions. They have to be properly arrived at and fully accepted within our hearts, but we must also recognize that no matter how good they may be, their practice and their results depend absolutely upon God. What do you think is the most common reason why our resolutions fail? Is it not because we rely too much upon ourselves, upon our own good aspirations, and upon our own strength? This is why they produce such little fruit. This is why, after we make our resolutions, we should greatly distrust ourselves and turning to God, invoke his grace, so he may be pleased to shower his gifts upon us and bless our resolutions. Even then if we should fall short once or twice, or even fail to keep our resolutions repeatedly, still we must again renew our resolve by having recourse to his mercy and imploring the help of his grace. Our past faults should humble us, but not to the extent of making us lose courage. No matter what fault we fall into, we must not lose confidence that God wishes us to come to him. We must resolve anew with the help of his grace not to fall again, something we must earnestly ask of him. Physicians who see no result from the medicines they dispense to the sick do not stop administering them as long as there is still some hope. If these remedies for the body are continued until there is some sign of improvement, no matter how long or how extreme the illness, should we not do the same for sicknesses of our souls, since, when it pleases God to act, grace can produce such great marvels in them?¹⁴

In another conference, he spoke about a brother of the Company who stated that he followed a set way of making his mental prayer by dividing the subject into several parts. Monsieur Vincent said:

Brother, you did well to divide your mental prayer as you did, but when a mystery of religion is the subject of meditation, it is not necessary or expedient to stop at the consideration of a single virtue, and then to make your customary division based on this virtue. It would be better to look at the mystery as a whole, paying attention to all the circumstances, no matter how trivial they may be, for there are hidden treasures there if you know how to look for them.

I recall a recent meeting of some priests who had taken as the subject of their conversations the way to use Lent well. This is a common topic, spoken of every year, and yet such good things were said that all those present were touched, I especially. I can truly say that I have never seen a more devout conference than that one, nor one that made a greater impression upon those present. Although

¹⁴. CED XI:87-88.
several spoke on the same topic more than once, it seemed they were no longer the same people who were speaking, for God had inspired them in their mental prayer with a wholly new way of speaking. See, my brothers, how God hides such treasures of the truths and mysteries of our religion in the most ordinary things and in everyday circumstances. These grains of mustard seed become great trees when it pleases God to give them his blessing.\textsuperscript{15}

On another occasion he spoke on the same topic.

Some have good thoughts and sentiments, but do not apply them to themselves and do not reflect enough upon their own interior state. This happens even though they have often heard the recommendation that when God gives a person a light or grace or a good thought in one's mental prayer, it should immediately be put to good use by applying it to one's own particular state in life. One's own faults must be considered, confessed, and acknowledged before God and even before the entire community as an aid to humility and self-denial, and as an incentive to the resolution of correcting oneself. There is always some benefit in doing this. Sometimes, during the repetition of mental prayer, I ask myself why this particular person or that one progresses so little in the holy exercise of meditation. I fear the cause of this is that they are not dedicated enough to mortification and they give too much freedom to their senses.

When the most noted writers on the spiritual life write about the practice of mental prayer, they unanimously declare that the practice of mortification is absolutely necessary to progress in mental prayer. For a person to be well disposed for such prayer, one must not only mortify the eyes, tongue, ears, and the other external senses, but also the faculties of the soul: the understanding, memory, and will. Mortification is the way to prepare for mental prayer, and reciprocally, mental prayer helps the person practice mortification.\textsuperscript{16}

One of the brothers of the Company once threw himself upon his knees before the others to ask pardon for the fault of not having made his mental prayer for some time. He found it painful even to attempt it. Monsieur Vincent said to him:

Brother, God sometimes allows us to lose the taste and attraction for mental prayer, and even allows us to find it distasteful. This is usually a test that he sends, a trial for us, but it should not discourage

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{CED XI:89-90.}

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{CED XI:90-91.}
or dishearten us. Many good people have been tried in this way, even some of the saints. Yes, I know several pious persons who have felt this dryness and distaste for mental prayer. Yet they were faithful to God, and used this experience well. As a result, they derived great benefit in their advancement along the way of virtue. As we begin to practice mental prayer, it is true that when this distaste and dryness comes, there is reason to think it may come from our own negligence. You must be on your guard, my brother, that this is not your situation.17

Later, he asked a brother if he had a headache, and he simply replied that he had, coming from his attempt during his last retreat to reach a higher level in his mental prayer. Monsieur Vincent responded:

Brother, you must not act this way, attempting to force yourself to feel something beyond feeling. This attempt comes from self-love. In mental prayer we must act in a spirit of faith, quietly and simply meditating on the mysteries and virtues with no attempt at imagining. Instead we must apply the will to respond by affections and resolutions rather than have the mind try to respond by understanding.18

In the repetition of his mental prayer, another brother complained about not being intelligent enough to pray well. He could exercise only one faculty of his soul, the will. At the very beginning of his prayer and without any reasoning, he began to make acts of affection. He would thank God, or ask his mercy, or arouse feelings of confusion and regret for his sins, or would ask for the grace to imitate our Lord in the practice of some virtue, and then move on to some resolutions. Monsieur Vincent said to him, “Brother, you must not try to change any of this. Do not worry about trying to understand, even though this is ordinarily necessary to move the will. In your case, you move directly to these affections and to the resolutions of practicing some of the virtues. May God give you the grace to continue as you have been doing, and make you more and more responsive to his holy will.”19

18. CED ibid.
CHAPTER EIGHT

His Devotion and Piety Toward God

DEVOITION IS a virtue which leads us to do with a special affection those things having to do with the worship and service of God, with a desire to honor and glorify him. It has no other limits than those imposed by charity. Since we honor and glorify God by the exercise of all sorts of virtues, Saint Ambrose has said that devotion is the foundation of the other virtues.¹ Saint Augustine assures us that true virtue cannot be found except in those who have a true devotion and piety toward God.²

Monsieur Vincent excelled in all sorts of virtues, as we have begun to see in the preceding chapters and we shall continue to see this in the following chapters. Hence there is no doubt he was gifted with a sincere and perfect devotion for all that concerned the worship and honor of God.

The devotion of this saintly man was founded first on his exalted view of the infinite grandeur of God and upon a profound respect for his divine majesty. His self-denial in all the acts of religion, the references full of respect and honor that he used when speaking of God, and the most affectionate way in which he strove to inculcate a great esteem and thanks for the perfections and grandeur of God, were all evident signs of the saintly dispositions he carried in his heart.

He once spoke to his community as follows:

Make it your duty, my brothers, to conceive a great, a very great, idea of the majesty and sanctity of God. Could we but penetrate even a little into the immensity of his sovereign excellence, O Jesus, would that we could conceive the appropriate sentiments! Then we could well say with Saint Paul, that eyes have not seen, nor ears heard, nor the mind conceived anything like it.³ He is the unlimited perfection, the eternal being, most holy, most pure, most perfect, and infinitely glorious. He is the infinite good, encompassing all that is good, and he is wholly incomprehensible. This knowledge which we have, that God is infinitely above all knowledge and of all human understanding, ought to suffice to make us esteem him infinitely, to annihilate ourselves in his presence, and make us speak of his supreme majesty with great reverence and submission. Our

¹. PL 14.1.1:424.
². PL 41:631.
³. I Cor 2:9.
appreciation of him ought to be in proportion to our love of him. This love should make us have a strong desire to acknowledge his blessings, and to form faithful adorers of his majesty.  

He had an incredible aversion to human pride. This vice robs God of the glory due him alone, and then with much temerity and injustice attributes this glory to a human being rather than to the Deity. Thus Monsieur Vincent waged a constant war against pride, not only in himself, but in all those over whom he had any influence, as we shall see more fully when we treat of his humility. We shall recount here only what he wrote to one of his priests serving on a mission.

How consoled I was to read that these good people are so devoted to their duty. I cannot tell you how concerned I was that this might not be the case. To God alone be the glory, and may those who work with you give him this thanks. If their small efforts have any success and produce any good (A Domino factum est istud) God has done this, and to him alone should be the glory. Oh, Monsieur, what an obstacle it is to the glorification of the name of God and to the sanctification of souls to attribute either of these to oneself or to think that you have had anything to do with it. May his divine goodness never allow any of the Missionaries ever to let such a thought enter his head! It would be a great sacrilege even to think this. The whole Congregation would be guilty of this same crime if it adopted this same opinion that by their efforts the confreres had converted people to God, and that they should be honored and respected because of this. How anxious I am to have this truth engraved on the hearts of us all! Those who think they are the source of any good, and have contributed even a part to it, and who take pleasure in this thought, lose much more than they gained by the good they did.

To the edification of all, the devotion of the great servant of God was most evident, in his public celebration of the divine office. When he came to the choir to chant the psalms, he did so with much recollection, and appeared to be totally taken up with the presence of God. He often recommended that his community fulfill this duty to God both with respect and piety, and to walk gravely, with eyes cast down, looking neither right nor left. Although his heart was usually gentleness itself, he would not countenance the least faults in the recitation of the divine office. On the other hand, he could hardly restrain his expressions of joy when the office was well said.

When he presided at a solemn office, he took pains to be informed of all

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5. Ps 118:23.
the details of the rubrics appropriate to the occasion. In his later years he was much chagrined at not being able to make all the genuflections prescribed for the feasts. He believed strongly and often recommended that the objects used in sacred worship be appropriate to their sacred use. He also wanted the rubrics to be observed exactly. Whenever there was a failure in this regard, he made his displeasure known.

He extended his reverence and his posture to his private recitation of the office, which he always made kneeling, his head uncovered. He continued to kneel, except for the last two or three years of his life when infirmities compelled him to remain seated.

God had given him a great devotion for all the mysteries of our holy religion, particularly those of the most holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, and that of the blessed sacrament of the altar. Since the most holy Trinity is the first and principal of the truths to be believed and adored, he was anxious to have it known and loved among souls, and taught on all the missions. Every morning and evening he honored this mystery with such devotion that he inspired all the members of his Congregation. He arranged to have included in the papal bull establishing the Congregation of the Mission an explicit obligation to honor daily in a special way this mystery of the Trinity and that of the Incarnation. The rule says: “We shall strive to acquit ourselves of this duty with great care, and in every possible way, but chiefly by observing three things: (1) producing from the heart, acts of faith and religion in these mysteries; (2) offering some prayers and good works every day in honor of these mysteries, and celebrating their feasts with all possible solemnity and devotion; (3) carefully striving by our instruction and example to have the people come to know, honor, and greatly respect these great mysteries.”

Since the Church invites us to honor these mysteries in a special way on the principal feasts, which recall them to the minds of the faithful, Monsieur Vincent showed his extraordinary devotion on these occasions. Thus he would ordinarily preside at the high mass and at vespers with such a spirit of recollection, modesty, and gravity that his internal union with God was made evident. Even though he was very devout on the days of great feasts in everything concerning the honor and worship of God, he was no less so on ordinary days.

He rose regularly at 4:00 A.M., no matter what time he had gone to bed the night before. Many nights he slept for only two hours, as he himself stated. Nevertheless, at the first sound of the bell, he rose so promptly that the second ringing of the bell never found him still lying down. With his usual humility, he never failed to begin the day by performing his morning

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devotions. He wrote the following in his own hand, to a virtuous woman, urging her to make good use of this opportunity to praise God:

After rising I adore the Majesty of God. I thank him for the glory residing in him, and which he has shared with his Son, the holy Virgin, the holy angels, with my guardian angel, with Saint John the Baptist, with the apostles, with Saint Joseph, and with all the saints in paradise. I thank him also for the graces he has given his holy Church, and especially for those graces which he has granted to me personally, and especially for having preserved my life during the past night. I offer my thoughts, words, and actions in union with those of Jesus Christ. I pray that he will keep me from offending him, and I ask for the grace to accept faithfully everything that shall be most agreeable to him.⁷

After these acts of worship and thanksgiving, he made his bed. Then he went to the chapel to pray before the blessed sacrament, and despite having to wrap his swollen legs he managed to arrive within a half hour, and before many of the others. He was very happy to see the community assemble before our Lord. He strongly congratulated those most faithful in their prompt attendance, but was pained to see some arriving late for prayers.

After meditation he recited aloud with indescribable devotion the Litany of the Name of Jesus, and savored the titles of honor and praise given to the divine Savior. By his devotion to the litany he spread the balm of the sacred name in all hearts. Then allowing himself enough time for recollection, he prepared himself for mass, never allowing himself to be distracted by his many preoccupations. Often enough, he also went to confession. One of his priests wrote of him as follows: “I had the consolation of serving as his confessor while I was in Paris. I was able to see at first hand the sanctity and purity of his soul, which could not entertain even the appearance of sin.”

He pronounced the words of the mass so distinctly, devoutly, and affectionately that his heart was obviously in what he did. This greatly edified those in attendance. He spoke in a moderate tone of voice, pleasantly, in a manner both devout and free, being neither too slow nor too hasty, but rather suitable to the sanctity of the occasion. Two traits united in him were rarely seen in the same person: a profound humility joined to a serious and majestic presence. He shared in the spirit of Jesus Christ who brought to the sacrifice the two differing qualities of both victim and priest. In keeping with the first, he humbled himself interiorly, as a criminal worthy of death before his judge. He recited the Confiteor, the words in spiritu humilitatis et in animo contrito ["in a humble spirit and a contrite heart"], etc., and Nobis quoque peccato-ribus [“Also to us sinners”] and others with sentiments of humility and

⁷. CED XIII:142-43.
contrition, and as though filled with fear. As priest, he offered in union with the whole Church prayers and praise to God, and joined them to the merits and person of Jesus Christ. He did so in a spirit of worship, with respect and love for God.

He said one day to his priests on this subject:

It is not enough for us merely to celebrate mass, for in keeping with God's will for us we should offer this sacrifice with as much devotion as is possible for us. With the help of his grace, we must conform ourselves as much as possible to Jesus Christ. While on earth he offered himself in sacrifice to his Eternal Father. We must do our best, gentlemen, as completely as our poor and miserable nature will allow, to offer our sacrifice to God in the same spirit as our Lord offered himself.8

One of the oldest members of the Company remarked that the extraordinary devotion of Monsieur Vincent in the celebration of mass was especially apparent when he read the holy Gospel. Others, too, noticed it when he came to some of the words of our Lord. He pronounced them with such tender love that it struck a chord in all who heard them. On many occasions those who did not know him, but who attended his mass, were heard to say, there indeed is a priest who knows how to say mass; he must be a holy man. Others said that while he was at the altar, he seemed to them to have the appearance of an angel.

Several others noticed that when he read the holy Gospel and came upon the passages where our Lord said *Amen, amen dico vobis*, that is, I solemnly say to you, he paid particular attention to the words that followed, as if he were amazed that these were the words that God himself truly used. By the affectionate and devout tone of his voice, he testified to the prompt submission of his own heart in recognizing the great mystery and importance of these words. He seemed to be nourished by the passages of Scripture like a child taking his mother's milk. He drew such nourishment for his soul that in all his words and actions he seemed filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ.

When he turned toward the faithful, the expression on his face was modest and serene. By his gesture of extending his arms, he portrayed the attitude of his heart, and the great desire he had that all present should be united to Jesus Christ.

Since he recognized the sacrifice of the mass as the center of Christian devotion and as the most important of all priestly actions, he never failed to celebrate mass each day, except for the first three days of the annual retreat, in keeping with the custom of the community. During these days of retreat the priests and brothers recalled any faults and failings they might have

8. CED XI:93.
committed. In a spirit of penance they did not approach the altar until after their annual or general confession. Except for those days, this devout servant of Jesus Christ regularly celebrated daily mass, no matter where he might be, whether in the city or in the country, or even on a trip. He made it a rule that the priests of the Company do the same. It was never known that he ever failed in this practice, as long as he was still able to stand erect. Ordinary indispositions would not hinder him. Often he said mass or went to meditation when he had a fever, which he usually called his little warmup.

He was not content with just celebrating mass every day, for he also had the devotion of periodically serving the other priests at the altar. He would do this even when overwhelmed with business affairs. He continued this practice well into his old age, even when he was more than seventy-five years old and could no longer walk without a cane, or could kneel only with great difficulty because of his inflamed legs. At this venerable age and in this sickly condition the first superior of the Congregation of the Mission continued to fulfill the office of acolyte, in serving other priests at the altar, to the great edification of all who witnessed this.

He recommended that when the clerics of his Company attended mass, they should never allow a lay person to act as an acolyte. Instead, they themselves should get a surplice and provide this ministry, for he said, “Laymen do not have the right to serve, except in cases of necessity. It is shameful that a cleric, deputed for the service of the altar, should see his office taken by those without this sacred character.”

SECTION ONE

His Special Devotion Toward the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar

One of the greatest and most characteristic of the devotions of Monsieur Vincent was that toward the most Holy Eucharist, considered not only as a sacrifice, as we have already spoken of in this chapter, but also as sacrament, under the species by which the Son of God becomes truly present in our churches, and accomplishes in a true and marvelous manner what he had promised, to remain with us to the end of time.

This devotion of Monsieur Vincent was manifested first by the great respect which he displayed in those churches where the blessed sacrament
was kept, and by his affection for these places honored by Christ's presence. We have an account of this from a very trustworthy person. 9

I several times noticed when Monsieur Vincent was in prayer before the blessed sacrament that his true and sincere devotion could be clearly seen in his exterior behavior. He always prostrated himself on both knees, with such a humble attitude that it seemed he would willingly lower himself to the center of the earth if by this he could show even greater respect for the sovereign majesty of the divine presence. In seeing the respectful modesty of his countenance, it could be said that a person was seeing Jesus Christ through his eyes. The impression made by his whole manner, so devout and religious, was capable of awakening the faith of the most tepid, and arousing in even the most unfeeling sentiments of piety for this adorable mystery.

This respect and devotion was shown not only during his prayers. He exhibited the same modesty no matter what the occasion, whenever he found himself in church in the presence of the blessed sacrament. As much as possible, he would never speak in these holy places. If he thought it necessary to do so, however, he would have the one he wanted to speak to first leave the church. He would act this way with persons of rank, even bishops, yet never failing in the respect he owed these persons.

This esteem for those places honored with the divine presence was such that on days he was not too occupied with the business of the community, or obliged to go to the city, he would go to the church, and remain there as long as he could, sometimes for hours, before the blessed sacrament. Like another Moses, he above all had recourse to the holy tabernacle and the oracle of truth when confronted with the thorny problems that arose during his administration of the community. It was noticed, especially on those occasions when he would receive letters which he felt would bring some particularly good or bad news, that he would go behind the altar in the church of Saint Lazare. He would kneel there with head uncovered, and open and read the letters in the presence of our Lord. He would do the same wherever else he was. One day he was given a letter in the court of the palace in Paris, which undoubtedly had news of the outcome of an important matter related to the glory of God. Although this happened at a time when he had much difficulty in walking, he went up the stairs to the upper chapel of the palace, where the blessed sacrament was kept. He found the chapel locked, but nevertheless he knelt at the door to read the letter. He undoubtedly did so to express more perfectly his submission to whatever would be revealed to him as the will of God manifested through the letter. He wished to sacrifice to

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God any sentiments of joy or sadness which whatever its contents the letter
might arouse in him.

When he was obliged to leave Saint Lazare on some business, before
leaving he would go to prostrate himself before the Lord in the blessed
sacrament to ask God's blessing upon his mission. Upon his return, he would
again stop in the chapel, as though to give an account of his activities in the
city. He would thank God for the graces he had received, and humble himself
for any faults he may have committed. He did this, not in a formal or routine
manner, but with a true spirit of worship and piety, remaining before the
blessed sacrament in a humble and devout posture. He proposed this same
practice to his community, saying it was only right for them to fulfill this
duty to the master of the house.

When on his visits to the city he would come upon the blessed sacrament
being carried through the streets, he would kneel, no matter where he
happened to be. He would remain in this posture as long as the procession
was in sight. If the procession went along the same street he was traveling,
he would follow it bare headed, at a distance, because his difficulty in
walking would not allow him to do otherwise.

On the trips he made to the villages and towns, he had the custom of
dismounting from his horse to visit and adore the blessed sacrament in the
church, if it were open. Otherwise he would do so in spirit. Once arrived at
his destination for meals or for spending the night, he would first go to the
local church to pay his respects and homage to the blessed sacrament.

In his serious illnesses, when he could no longer walk or support himself
well enough to celebrate mass, he still communicated every day, if it were at
all possible. In these daily communions he showed such affection and venera-
tion for the presence of the Lord in this sacrament that he seemed transported
outside of himself. In this connection, speaking once to his community on the
effects of this divine sacrament upon those who approached it with appropriate
dispositions, he said, "Do you not feel, my brothers, do you not feel divine fire
burning in your breast when you receive the adorable body of Jesus Christ in
communion?" He spoke these words out of the abundance of his own heart,
and this allows us to deduce what he, in his own experience, tasted and felt in
his communions. This appreciation led him to exhort everyone to prepare
themselves well for the worthy and frequent reception of the holy communion
of the body of Jesus Christ. He did not want his confreres to abstain
from communion without serious reasons. When a person of piety came to him for
counsel and guidance after omitting receiving the sacrament because of some
interior trial, he wrote to her:

You did not do well in abstaining from communion because of
the interior trial you experienced. Do you not see that this was a
temptation, and that by doing this you laid yourself open to the influence of the enemy of this adorable sacrament? Do you suppose you will become better disposed, and more suited to unite yourself to our Lord by withdrawing from him? Surely, if you think like this you would be greatly mistaken, and would be living an illusion.\(^\text{10}\)

On another occasion, he spoke to his community on the same topic:

You should lament seeing that this devotion to the blessed sacrament is declining among Christians, due in part, no doubt, to the new opinions. I have spoken with the superior of a saintly congregation and with another man who was a great director of souls, and I asked if there was a decrease in the number of those who came to confession and to holy communion. They told me that there was a great reduction in the number of those receiving these sacraments. The daily bread which our Lord wanted us to pray for, and which was received every day by the early Christians, has been discouraged by the new doctrines of our own times. This should not surprise us, for these doctrines appeal to our natural inclinations. Those who follow their own inclinations follow these new opinions which surround them, and which seem to dispense them from taking the trouble to put themselves in the required dispositions for receiving holy communion often and worthily.\(^\text{11}\)

He added that he had known a good pious woman who had, upon the advice of her director, accustomed herself to receive communion on every Sunday and Thursday. Later, she put herself under the direction of a confessor who followed the new teachings. By some curiosity and the promise of a greater perfection, he limited her to receiving only once a week, then once a fortnight, then once a month. After eight months of this, she stopped one day to reflect on her life, and found things to be in a deplorable state. She was filled with imperfections, and subject to a great number of faults, given to vanity, quick to anger, impatient, and prey to the other passions. All this had come about since she had abstained from frequent reception of holy communion. She was astonished and moved by this, and said to herself, “What an unhappy state I am in! How I have fallen! How has it happened about that I am now subject

\(^{10}\) CED I:111. Abelly altered the original letter in several ways. For example, he expanded the final sentence; the genuine expression of the writer reads: “Oh! Surely, that is an illusion.” It was addressed to Louise de Marillac.

\(^{11}\) These “new opinions” were those of the Jansenists. They were most popularly formulated in the work of Arnauld, *De la fréquente communion*, which discouraged the faithful from the frequent reception of the Eucharist. Vincent had already worked for the condemnation of Martin Barcos and his work, on the two heads of the Church, *De l’autorité de S. Pierre et de S. Paul*, 1645. He worked actively in the negotiations with Rome for the condemnation of Arnauld’s work. When the condemnation finally came from Rome, the saint invited the community to give thanks to God. CED XI:321-22. See also VI:88-89.
to all these disorders and outbursts? What has brought about these changes in me? It undoubtedly has been caused by my leaving off and abandoning my original devotion, and having heeded the advice of these new directors. I now know from the unhappy results of my own experience that they are very dangerous. O my God, who has opened my eyes to recognize this, give me the grace to leave them completely!” Afterward, she left these new directors, and renounced their dangerous teachings which had so upset her and nearly brought her to her ruin. She returned to wiser counselors. They brought her back to her previous practice of the frequent reception of the sacraments with the required dispositions, and she found in them peace of conscience and the remedy for all her faults.12

Monsieur Vincent used this example several times to illustrate the great blessings inherent in the frequent and worthy reception of the blessed sacrament, in which our Lord gives us not only an abundance of grace, but himself as well, the source of all graces. Monsieur Vincent, this devout servant of Jesus Christ, felt very keenly the love and charity of God for his creatures. Thus, he often exhorted his confreres to thank God for such an incomprehensible blessing, by expressing themselves in their frequent adorations, humiliations and glorifications of the Son of God residing in this blessed sacrament. Because of their own inadequacies, he urged them to pray to their guardian angels to help them in rendering this homage.

In this same spirit he wanted the members of the Congregation to show all external marks of reverence toward the blessed sacrament. He would reprimand those he saw lacking in this reverence. He was so careful of this that if he saw someone passing before the main altar of the church where the sacrament was kept, and not stopping to make a full genuflection, or making it too hurriedly, he would speak to the offender in private, or even in public, if he judged it expedient. He would say that we ought not appear before God as puppets, making light gestures and reverences without soul and spirit. Once, when he saw a brother making only a partial genuflection, he called him aside and showed him when and how to make a proper act of reverence. He was always personally exact in this, and made the proper genuflection as long as he was able, even up to the time that he needed help in rising from his genuflection. When he grew older, and the trouble with his legs no longer allowed him to do so, he publicly asked pardon before the whole community. He said that his sins caused him to be deprived of the full use of his legs.

Once, as he did on many other occasions, he said with his usual humility, that he regretted that his age and infirmities prevented him from making the proper genuflection. He went on to say:

12. See his letters to Jean Dehorgny on Jansenism: CED III:318-32, 362-74. The conference is not reported in Coste.
If I should see the Company failing in this regard to show you what I would think of this, I would force myself to kneel down, no matter the cost, and not knowing how I could get up again myself. The faults committed in a community are the fault of the superior. The faults of the Congregation, in this matter, are important, because it is a duty of worship, and an exterior mark of the interior respect we must have for God. If we fail first in this matter, making only a small or half genuflection, the priests from outside who come here for retreats will feel that they too are not obliged to do any differently. Those in our own Congregation who succeed us, and will be guided by what we do, will do as they see us doing, and so all will fall into decadence. If the original is defective, what will the copies be like? Gentlemen and my brothers, please pay attention to this in such a way that our interior reverence will show in our external actions. God ought to be adored in spirit and in truth, and all true Christians should do so in imitation of the Son of God in the Garden of Olives. He prostrated himself in an attitude of profound interior humility, out of respect for the sovereign majesty of his Father.13

Since he so deeply believed that there should not be the least lack of even the exterior respect owed to the adorable sacrament, he was very displeased and filled with sorrow when he heard of the profanations and indignities against this holy sacrament committed by the soldiers and heretics during the wars. We cannot adequately describe his feelings, his sorrow, or the tears he shed, and how many extraordinary penances he endured to atone, as much as he could, for the disrespect shown to the person of Jesus Christ. Not content with his personal efforts, and what he was able to persuade his friends to do, such as sending ciboria, chalices, and other vessels to the devastated churches, he wanted the members of his community to join in the reparations. On pilgrimages, they would visit, in a penitential spirit, those churches where the sacrileges had been committed. The priests of the Congregation would celebrate mass, and the other members, joined by laymen, would receive communion. Afterward, missions would be given in the villages or other desecrated places. The Missionaries sought to move the people to penance, and to practice other works of piety to appease the wrath of God, and to repair, in some way, the injuries and offenses committed against his sovereign majesty.

13. CED XI:207.
His Special Care to Imitate Jesus Christ, and Conform Himself to His Example

Love implies a resemblance, or even better creates it. The beloved does what he can to transform himself into the image of the other, to render the loving union more stable and more perfect. The Son of God, wishing to witness to the depth of his love, became man to make himself like unto us. Also, those who truly love Jesus Christ seek, with the help of his grace, to make themselves like him by imitating his virtues. The greater this love, the more exact and fully achieved this modeling will be.

We have seen in the preceding section the singular devotion which Monsieur Vincent had for our Lord Jesus Christ in the blessed sacrament of the altar. His great love for the Lord did not stop at honoring this adorable mystery. He extended this love by honoring all the phases of the Lord’s mortal and glorified life, and he strove to imitate the virtues which the savior practiced in every part of his life. He realized that the design of the Eternal Father, in the Incarnation of the Son of God, was not simply to give us a redeemer to draw us from the slavery of sin and hell, but also to offer a model who would show us all the virtues we might practice which would conform us to his image. He firmly resolved to follow this design of God by striving to imitate this divine model, and to reproduce in his own heart this exemplar of all virtues. He followed this plan so constantly and faithfully that it could rightly be said of him that his life was nothing else but a perfect expression of the life of Jesus Christ. In his own person he verified these words of this divine Savior: “Every student when he has finished his studies will be on a par with his teacher.”

In order to recount fully all his practices in imitation of the son of God would require a full account of his entire life. Therefore, in order not to be too long delayed, we will concentrate our remarks on two or three of the main traits which merit some more discussion.

First, Monsieur Vincent strove to imitate the ordinary and hidden life of Jesus Christ, a life which outwardly appeared to be in no way singular, but which inwardly was all holy and fully divine. In imitation of this incomparable master he led a life most ordinary in appearance. Nothing about him appeared on the surface to be outstanding or extraordinary, and he lived

without any kind of show or singularity. Yet in the secret of his heart was a wealth of praiseworthy and truly heroic actions, marked by all manner of virtues.

He was neither completely withdrawn into himself nor constantly in the public eye, but in imitation of his divine model he led a life which perfectly united elements of both the active and the contemplative. He sometimes retired into solitude like Jesus Christ, but at other times he would come forth also like Jesus Christ to preach penance and to work for the conversion of sinners and the salvation of souls.

We might say that our Lord practiced the hidden life, not so much by separating himself from any human contact but rather by concealing the more excellent and divine traits of his character. He could have allowed himself to be seen and honored everywhere and all times as the true Son of God. He could have allowed the rays of his glory to shine forth in all Judea, as he did on Mount Tabor. He preferred, however, to be seen as the son of a simple carpenter and as an ordinary man. Following his example at every opportunity, Monsieur Vincent gloriéd in saying that he was only the son of a poor peasant. He sought to be known as a simple country priest. He hid from the eyes of all the excellent gifts of nature and grace which he had received from God, and which rendered him worthy of honor and veneration.

He had thoroughly studied theology, and even, as we remarked in Book One, had received his degree from the faculty of theology of Toulouse. Nevertheless, he spoke of himself as an uneducated man, and customarily referred to himself as a poor student of the fourth class. He fled from any dignities with more care than the ambitious sought them. In every sort of circumstance he admired and perfectly imitated this dual public and hidden life of his divine master. Since he knew from his own experience that the treasures of grace lie hidden in the mystical field of the Gospel, he invited and exhorted others to share in them there. Here are some extracts of several letters he wrote to a person he was directing to follow this way:

We must always honor the hidden life of the Son of God. This must be the center of our activities for the present, the future, and for ever. We cannot be mistaken. He does not want anything else from us but to imitate his way of life. Let us honor, I say, the ordinary life our Lord led upon earth, his humility, his self-denial, and the practice of the most excellent virtues of the way of life he led.

15. Ch. 3
16. The French secondary school system worked up from the sixth class to the first. The fourth class would, therefore, be the third year of secondary school, with students thirteen or fourteen years old. In the typical Gascon style of his origins, the saint's reference seems, however, to be more an ironic allusion to the quality of his education or his style of speaking and writing than to his actual educational attainments.
chose. Let us especially honor our divine master in the moderation with which he acted. He did not always do all that he might have done. This was to teach us that there are times when it is not expedient for us to do all we can do, and that we should be satisfied to do only what charity dictates and what conforms to what his divine will desires of us.

How greatly I appreciate the generous resolution you have taken to imitate the hidden life of our Lord! Evidently this thought comes from God, since it is so foreign to the impulses of human nature. Believe for certain that this is the proper attitude for children of God. Remain firm, therefore, and courageously resist all contrary inclinations which may arise. You must be convinced by this attitude that you are in the state God asks of you. In it you can accomplish his holy will, which is what we all hope to achieve, and which all the saints have achieved.17

Monsieur Vincent led not only individuals to this holy practice, but also the members of his Congregation as a whole, often exhorting them to become true imitators of Jesus Christ in his ordinary and hidden life. On this topic, he was once explaining the renunciation to be made by all those who wished to follow the Lord. Among the six or seven examples of ways of practicing what he suggested, all taken from the life of our Lord, he referred to one taught by Saint Basil about renouncing pomp and show. He raised an objection to this, only to answer it then in his own way. In speaking to his community about what they must do, in this instance he allows us to see an example of his own way of acting. Here are his words:

Perhaps you will say to me, we are but poor priests who have already given up all the outward show of the world. We wear the simplest of clothes, our furniture is primitive, and nothing about us shows vanity or smacks of the luxury so prevalent in the world around us. What need is there, then, to exhort us to avoid pomp, which already is so far removed from us? Oh, gentlemen and my brothers, we must not deceive ourselves! We do have poor clothing and ordinary furniture, yet even with all this, we still might have a spirit of show and pomp. How could this be, you might ask. Well, if you take pains to prepare a beautiful sermon, and are pleased at the results and what people say about it in approval and appreciation, or should you publicize the good you have done, or even take pleasure in it, all these are marks of the spirit of outward show. To combat and crush this spirit, it is sometimes more useful to do

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17. CED I:87, addressed to Louise de Marillac. The original letter differs in many significant respects from Abelly's text.
something outwardly less perfect, than to congratulate yourself on how well it was done.

Also, we must be ever on our guard not to give any opportunity to our spirit of vanity. We should renounce all the thoughts and feelings which come to us interiorly, as well as the public applause we receive. We must give ourselves to God, my brothers, fleeing from self-love and the praises of the world, which are the vanity of the spirit. In this connection, a celebrated preacher said to me just a few days ago that whoever seeks public approval when he preaches, hands himself over to the tyranny of the public. If he thinks he is making something of himself by his beautiful sermons, in reality he is enslaving himself to his vanity and to his frivolous reputation. We might add that those who adopt a pompous preaching style, featuring beautiful and rare thoughts, directly oppose the spirit and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said in his Gospel, “blessed are the poor in spirit.”\footnote{18} By these words, the Eternal Wisdom showed us how evangelical workers should completely avoid any showy behavior and studied eloquence in speech. Instead, they should adopt a manner of speaking and acting that is humble, simple, and ordinary, after the example he himself gave us.

Be careful, my brothers. The demon inspires in us the desire to succeed. He persuades some of us that to speak in our simple way is too base and is unworthy of the grandeur and majesty of Christian truths. This is a ruse of the demon which we must avoid, and renouncing these vanities, we must remain faithful to the simplicity and humility of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He could have done startling things and spoken momentous words, but did not do so. Even beyond that, to confound our pride even more by his own admirable abasement, he wanted his disciples to accomplish even more than he did. Speaking to them, he said, “You will do what I have done, and even more.”\footnote{19} Why was that? Because, gentlemen, our Lord wanted to show by his public actions that he excelled in the humblest and lowest, something which men no longer value.

He desired the fruits of the Gospel rather than the noise of the world. He wanted his disciples to accomplish even more than he did himself. He preached only in parts of Judea, but sent his apostles to preach the Gospel throughout the whole world. They enlightened everyone by the light of his doctrine. Though he did much by himself, he willed that his poor, ignorant and crude apostles and

\footnote{18} Matt 5:3.  
\footnote{19} John 14:12.
disciples could still, if animated by the Holy Spirit and his power, do much more. Why is this? To give us the example of a most perfect humility. Oh, gentlemen, should we not imitate our divine Master? Should we not give way in everything to others? Should we not choose for ourselves the worse and the most humiliating? This assuredly is what our Lord did, and he is the perfect one we all strive to imitate. Let us resolve today to follow him.

Let us offer him the puny sacrifices of our self-love. For example, if I do something publicly and can possibly derive some benefit from it, I will not do so. I will rather refrain from anything which might give my action some notoriety and bring me a certain reputation. If two thoughts come into my head, I will mention the lesser one to humble myself. I will not mention the more polished one, and keep it in the secrecy of my heart as a sacrifice to God. Finally, my brothers, it is a truth of the Gospel that our Lord rejoiced in nothing so much as in a humble heart and simple words and actions. His spirit is found here, and you would look for it elsewhere in vain. If you want to find it, renounce all the vanities and satisfactions of life, and your desire for exterior show both in mind and body.20

This faithful imitator was not content to conform himself only in general to the ordinary and hidden life of Jesus Christ, but as much as was in his power he strove to model himself upon the Lord’s way of speaking and acting. We have the following written testimony of a superior of one of the missions.

Monsieur Vincent’s love for our Lord resulted in his always keeping the Savior in mind. He walked always in his holy presence, and modeled himself upon him in his actions, words and thoughts. I can truly say, as we all know, that he was so filled with God’s spirit that he hardly ever spoke unless it was to recall a Gospel teaching or some action of the Son of God. I often admired how he would apply the words and deeds of our Lord whenever he counseled or recommended something.

Monsieur Portail had lived and worked for forty-five or fifty years with Monsieur Vincent. He is one of the oldest priests of the Congregation. I have heard him say that Monsieur Vincent was the perfect image of Jesus Christ whom he knew upon earth, and that he had never heard Monsieur Vincent say or do anything except relating to him who said: Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemandmodum ego feci, ita et vos faciatis ["What I just did was to give you an

20. CED XII:211-27.
example: as I have done, so you must do]. 21 This is what Monsieur Vincent so often urged us to do. In the advice he gave me on the occasion of my leaving to take over the Mission which I now guide, he recommended that when I was to speak or to do something, I should reflect within myself and say, What did our Lord say or do in this case? How did he do or say this? O Lord, inspire me with what I must say or do, for by myself I can do nothing without your help.

One day a noted doctor asked one of the priests of the Mission who knew Monsieur Vincent well, what his chief virtue was. He replied:

It was undoubtedly the imitation of our Lord, Jesus Christ, for he always kept him before his eyes to serve as his model. Christ was his light and mirror, and in him he saw everything else. If in some particular case he doubted how he should act, to be perfectly agreeable to God, he reflected on how our Lord acted in similar cases, or what he said, or what he taught in his various sayings. Without hesitation he then followed his example and his words. He walked in the brightness of this divine light, and trampled under foot his own judgment, human respect, or the fear his actions would be unacceptable to those who found the Gospel too severe, or who wanted to accommodate Christian piety to the spirit of the times.

He sometimes said, “Human prudence fails and often leads one away from the right path, but the words of Eternal Wisdom are infallible, and its guidance right and secure.”

Since he was so thoroughly convinced that our perfection and even our predestination consists in being conformed to the Son of God, and since his mind was so filled with this truth, he often spoke of it from the abundance of his heart. His responses to various consultations, or the advice he gave, were founded on this same truth, and always tended to influence the minds of those he spoke to. We could give a countless number of examples, but we will limit ourselves to but a single rather important one.

When the late king, 22 of glorious memory, called for Monsieur Vincent in his last illness, he asked him how best to prepare for death. He replied to His Majesty that it would be best to imitate the way our Lord acted when he was about to die, and that the holy Gospel tells us that one of our Lord’s chief dispositions was an entire and perfect submission to the will of his heavenly Father, to whom he said: Non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat: may your will be done, and not mine. 23 The king replied in a manner appropriate to his

22. Louis XIII.
designation as the Most Christian Monarch: "O Jesus, I desire this with all
my heart. Yes, my God, I say this and will say until my last breath, \textit{fiat
voluntas tua}, may it be done according to your will." This is how Monsieur
Vincent always kept before his eyes this Original of all perfection and
sanctity, and not content to conform himself to it in all things, he strove to
have others do the same.

This holy man's constant goal was to imitate Jesus Christ and conform
himself to him, not only in his manner of acting and speaking, but also in
his interior dispositions, desires and intentions. In everything he desired and
hoped for only what his divine Savior desired and hoped for: that God would
be better known, honored, loved, served, and glorified, and that his most
holy will would be entirely and perfectly fulfilled. He held himself ready at
every moment to do or to suffer whatever God might be pleased to send in
pursuit of these noble and just objectives. He was always ready for whatever
work, fatigue, humiliation, pain, or persecution that might arise. Because of
this he was never surprised at what happened to him, no matter how
unpleasant it might be. He was never surprised by any bad treatment he might
receive, since, in imitation of his divine Master, he was prepared for anything
when it was a matter of increasing the glory of God or submitting to his will.
He was prepared to do all or suffer all, to be deprived of what he held most
dear in the world, even to the point of seeing his own Congregation dispersed
and destroyed, if such should be the will of his divine Majesty. On this topic,
he several times said to his community, "I pray God two or three times each
day to destroy us if we are not useful to him in his service. My brothers,
would you want to continue if you were not pleasing to God, or were not
succeeding in having him known and loved by others?"\textsuperscript{24}

He sought to conform himself, not only to the desires and intentions of
the Son of God, but even to his disappointments, sorrows, and interior
anguish. Who could penetrate into the secrets of the heart of this faithful and
zealous imitator of Jesus Christ? He took the same attitude as his divine
Master toward the innumerable sins committed against God, and was filled
with an aversion for the teachings of the world, so opposed to those of the
Gospel. He was saddened and troubled at the progress of heresies and for
the great damage they wrought to the Church. He was keenly moved by
compassion for the temporal and spiritual miseries of so many, and for the
license and abandonment by which so many souls were plunged into the
darkness of ignorance or infidelity. How many times he wanted to die, to
give his life, to remedy these ills! Since by his mortifications and sufferings
his life was a constant dying, it could be said God accepted his offer, but
over a long period of time.

\textsuperscript{24. \textit{CED XI}:2.}
He wished his own confreres to enter into these same sentiments. In imitation of Jesus Christ they were to become living victims, immolating themselves in union with their divine Savior for the salvation of all. He spoke of this once, as follows:

Whoever would wish to save his life, my brothers, shall lose it. Jesus Christ himself stated this, and he added, that he knew of no greater love than to give one’s life for one’s friend. And then? Can we have a better friend than God, and should we not love what he loves, and take our neighbor as our friend, for love of him? Would we not be unworthy of the life God gives us, if we did not use it in this worthy manner? Surely, recognizing that we have received our very life by his generosity, we would be acting unjustly if we refused to use it, and to expend ourselves, in keeping with his designs, and in imitation of his Son, our Lord.  

Speaking another time on this same subject, he spoke these words from the abundance of his heart:

Those who describe a missionary speak of one called by God to save souls. Our purpose is to work for their salvation in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one true redeemer. He fulfilled perfectly the meaning of his name Jesus, that is, savior. He came from heaven to earth to exercise this function. He carried this out both in life and in death, and he continues as our savior by applying the merits of the blood he shed. While he lived on earth he thought of nothing but our salvation, and he continues this same work, for this is the will of his Father. He came, and continues to come to us each day, and by his example he teaches us all the virtues appropriate to this office of savior. We must give ourselves to him, that he may continue to fulfill this same office in us and by us. 

Lastly, he spoke in the same spirit to his Congregation in a letter he wrote to them which he placed at the beginning of the rules and constitutions.

You must consider these rules and constitutions as produced not by the human mind, but rather by God’s inspiration. All good proceeds from him, and without him we are incapable of doing any good by ourselves, as coming from ourselves. What will you find in these rules other than what will encourage you to flee vice, acquire virtue, and practice the Gospel maxims? We have attempted, to the extent of our powers, to base these rules totally on the spirit of Jesus Christ, and to draw them from a consideration of his life, as you will easily see. We have felt that persons called to

25. CED XI:49.
continue the mission of the Savior, which was chiefly to evangelize the poor, should adopt his sentiments and teachings, be filled with his spirit, and imitate him in all his actions. 27

CHAPTER NINE

His Devotion Toward the Most Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, and the Other Saints

The great Saint Bernard once said we should honor the most holy virgin Mary with the deepest affection of our hearts. Such is the will of him who has bestowed all manner of favors and graces upon us by the mediation of this incomparable Virgin.¹ This is not a pious invention of the human mind, nor a fruit of some particular devotion. It is an order established by the will of God that we give special honor to her whom he favored to the point of choosing her to be the mother of his only Son, that she in turn would receive true and perfect subjection and obedience from him.

The entire Church has always recognized this truth, and in every age has shown its respect and devotion toward the most holy Mother of God. It celebrates her feasts, venerates her images, and has always offered her solemn prayers. To this very day the Church continues to chant this praise by hymns and canticles, and by other means suggested by the Holy Spirit. All the great saints joined in this veneration and devotion toward the queen of angels and men. We have every reason to assume that Monsieur Vincent, always so careful to seek out the will of God and to follow faithfully the direction of the Church and the example of the saints, faithfully followed all the duties of piety and devotion toward the holy Mother of God. We have many proofs and reminders of this.

First, in the rules he left to his Congregation was this one. He regarded it as one of the main ones, and he often commended it to his confreres: “We should strive, all of us in general and each one in particular, to fulfill perfectly with the help of God our duty of honoring the most holy and most glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God: (1) by honoring her with some special practice every day, as homage given to our lady and mistress, Mary, the Mother of God; (2) by imitating as much as we can her virtues, particularly her humility and purity; (3) by exhorting others at every opportunity to honor her as she so richly deserves.”²

He always recommended and advised that each of the members of the Congregation have a special devotion to the queen of heaven, but more important than words, he used the force of his personal example. He fasted on the vigils of her feasts and prepared to celebrate them with practices of

¹. PL 183.3-4:441.
². Common Rules 10,4.
mortification and good works. Thus by his good example he introduced this custom among his confreres. He never failed to preside at the solemn offices of her feasts, and he did so with such devotion that the sentiments of his heart were obvious. He also loved to celebrate mass in chapels and altars dedicated to her.

He opened every conference or assembly at which he presided by the invocation of the Holy Spirit, and he was equally exact to end them always by an anthem or prayer in honor of the holy Mother of God.

He wore a rosary on his belt, not only because he used it often, which he did, but also as an exterior mark of his veneration and devotion toward the queen of heaven. By this practice he declared himself openly to be one of her most faithful and devoted servants.

Wherever he was, whether at home or in the city, and even in the presence of people of rank, when he heard bells sounding the Angelus he would fall to his knees (except in Paschal time or Sundays, when he would pray standing) to recite this prayer with the greatest possible devotion. His example moved others to follow this same practice.

Out of devotion, he often went to visit churches dedicated to God under the invocation of the most blessed Virgin. Likewise, during the troubled times of the wars he urged the members of the clergy conferences of Saint Lazare to make pilgrimages in her honor, to beg of God, through the intercession of this Mother of Mercy, peace and tranquility and the return of the subjects of the king to the obedience they owed His Majesty. He persuaded the Ladies of Charity to make similar pilgrimages to various places dedicated to this same holy Virgin, and to implore God's mercy through her intercession in this time of public calamity. He himself went to these places to offer mass and give communion to these pious ladies. He once went to the cathedral of Chartres for the express purpose of praying through the powerful intercession of Mary for a priest who had been named a bishop. He asked that the priest would receive the necessary spiritual insights to realize that God was calling him to the vocation of this sublime estate, since as a bishop he could render great services to the Church; and that he would overcome his great humility and accept this office.

The devotion of this saintly man for the Mother of God was evident in the sermons he gave on the various missions he preached. He introduced the practice among the Missionaries to instruct the people thoroughly in their obligation as Christians to serve and invoke the holy Mother of God, and to have recourse to her in all their needs. Finally, the many confraternities he established, and those he encouraged elsewhere, to honor our Lord in his love for the poor, were all put under the special protection of the blessed Mother. The various other groups and assemblies for pious works that he
founded were also testimony to his devotion to this most holy Virgin, and to his zeal that she should be known and loved by others.

Since he was so filled with this spirit, and always so careful to render all honor and service to the queen of angels and men, can we be surprised that his enterprises were favored with such success, and so greatly blessed? They were all placed, in a special way, under the powerful protection of the Mother of God.

Monsieur Vincent himself was well aware, and often taught on the missions he gave, that the honor given to the Mother of God and to the other saints was ultimately directed to almighty God, whose servants they were. In this regard he particularly appreciated the apostles as those who had enjoyed the happiness of living close to the Son of God. They had drawn from the fountain of the Savior that water which springs up to eternal life. He regarded and honored them as the first and greatest of the missionaries, since they carried the light of the Gospel throughout the world and worked with God’s blessings for the instruction and conversion of all peoples. Among all the apostles he particularly respected Saint Peter. He had loved the Savior more than any of the others, and had been chosen to be the first vicar of Christ upon earth, the head and sovereign pastor of the Church. He loved and venerated Saint Paul, the master and teacher of the gentiles, who had worked harder than anyone else. Since he bore his name, he also strove to imitate his virtues.

He had a special devotion toward his guardian angel and never entered or left his room without directing his attention to greet and honor him. He introduced this same custom among his confreres, in regard to their own guardian angels, whom they were to acknowledge when they entered or left their rooms.

He also had a strong devotion to his patron, the martyr Saint Vincent [of Saragossa]. Hearing once that a worthy and pious acquaintance of his had some Spanish connections, he asked him to use his good offices to find out more about this saint from the traditions of that locality than was found in the standard lives of the saints. He also honored Saint Vincent Ferrer, and it was noticed that on many of his retreats he read from the book written by this saint. He was so strongly influenced by what he had read about this saint’s life and teachings that he often quoted them in the talks he gave to his community. He imitated this saint, particularly in his great zeal for the conversion of sinners and for the salvation of souls.³

He piously honored the relics of the saints. He spoke one day to his community about the procession which the priests of the chapter of Notre

³. One of the reasons for accepting the date of 1580 for the saint’s birth is that his birthday would fall that year on the feast of Vincent Ferrer (also spelled Ferrier.)
Dame of Paris were to make to Saint Lazare, in which they carried the most notable of the relics of their church. "We must put ourselves in a frame of mind to receive these precious relics as if we were receiving the saints themselves, doing us the honor of paying us a visit. Thus we will honor God in his saints, and we must ask him to allow us to share in the graces he so abundantly showered upon them." ⁴

Monsieur Vincent's chief intent in honoring the saints and angels was to honor in them the gifts of God and of his Spirit, whose temple they were. God was the object and end of the prayers he offered, and his expressions of piety toward them were ways of glorifying his divine majesty, and invoking their intercession to help him in this duty. He was faithful to the Church's teaching on the invocation of the saints. He saw to it that his confreres also were faithful to the teachings of this common mother of all the faithful, and submitted themselves to her guidance in all things which he recognized as inspired by him who is the author of all holiness.

Just as the fervor of his devotion led him to urge others to adopt the same sentiments as filled his heart, so too the coldness and indifference of many Christians of his time greatly afflicted him. On many occasions tears came to his eyes when he spoke of the fervor and exactitude of the Moslems in the practices of their false religion, their profound bows, their silence, modesty, and reserve in their mosques. He used to say that we must greatly fear that they will one day be our judges, and they will witness against our own laxity and lack of devotion.

We should not fail to mention his devotion for the comfort and deliverance of the souls suffering in purgatory. He often urged his confreres to do this duty of charity. He said they should consider these dear departed as living members of Jesus Christ, vivified by his grace, and destined one day to share his glory. Because of this we should love, serve, and help them to the full extent of our powers. He prayed and frequently offered the sacrifice of the mass for their intentions. He saw to it that the other priests of the Mission offered their masses for this same intention. The sacristan of Saint Lazare told how Monsieur Vincent often directed him to have the mass for the souls in purgatory said, especially for those detained there for a long time, with no one to pray for them. In all the houses of the Congregation, he directed that the *De profundis* ⁵ be recited three times each day, after the two particular examens before meals, and in the evening prayer.

Let us conclude this chapter with the testimony of two worthy priests regarding the devotion and piety they observed in Monsieur Vincent. The first of them said:

⁵. Ps 130.
Although Monsieur Vincent was deluged with business matters and had to deal constantly with many different people, conditions not usually conducive to recollection or devotion, we can say, nevertheless, that his heart was always filled with devotion. He seized every occasion that presented itself, no matter how difficult, to further the glory of God and the good of the neighbor. He showed that devotion is nothing other than charity, lovingly and promptly practiced, especially for those most abandoned and in the greatest need. His sense of devotion was such that his conversation alone moved those he spoke to. To hear him speak of God so respectfully and lovingly was to feel some spark of the sacred fire which Jesus Christ himself aroused in the hearts of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. It was evident that this same Jesus Christ inspired his words, and all his other actions as well.

The second priest gave the following written testimony:

Concerning the devotion and piety of Monsieur Vincent, you had only to see him in choir, at the altar, or in the other exercises of piety, or even in his everyday activities, for his posture, his modesty, and his recollection, were all pencils sketching out his devotion. Several members of the clergy conference of Saint Lazare have spoken of how they came to these conferences mainly to hear him speak. When, through modesty, he would refrain from speaking, as happened now and again, they were very disappointed.
CHAPTER TEN

His Zeal for the Glory of God and the Salvation of Souls

Monsieur Vincent had devoted himself to studying and imitating perfectly all the virtues of Jesus Christ. He particularly excelled, however, in zeal, reproducing in himself a living image of the divine Savior. It could well be said of him, "the zeal for the house of God had devoured him,"1 for his life was consumed by the flames of the ardent desire to procure the glory of God. He continually looked for ways to undertake, to sustain, and to suffer everything to prevent any offenses against God, and to offer reparation for sins committed against his divine majesty, or to work for an increase in his honor and service. As Saint Augustine said so well in response to a question he posed for himself, "Who is this person, devoured by zeal for the house of God? Whenever someone ardently desires to prevent offenses against God, and sees such an offense against his divine majesty, he does not rest until he has done everything in his power to offer some sort of reparation. If he cannot do so, he grieves in his heart, and feels great distress at seeing God so dishonored."2

The life and works of Monsieur Vincent, and what type of person he was, have been reported in Books One and Two. It could truly be said that he did not live for himself, but for Jesus Christ, whose honor and glory were incomparably more dear to him than his own life. His works can easily be used as proof of his zeal, since they were undertaken solely to destroy sin, and to help make God known, served, loved, and glorified in every place and by every person. This is what he worked so hard for in his missions, in the establishment of confraternities, conferences, and seminaries. In a word, he accomplished and suffered so much during his life until he was finally consumed in the flames of his own zeal.

To speak more specifically, the zeal of this great servant of God made him feel very keenly the offenses committed against the divine majesty. We cannot adequately express how much he was moved by this, or what efforts he made to prevent these offenses, and what penances he did as reparation for the sins committed. He was particularly disturbed when he learned about some miserable sinner dying in this sorry state, because a soul had been lost for all eternity. When speaking, if he emphasized the value of the single soul which had cost Jesus Christ so much, he drew tears from the eyes of his hearers.

1. Ps 69:10; John 2:17.
2. PL 35:1471.
To prevent this loss of souls, of those so dear to the divine Savior, there was nothing that he was not prepared to do or to suffer. He exhorted his confreres to cultivate in their hearts this same zeal which animated him. He spoke of these things while addressing his community on the occasion of the plague striking the missionaries working in Genoa.

By the grace of God, it was necessary that they suffer, and they were happy to suffer in their service of God by working for the salvation of souls. We must, gentlemen, have a similar disposition, and the same desire to suffer for God and for the neighbor, and to pour out our lives for this. Yes, gentlemen and my brothers, we must be committed to God without reserve, to him and to the service of our neighbor. We must strip ourselves of everything for their benefit, giving our very lives for their benefit, always prepared to give all and suffer for the sake of charity, to go where it will please God to send us, to the Indies or any other place even farther away, and finally to offer our lives willingly for the spiritual good of our dear neighbor, and to further the empire of Jesus Christ in souls.

Even as old and decrepit as I am, I should also adopt this attitude, even being ready to go to the Indies to gain souls for God knowing that I would probably die on the way. Do not think that God asks us for the strength of a healthy body. No, he asks only for our good will, and a true and sincere readiness to seize every opportunity to serve him, even at the risk of our lives. We should cultivate in our hearts a desire to sacrifice ourselves for him, even to suffer martyrdom. This desire is as effective and as agreeable to his divine Majesty as if we actually shed our blood. The Church adopts this same thought in honoring as martyrs several of the saints who were exiled for the faith, and who died in exile from natural causes. How learned in this science of suffering are our confreres working in foreign lands! Some serve the sick, even during the plague. Others serve in the armies in time of war, some suffer hunger, every discomfort, excessive labor, and sufferings. Notwithstanding, they remain firm and unshaken in the good they have begun. Gentlemen, let us acknowledge the grace God has given to this poor and wretched Congregation to have such people among us, members so faithful and constant in their sufferings for the service and love of his divine majesty.3

These words of Monsieur Vincent allow us to see how in his heart he desired to sacrifice his life as a martyr, or of going to foreign lands to be consumed as a Missionary. He would have done so if it was not for the

3. CED XI:401-03.
extreme pains in his legs and the other ailments from which he continually labored. He did manage, six or seven years before his death, when he was around eighty years old, to give a mission during the Jubilee.\(^4\) He worked with much success, to the great edification of all who saw this venerable man. Despite all his infirmities, he gave himself completely to catechizing, preaching, and hearing confessions, and the other similar exercises of the mission. His age, infirmities, and other responsibilities did not allow him to continue in this holy exercise which he loved so well. Once, writing to one of his priests, he spoke of his sentiments in this regard:

> How blessed are they who give themselves to God in this way. They do what Jesus Christ did, and imitate him in his practice of poverty, humility, patience, zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls! In this way they become true disciples of this Master. They live purely with his spirit, spreading the good odor of his life and the merits of his actions for the salvation of souls, for whom he wanted to give his life.

In this same spirit and with this same zeal he urged his confreres in their work undertaken for the service of our Lord. This is what he wrote to one of his priests, whom he had sent to a foreign land, and who had much to do and suffer in the service of the Lord:

> Oh, Monsieur, what consolation I have to know that you are wholly devoted to God and to your vocation, which is truly apostolic! Love the happy chance that has fallen to your lot, and which will attract to yourself an infinity of graces if you respond well to it. You will undoubtedly have much to overcome, for the evil one and corrupt human nature will join to oppose the good you will attempt to do. They together will attempt to make your difficulties seem more than they really are. They will try to persuade you that grace will be lacking when you need it most, to discourage you, and break you down. They will raise up persons to contradict and persecute you. These will perhaps even be ones you think of as your best friends, and to whom you look for support and consolation. If that should happen, Monsieur, you must take courage. Take it as a good sign, for you will be more like our Lord, overwhelmed by sorrows, abandoned, denied, and betrayed by his own disciples, and seemingly abandoned by his Father. How happy are they who lovingly carry their cross, following such a master! Remember, Monsieur, and be convinced that no matter what happens, you will

\(^4\) See CED IV:589. By judging the year of his birth to be 1580 or 1581, he was seventy-two or seventy-three at this time.
never be tempted beyond your strength. God himself will be your support and strength the more completely you put your trust and hope in him alone.\textsuperscript{5}

Writing to another missionary whom he had sent to a most laborious and difficult assignment, he said:

Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who so gently and yet strongly inspires the mission you have undertaken for the faith. Blessed also be the Lord who not only came to this world to redeem the very souls whom you are teaching, but also to merit the graces you need for your own salvation and for those you serve.

These graces have already been prepared for you, and the good God who gives them desires nothing so much as to give them to those who will make good use of them. Therefore, what is he waiting for except for you to destroy all traces of the old man, and for the people themselves to leave the darkness of ignorance and sin? I would hope that, for your part, you would spare neither your labor, your health, or your life. You gave yourself to him for this, and risked the long voyage you undertook. Therefore, nothing remains but for you to begin your work earnestly. To both begin well and to succeed, you must act in the spirit of our Lord. Unite your actions to his and dedicate them to his greater glory, to give them a totally noble and divine purpose. In this way, God will shower all manner of blessings upon you and your work. You may not live to see them, at least not in their full extent, since God for good reasons hides from his servants the fruit of their labor. Nevertheless, he causes them to be effective. A farmer has to work many hours before seeing the fruit of his work, and sometimes he sees nothing of the abundant harvest his sowing has brought about. This same thing happened to Saint Francis Xavier. In his lifetime he never saw the results of his work, nor the great development which the holy works had produced after his death, nor the marvelous progress of the missions he had begun. This consideration ought to keep your heart at peace, and strongly centered in God, in the confidence that all will be well, despite everything you may see to the contrary.\textsuperscript{6}

Speaking once to his community in this same spirit, he said:

See what a beautiful field God has opened for us in Madagascar, the Hebrides, and elsewhere. Pray to God that he will move our hearts with a desire to serve him and to give ourselves to him to do

\textsuperscript{5. CED IV:280-81.}  
\textsuperscript{6. CED V:456-57.}
with us what he will. Saint Vincent Ferrer drew courage from the
thought that priests who would come to join him would, by the
fervor of their zeal, convert the whole world. If we do not merit the
grace from God to be this sort of priest, let us ask him at least to be
the precursors and models for such persons. But be that as it may,
we must hold it for certain that we cannot be true Christians until
we are ready to lose everything and to give our lives for the love
and glory of Jesus Christ. We should then resolve together with the
holy apostle to choose suffering and even death rather than to be
separated from the love of this divine Savior.\footnote{CED XI:74-75.}

On another occasion, when he told his community of some of the
persecutions which the missionaries in Barbary were enduring, he contin­
ued:

Who knows if God did not send this accident to test our faith?
Do merchants fail to put to sea because of the perils they might face?
Do soldiers not go to war for fear of scars or of the death they may
meet? Should we fail in our duty as helpers and saviors of souls
because of the troubles and persecutions we may encounter?\footnote{CED XI:75.}

Thus, by his ardent zeal, he encouraged those of his community to
continue their work in the service of our Lord. Since his zeal was truly
disinterested, he rejoiced at the blessings God gave to the missions. Others
accomplished what he would have liked to have done himself, had his age
and infirmities allowed him. He was also very happy at the good done by
other communities in the services they rendered to the Church. A person of
some importance wrote of this as follows:

Monsieur Vincent always rejoiced when he heard of the great
successes and progress of other religious communities. Far from
harboring any envy or jealousy, he publicly proclaimed his high
esteem for them, and often praised them. He would occasionally
offer them help of all sorts. His zeal compared with that of Moses,
saying with him \textit{Utinam omnes prophetent} ["Would that all were
prophets"]\footnote{Num 11:28-29.} and he wished to extend to others the graces he had
received from God. And in truth, what did he not do either directly
or indirectly to renew this apostolic and ecclesial spirit which we
see flourishing in the Church today? He relied on everyone for this
task—the tongue of one, the mouth of others, the favor of the
wealthy, the care of the little ones, the prayers of the virtuous. In a
word, his zeal was boundless, and nearly everyone felt its effects.
And it wasn’t just the tiniest orphans and the aged poor who spoke about it.
Likewise, he often spoke favorably of the religious of the holy Society of Jesus, praising God for the great things they had done in all parts of the world in spreading of the Gospel and for the establishment of the reign of Jesus Christ his Son. Once, speaking to his community on this topic, and moved by his usual zeal and humility, he said:

My brothers, let us be like the poor peasant who carried the traveling bags of Saint Ignatius and his companions on their tiring journeys. When he saw them fall to their knees when they arrived at the place they were to stop for the night, he did the same. When he saw these saints pray, he prayed too. When these holy personages once asked him how he prayed, he replied, “I pray that God will grant what you are asking for. I am like a poor beast who does not know how to meditate. I pray he will listen to you. I would like to pray like you do, but I don’t know how, and so I offer him your prayers.”

Oh, gentlemen and my brothers, we must think of ourselves as porters for these worthy workmen, as poor ignoramuses who can say nothing worthwhile and as outcasts among men. We should think of ourselves as the gleaners who clean up after the great harvesters. Let us thank God that he agreed to accept our puny services. Let us offer our small handfuls along with the plentiful harvests gathered by others, and be ready to do all we can in the service of God, and for helping our neighbor. Since God had given such a beautiful insight to this poor peasant that he should be remembered in history, let us hope that our feeble efforts will contribute to God’s being honored and served, and that his divine Goodness will accept our offerings and bless our insignificant efforts.

If Monsieur Vincent showed his ardent zeal in so many ways, he also showed his strength and constancy. He persevered in the holy enterprises which God had inspired him to undertake, despite the difficulties, opposition, losses, and all the other grievous situations which he encountered. Among all the missions he began, one of the most difficult both personally and for his Congregation was certainly the mission to the island of Madagascar, of which we spoke in Book Two. We saw how this mission had cost him the lives of many of his best workers, most of whom died soon after their arrival, before they could begin the work they had been sent to do. Others were shipwrecked on the way, and some fell into the hands of those at war with France. In sum, it seemed that nature and men united to oppose
his efforts to help and instruct these poor natives. After so many accidents and losses, a person less virtuous than Monsieur Vincent would have bent under the weight of so many reverses, and would have abandoned this good work under the pretext that it was impossible.

The courage and zeal of this holy man enabled him to spring back, like the palm tree when flattened by the storm, which later stands straight again. The more he saw the opposition of creatures, the more he showed his constancy and the resolution of persevering in these good works undertaken for God's glory. Instead of these losses and opposition leading to discouragement, they provided the stimulus to encourage his confrères. They showed themselves even more anxious and more willing to go to this same mission, even knowing the fate which probably awaited them there. He wrote to one of his priests on this subject:

Man proposes, but God disposes as he sees fit. The measures we have taken to support the mission in Madagascar have been so thwarted that it seems we cannot be sure of anything in the future. Nevertheless, it seems to me that we should do what we can to fulfill this plan, since it refers to the glory of the master, whom we serve and who often gives to perseverance the success that he refuses to our initial failures. He is also pleased to test his workers before confiding more important things to them, and to have them earn, by their faithfulness and hope, the grace to plant these same virtues in the souls of destitute people.  

As he said in another letter:

We have wept at the news of the deaths of our dear deceased sent to us by the Madagascar mission. I cannot deny that this news has greatly afflicted us, and has given us the amazing opportunity to adore the incomprehensible judgments of the conduct of God. This affliction, however, cannot diminish our resolution to help this people, any more than all the previous losses, and the unfortunate accidents which have happened since we first arrived.

On another occasion the superior of the mission at Marseilles reported it was becoming very difficult to continue the mission in Barbary. It seemed that it would take all the resources of the Congregation to support this single mission, and to overcome the difficulties raised by the Moslems in dealing with the missionaries. Monsieur Vincent responded that he could not bring himself to leave this work, for, as he said:

If the salvation of a single soul is of such importance that we should risk our life to obtain it, how can we abandon so many out

11. CED VIII:156-58.
of fear of the expense? I would consider the men and money well spent if there should be no other good coming from these missions than to make this barbarous and cursed land see the beauty of the Christian religion. We send men there across the seas who are willing to leave their own country with its conveniences, and who open themselves to a thousand outrages. They do this to console and help their afflicted brothers. I believe that the men and money are being well spent. 12

Zeal inspired in Monsieur Vincent the courage and strength to persevere in the holy enterprises he had begun. Thus it was a source of great pain for him to see that some among his own confreres were lukewarm, or allowed themselves to be overly influenced by natural sentiments and self-love. They would give way to discouragement and cause others to do the same. We will conclude this chapter by giving an extract of a conference he gave to his Company on this matter:

It is impossible for a lukewarm priest and Missionary to be successful, or to come to a happy end. What sort of wrong do you think that these cowardly souls could do in the Company? What harm these lazy ones do to themselves and to others, whom they discourage by their bad example and by their impertinent remarks! "What good is done," they say, "by so many different kinds of works, so many missions, so many seminaries, conferences, retreats, assemblies, and trips made to help the poor? Just wait for Monsieur Vincent to die, and we will be done with all that! How can we support all these activities? Where will we find the Missionaries to send to Madagascar, to the Hebrides, to Barbary, to Poland? Not to mention the expenses of such burdensome and distant missions?"

We must answer these questions in this way: if the Company at its birth and from its cradle had the courage to seize opportunities to serve God, and if the first Missionaries were so fervent, should we not trust that it will be fortified and grow in time? No, no, gentlemen, if God gives us new opportunities to serve him we must, with his grace, respond generously. These lazy and mistrusting ones are capable only of discouraging others, and for this reason you be on your guard against such people. When you hear them speak the way they do, speak up with the words of the holy apostle: Jam nunc Antichristi multi sunt in mundo, "Antichrists are already in the world," 13 and they are these anti-missionaries who set themselves up to oppose the designs of God. Alas, gentlemen, we still feel the

12. CED VII:117.
13. 1 John 2:18.
effects of the first graces of our vocation poured out upon us. We already have reason to fear that by our laxity we will become unworthy of the blessings God has so abundantly given the Company up to now, and those he has bestowed upon the projects which his providence has confided to us. We must fear that we will fall into the unhappy state we see in some other communities. This is the greatest unhappiness that could possibly happen to us.¹⁴

Lastly, since zeal deals with the sanctification and salvation of souls, as well as with the glory of God, we will see in the following chapter what his dispositions were in regard to his neighbors. We will see how perfect his charity was toward them, to appreciate more fully the grandeur and extent of his zeal.

¹⁴. CED XI:193-95; Abelly's text differs from Coste's.
Closely allied to the first great commandment of loving God with all one's heart is the second, to love one's neighbor as oneself. These two commandments are so inseparable that the first cannot be fulfilled if the observance of the second is lacking. Those who do not love the neighbor cannot say that they truly love God, no matter what feelings of fervor and zeal they might think they have for God's honor and glory.

Monsieur Vincent was totally convinced of this truth. He knew that the precept of loving the neighbor is so strong that whoever observes it fulfills the law of God. All the precepts of the law come down to love of neighbor, for according to the doctrine of the holy apostle: *Qui diligit proximum, legem implevit* ["He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law"].

Speaking one day in a conference he said:

Show me a person who limits his love to God alone, a soul, if you will, so elevated to the heights of contemplation, so taken up with this way of loving God that he savors only this infinite source of blessedness, and takes no thought of his neighbor. Now consider a second person who loves God equally with all his heart, but loves his neighbor also, no matter how brusque, crude or imperfect, for the love of God. This person who also strives with all his strength to bring his neighbor to God. Tell me, please, which of these two loves is more perfect and the least self-serving? Beyond doubt, it is the second. This love unites the love of God to the love of neighbor or to say it better, it extends the love of God to the neighbor, fulfilling the law more perfectly than the first.

Then, applying this to his own Congregation, he continued:

We ought to impress these truths deeply on our minds, to guide our lives by this more perfect love, and to do what it demands, for no one in the whole world is more obliged to this love than we are. No other congregation should be more committed to this than ourselves, nor more dedicated to works of true charity. Our vocation is neither to go to a single parish nor a single diocese. We are to embrace the whole world to gain the hearts of all. The Son of God

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said that he had come to light a fire upon earth, to fill hearts with his love, and we must do the same.

We are sent not merely to love God but also to make him loved. It is not enough for us to love God if our neighbor does not love him as well. We will not know how to love our neighbor as ourselves if we do not procure for him the same good we want for ourselves, to know the divine love which unites us to the one who is our sovereign good. We must love our neighbor as the image of God and as the object of God’s love, and act in such a way that everyone will in turn love their loving creator. We must develop among ourselves a mutual charity, for the love of God, who loved us so much that he sent his own Son to die for us. Gentlemen, please look upon our divine Savior as the perfect exemplar of the charity you ought to have for your neighbor. O Jesus, tell us, if you will, what impelled you to leave heaven to suffer so on earth? What excess of love led you to humble yourself, and accept the infamy of the cross? What excess of charity made you take upon yourself all our miseries, to adopt the form of a sinner, to live a life of suffering and submit to a shameful death? Where can anyone find such an excellent and admirable charity?

Only the Son of God is capable of such love, of leaving the throne of his glory to take a body subject to all the infirmities and miseries of this life. He alone was capable of doing all he did to establish in us and among us, by word and example, the love of God and neighbor. Yes, this same love crucified him and produced the marvelous work of our redemption. Oh, gentlemen, if you had but a spark of that sacred fire which consumed the heart of Jesus Christ, could you spend your life with folded arms, and abandon those who call for your help? Certainly not, for true charity does not know how to live in idleness, nor of seeing our brother in need, and not to respond. Since our exterior actions show our interior dispositions, those who have true charity will show it by the way they act. Fire gives light and heat, and in the same way, love shines forth in action.²

He expressed this same thought on another occasion when he said to his community that they should be happy if they became poor themselves in exercising charity toward others.

You should not fear this poverty, never doubting the goodness of our Lord and the truth of his word. Even if you were forced to go to work for the pastors in the villages to support yourselves, or

². CED XII:261-64. Abelly’s text differs considerably from Coste’s.
had to beg your bread, or sleep in barns, exposed to the rigors of
the weather, suppose someone were to ask you: Poor priest of the
Mission, what has brought you to such extremity? What happiness,
gentlemen, if you could respond: Charity. How blessed this poor
priest would be, before God and his angels. 3

Once the Missionaries he had sent to Algiers to work among the poor
slaves there found themselves in danger of having to pay a large amount for
one of the fugitive slaves for whom they had supplied bail. Monsieur Vincent
told the members of the Congregation about this in a noteworthy statement:
“What is done out of charity is done for God. It is a great honor for us if we
are asked to give away what we have, for charity’s sake, since it was for God
who gave it to us in the first place. In this case, we should thank him and
bless him for his infinite bounty toward us.” 4

The charity of Monsieur Vincent was so perfect and his heart so filled
with the effects of this divine virtue that we might say in some way that he
anointed all who came in contact with him. It could be said of him what the
apostle Paul said: Christi bonus odor sumus in omni loco, we are an aroma
for Christ’s sake. 5 Once he said to his community:

Everything creates an image of itself, much like a mirror which
reflects things just as they are. An ugly face appears ugly in a mirror,
and a beautiful face appears beautiful. In the same way, good and
bad qualities shine forth from us. This is especially true of charity
which by its very nature communicates itself and produces charity.
A heart truly filled and animated by this virtue shows forth its inner
fire, and everything in a charitable person breathes and preaches
charity. 6

The charity of this great servant of God was not restricted or limited, but
extended to everyone capable of receiving its effects. As much as possible he
preserved an affectionate and cordial relationship with everyone. This virtue
always led him to be united and submissive to the sovereign pastor of the
Church, that is, our holy father, the pope. In the person of the pope Monsieur
Vincent respected and loved Jesus Christ, whose vicar he was upon earth.
When the Apostolic See became vacant by the death of a pope, he prayed
incessantly and had the community pray that God would be pleased to give
the Church a man after his own heart. When a new pope was elected he showed
respect and affection for the person raised to this sublime dignity. Leaving
aside all human consideration he saw in the person of the sovereign pontiff
only the person given to the Church by God’s providential will.

3. CED XI:76-77.
5. 2 Cor 2:15.
6. CED XI:76.
This same virtue inspired him with sentiments of love and reverence for all the bishops of the Church, as we shall see in one of the following sections of this chapter. He showed them every kindness and submission that he possibly could. He supported their plans, promoted their wishes, and maintained their authority. He wanted and did all he could that the clergy and people might regard their sacred persons highly, and deferred humbly and promptly to their directions.

He was also united to the pastors and other clergy. He honored and served them as dictated by circumstances, both as a general rule and also in each particular case. He was on good terms with the orders and communities of religious and even of seculars, and as occasions arose, met with the superiors of these groups. He showed a remarkable deference to all persons in authority, whether clergy or lay. If someone did not want to use his services, a lord in his territories, a pastor in his parish, or a bishop in his diocese, he never went over their heads to override their objections. Even in a matter which was just and reasonable, he preferred to leave a good action undone rather than do it against their will.

He was particularly noted for his open profession of sincere affection and his faithful service to the king, going so far as to risk the welfare of his community and even his own life to support the interests of His Majesty. A member of the nobility testified to this one day in the presence of the queen mother during the regency:

I know of few people attached with such a sincere fidelity, constancy, and disinterestedness to the service of the king as Monsieur Vincent. Your Majesty knows well how during the troubles in Paris he risked the pillage of his house at Saint Lazare, and risked even his own life, when he gave refuge to your chancellor on his way to Pontoise to find the king. You are aware of how he endured slander and the hatred of some by the firm and faithful way he handled the pious wishes of Your Majesty, as you had directed him, particularly in the administration of ecclesiastical goods.

The queen acknowledged this tribute and said that it was true.

In summary, Monsieur Vincent was everyone’s friend. He conserved and cultivated friendships, not simply to avoid having trouble with anyone, but rather to promote that holy unanimity of spirit that the Son of God so earnestly recommended. He was more anxious to do good than to receive any favors. We can say in all truth that he never acted to increase his own possessions or to receive honors. He acted for the good of his neighbor because of his true and sincere spirit of charity. It would not be inappropriate to cite the testimony of the religious of the first Visitation house in Paris, his spiritual daughters for over thirty-five years.
This great servant of God burned with such a love of God that he wanted everyone to share this virtue. He wanted charity to be practiced in all things as thoroughly as it could possibly be. He would not tolerate in this community anyone who showed a lack of esteem for others or who spoke to discredit her neighbor. He said that he feared that the community would be destroyed if its members were not united with one another, especially when disunity was caused by a lack of esteem, mutual support, and charity. He stressed that religious should look upon each other as spouses of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, and the living images of God.

This view should lead each person to have a mutual respect and love for one another. In turn, this should lead to the two following things. First, we must have recourse to the goodness of God who is all love and charity, to beg of him a share in his divine spirit. Second, we should be most anxious about our own conversion, and try to correct the faults and failings we may commit against the virtue of charity. We should use this as the subject of our particular examen, to root out of our hearts anything that might hinder the union we should have with God and among ourselves.

Another religious of this same order, who lived a saintly life in the second of the houses of the Visitation established in Paris, left us this testimony about Monsieur Vincent.

We can truthfully say that this holy man strove to imitate the life of Jesus Christ, who did good to everyone during his sojourn upon earth. Who has not felt the charity of Monsieur Vincent in fulfilling the needs of their lives, whether of body or soul? Can anyone be found who had recourse to him and went away without receiving some help? Is there anyone who turned away from him when he spoke or consoled them? Who had a greater claim on the goods of his community than the person in need?

One more aspect of charity remains which we should not omit mentioning. Besides looking to the actual needs of both body and soul, he was most careful to safeguard the honor and reputation of everyone. Remarkably, he was never heard to complain about anyone, even when he had been treated poorly by them. On the contrary, the absent had an advocate who defended their cause and one who openly urged the virtue of charity. He spoke as well of others as the truth allowed. He would not allow anything negative to be said about anyone else in his presence, even when it concerned someone who had done him harm.
Some Remarkable Examples of Monsieur Vincent’s Charity

To illustrate what we have just said of the charity of Monsieur Vincent we will in this first section give some examples, chosen from many others which filled the life of this great servant of God.

During the recent troubles in the kingdom, the people of Montmirail were distressed at the prospect of mistreatment at the hands of the soldiers. They did not know where to turn to safeguard their persons and their belongings from the ravages and annoyances of the soldiers. Monsieur Vincent wrote to the priests of this Congregation working in the region to do all they could to protect these poor people. The priests in turn pointed out that they were themselves in danger and would be at risk in attempting to help others. Monsieur Vincent replied: “We must come to the help of our neighbor in need. Since everything you own you have received from God, his divine majesty has the right to take it from you when he so wills. Rising above your fears, you are to come to the help of this poor town however you can.” This they did, helping the poor townspeople save most of their goods and their household furniture from the soldiers, leaving all that might happen to themselves in the hands of God’s providence.

The priests of the Congregation of the Mission, who direct a seminary under the jurisdiction of the Parlement of Toulouse, became involved in a lawsuit about the seminary. The Prince of Conti urged a solution to the difficulty by having the priests submit the case to arbitration in the city of Toulouse. Nevertheless, a bishop concerned with the seminary, and a supporter of the priests of the Mission, did not approve of the arbitration and ordered the priests to break it off. They soon informed Monsieur Vincent, and sent him the letter which the bishop had written them. One of the priests then pointed out to Monsieur Vincent that the Prince of Conti, then in Paris, should be informed that the priests of the Mission were not the ones responsible for breaking off the negotiations. Monsieur Vincent replied: “No, this course of action would reflect badly upon the bishop, which we must not allow to happen; this would give the priest reason to complain about the bishop. It is preferable that we take the blame, and let the recriminations

7. CED V:44.
8. The seminary at Cahors. The lawsuit concerned the abbey of La Fauvette.
9. Blessed Alain de Solminihac, the bishop of Cahors.
10. Guibert Cuissot, superior of the seminary at Cahors.
fall upon us. We must never do anything to work to the harm of our neighbor.

The greatest example of charity, as our Lord pointed out in the Gospel, is to give our lives for those we love. On several occasions Monsieur Vincent, who had this virtue in the highest degree, freely risked his own life in the service of his neighbor. Some time after the priests of the Mission moved into Saint Lazare, God permitted a plague to strike the house, and the sub-prior was among its victims. As soon as Monsieur Vincent learned of this, he went to visit the priest, to console and encourage him, and to offer to render any service within his power. He approached his reeking bedside, and remained there as long as he was permitted to do so. At this same time, a young boy at Saint Lazare was stricken. Several thought that the boy should be transported to the hospital of Saint Louis, but Monsieur Vincent would not allow it. The boy was to be cared for at Saint Lazare. Monsieur Vincent saw to it that one of the brothers was assigned to take special care of the sick child.

Once, while in the faubourg Saint Martin, Monsieur Vincent came upon six or seven armed soldiers, swords in hand, chasing a man of the working class and just about to kill him. He had already been wounded and it was all too obvious that he would not escape death. None of the bystanders wanted to risk the anger of the soldiers in attempting to help the victim, but Monsieur Vincent thought nothing of risking his own life in assisting his neighbor. Moved by a spirit of charity, he threw himself among the soldiers, using his own body as a shield against their swords, allowing the man to escape. The soldiers, astonished at this display of courage and charity, allowed themselves to be persuaded by his remonstrances, and they gave up their evil intent.

Another example of this same virtue, as remarkable as it is rare, has been reported by several persons from both within and outside the Congregation, and especially by the superior of the priests of the Mission of Marseilles, who heard the story from several persons of that town. Long before he established the Congregation, Monsieur Vincent emulated the charity of Saint Paulinus, who sold himself to ransom from slavery the son of a poor widow. It happened that once Monsieur Vincent came upon a convict in the galleys who had been forced to abandon wife and children to a life of abject poverty. He was so moved by compassion at the wretched state to which these persons were reduced, that he resolved to do everything in his power to help them. He was unable to find any way to help, however. Then, moved by extraordinary charity, he thought he would take the place of the poor convict to enable him to go to the help of his impoverished family. He convinced the authorities to allow this exchange, and freely accepted the
very chains of this poor man whose liberty he had secured. After some time, his extraordinary virtue manifested in this episode was appreciated, and he was released from servitude. Later, people, perhaps correctly, thought that the swelling in his legs may have come from the chains used to secure the convicts in the galleys. Once, a priest of the Congregation asked Monsieur Vincent if these things had really happened, that he had once taken the place of a galley slave. Monsieur Vincent merely smiled, but gave no answer to the question.\footnote{11. This account is still much debated.}

We can surely say that this act of charity was most admirable. Yet we can say with even more certainty that Monsieur Vincent gave greater glory to God by using his time, talents, goods, and his very life in the service of all convicts, not just of the one he replaced on the galley bench. Through his own experience he knew their sufferings and needs, and he worked to secure both bodily and spiritual help, in sickness and in health, for the present and for the future, far beyond what he could have accomplished if he had remained chained among them.

It is not hard to accept the idea that he was minded to give up his personal liberty in favor of an abject slave in imitation of Saint Paulinus if we reflect upon his later years. Following the example of Saint Paul, he was willing in a certain sense to allow himself to become accursed for the sake of his brothers.\footnote{12. Rom 9:3.} A remarkable example of this occurred during the time Monsieur Vincent was a chaplain of Queen Marguerite. We owe this account in part to what he said one day in a conference to his community, and in part to the recollections of several reputable persons reported after his death.

I once knew a famous professor, who for a long time had defended the Catholic faith against heretics in the exercise of his role as diocesan theologian. Because of his learning and piety, Queen Marguerite had even invited him to court, which required his leaving his other responsibilities. Since he no longer preached or catechized he fell prey to serious temptations against the faith. Incidentally, this warns us of the danger of idleness, either of body or mind. Just as the fields, no matter how good the soil, will yield weeds and thorns if they are not cultivated, so too our souls cannot long remain at rest or in idleness without feeling the rise of passions and temptations which lead it to evil.

This theologian, realizing that he was in this sad state, came to me. He admitted that he was undergoing violent temptations against the faith, and was even assailed by blasphemous thoughts against
our Lord Jesus Christ. He was in such despair that he felt tempted
to hurl himself from a window to his death. He was in such a bad
way that he had to be excused from reciting the breviary or cele­
brating mass, or even reciting any other prayer. Beginning even the
Our Father raised a multitude of evil spirits to torment him. His
imagination was so drained and his mind so exhausted at the effort
to resist these temptations that he could no longer function. In this
extremity he was advised to observe a simple practice. He should
lift his hand or even a finger in the direction of Rome, or even
toward any church, signifying whenever he made this gesture that
he professed his faith in all that the Roman Church taught. What
was the outcome of all this? God at length had mercy on this man,
for when he fell sick he was suddenly delivered from all his
temptions and the blindfold fell from the eyes of his soul. He
began to see anew the truths of faith but with such clarity that it
seemed he could almost touch them with one of his fingers. He
finally died, giving thanks to God for allowing him to fall into these
temptations only to be delivered by great and admirable insights
into the mysteries of our holy religion.¹³

We know of this episode from a talk which Monsieur Vincent gave to his
confreres on the subject of faith. He does not mention anything at all of the
means he used to deliver this man from his violent temptation. Only after
his death did it become known that it was by his own prayers and self-offer­
ing to God that this deliverance came about. This is how it happened,
according to the written account of a very trustworthy person, someone
unaware of the conference of Monsieur Vincent cited above.

Monsieur Vincent took it upon himself to help this man who had
revealed his troubled spirit. He counseled him to perform good acts
to obtain the grace of deliverance. Later, it happened that this person
fell sick, during which time the evil spirit redoubled his efforts to gain
his soul. When Monsieur Vincent recognized his pitiable condition
he feared that the man would succumb to the violent temptation of
infidelity and blasphemy, and would die poisoned by the implacable
hatred of the devil toward the Son of God. Monsieur Vincent prayed
earnestly that God in his goodness would deliver the sick man from
this danger, and in a spirit of penance he offered to take upon himself
whatever sufferings divine justice might require. In this, he imitated
the charity of Jesus Christ who took our infirmities upon himself that
we might be cured, and who bore the sufferings we deserved.

¹³. CED XI:32-34.
In his hidden providence, God accepted this offer of Monsieur Vincent, and heard his prayer. He delivered the sick man from his temptation, calmed his soul, enlightened his darkened and troubled faith, and gave him such sentiments of reverence and gratitude toward our Lord Jesus Christ as he had never before experienced.

At the same time, God in his divine wisdom permitted this same temptation to trouble the soul of Monsieur Vincent. This beset him for a long time after. He had recourse to prayer and self-denial to rid himself of this trial, but these had no other effect than to allow him to bear these torments from hell with patience and resignation, always with the hope that God would pity him.

Since he realized that God wished to try him in permitting the devil to attack him so violently, he had recourse to two remedies. The first was to write out a profession of faith which he placed over his heart as an antidote to his trials. He specifically repudiated any thoughts contrary to faith, and entered into a sort of pact with the Savior that every time he placed his hand over his heart and upon this paper, as he often did, he intended by the gesture to renounce temptation, all without saying a single word. At the same time he raised his mind to God and easily diverted it from the thoughts which troubled him. In this way he confounded the devil without directly confronting him.

The second remedy he used was to do the exact opposite of what the tempter suggested, striving to act by faith in rendering honor and service to Jesus Christ. He carried this out particularly in his visits to the sick poor of the charity hospital in the faubourg Saint Germain where he lived at the time. This charitable practice is among the most meritorious in Christianity since it bears witness to faith in the Savior’s words and example and to the desire to serve him. Jesus himself said that what was done to the least of his brethren he would regard as done to himself. God allowed Monsieur Vincent to draw such grace from this period of temptations that not only did he never have occasion to confess any fault in this regard, but on the contrary the remedies he used were the source of innumerable blessings drawn down upon his soul.

Three or four years passed in this severe trial which bore down upon Monsieur Vincent, and he groaned before God under their weight. Yet, seeking to strengthen himself more surely against the attacks of the devil, he thought of taking a firm and unbreakable

resolve to honor Jesus Christ and to imitate him more perfectly than ever before by committing his entire life to the service of the poor. No sooner had he done this than, by a marvelous effect of grace, all the suggestions of the evil one disappeared. His heart, which had been so troubled for such a long time, was suddenly freed, and his soul filled with such abundant light that he admitted on several occasions that he seemed to realize the truths of faith with remarkable clarity.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus did that temptation cease. The result of his decision was that one might say that God in his grace drew forth from his servant all the great works he did for the aid and salvation of the poor and for the greater good of his Church. Besides the one who gave this account, several other worthy persons still living have told us the same thing. Monsieur Vincent had told it to them in confidence when he wished to help them overcome similar temptations in their own case. He spoke of what he had experienced in these situations to bring them to use similar remedies and to obtain relief in the trials they were undergoing.

\textit{SECTION TWO}

\textit{His Special Charity Toward the Poor}

After seeing Monsieur Vincent’s charity in general, and some examples of this virtue in his life, we must now consider in greater detail his charity toward various groups of people. The first of these are the poor, for whom he had a tender love and a paternal care. If we consider his life, especially after he dedicated himself to God as a priest, it was a constant exercise of charity toward the poor, and his main works and most noted enterprises were in their favor. For them he founded various hospitals, established the Confraternities of Charity in so many places, and began the Daughters of Charity with their special mission indicated in their name, Servants of the Sick Poor. In their favor he held many fundraising meetings, which obliged his followers to undertake numerous trips. He used watchful care, and did everything he could think of to contribute to their help or service. We can say that he founded the Congregation of the Mission to evangelize the poor.

\textsuperscript{15} The authenticity of this account has been debated on chronological and psychological grounds.
He often used to say to his Missionaries, "We are priests of the poor. God has chosen us for them. They are our chief duty, all the rest is just secondary."  

In short, it seemed that the chief concern of this charitable priest was to serve the poor. This was the thing which usually occupied his mind or moved his heart. He carried the poor in his heart, and their sufferings touched him deeply. Knowing their needs and miseries, he felt it keenly when he could see no way to help them.

On one occasion, while walking with one of his confreres in the city, he spoke about the bad weather and crop failure which threatened the poor with famine and death.

I worry about our Company, but to tell you the truth, not so much as I do about the poor. If we need to, we could ask for help from our other houses or appeal to the vicars in the parishes. But where can the poor turn? Where can they go? This is my worry and my sorrow. I am told that the peasants say they can live as long as they have their crops. Once the crops are gone, their only recourse is to retire to their graves and bury themselves alive. O God, what extreme misery! What remedy is there?

Another time, speaking to his confreres about the poor, he said:

God loves the poor, and thus surely he must love those who love and serve them. When we also love someone, we love his friends and servants. The little Company of the Mission strives to serve the poor tenderly. God loves them so much, and so we have reason to hope that because of them God will love us as well. We then have, my brothers, a new reason to serve them. We should seek out the poorest and most abandoned. We must recognize before God that they are our lords and masters, and that we are unworthy to render them our small favors.  

Another time, while speaking with two highly placed priests, he said something which should not be forgotten: "Those who love the poor in life will have nothing to fear in death, as I have seen on many occasions myself. Because of this he tried to teach a love of the poor to those who were afraid of death."  

In one of his letters, speaking of the death of a virtuous priest, he remarked:

His death was in keeping with his life. He was committed to

16. CED XI:133.
17. CED XI:392-93.
18. Louis de Chandenier and Louis de Blampignon. This account was given by Brother Robineau, the saint's secretary.
19. Jean de la Salle, one of his first companions, who died October 9, 1639, at age forty-one.
carrying out the good pleasure of God's will from the beginning of his sickness to the end with no change in this sentiment. He had always lived in fear of death, but from the beginning of his last sickness he lost all fear. He even faced death with happiness, for he remembered what I had once said to him: "God takes away the fear of dying from those who have generously exercised charity toward the poor in their lives, even if during their lifetime they had always lived in this fear."\(^\text{20}\)

Monsieur Vincent's love of the poor produced two effects in his heart. One was his great sense of compassion for their indigence and misery, for he had a most tender affection for them. For example, when the litany of Jesus was said, and he came to the words "Jesus, father of the poor"\(^\text{21}\), he pronounced them in a way that showed the sentiments of his heart. When people would speak to him about some particular misery or necessity of the poor, he would sigh, close his eyes, and hunch his shoulders like a person weighed down with sufferings. His face would reveal the deep suffering by which he shared in the misfortunes of the poor.

Once, in speaking about compassion for the poor, he said to his confreres:

> When we go to visit the poor we should so identify with them that we share their sufferings. We should have the same attitude as the great apostle who said *omnibus omnia factus sum*,\(^\text{21}\) I make myself all to all, so completely that the words of the prophet would not apply to us: *Sustinui qui simul mecum contristaretur, et non fuit*,\(^\text{22}\) I looked for someone to grieve with me in my sufferings, but found none. We must open our hearts so that they become responsive to the sufferings and miseries of the neighbor. We should pray God to give us a true spirit of mercy, which is in truth the spirit of God. The Church says that it is the nature of God to be merciful and to confer this spirit upon us. Ask this grace of God, my brothers, that he may give us this spirit of compassion and mercy, and that he may so fill us with it that as soon as anyone sees a missionary, he immediately will think, there goes a person full of compassion. Think for a moment of how much we ourselves stand in need of mercy, we who must exercise it toward others. We must bring this mercy everywhere, and endure everything for the sake of compassion.

How happy our confreres in Poland are. They have suffered so much because of the wars there, not to mention the plague, all for

\(^{20}\) *CED* 1:595-97.
\(^{21}\) 1 Cor 9:22.
\(^{22}\) Ps 69:21.
the sake of relieving, helping, and consoling the poor! How happy
are these missionaries. Cannons, fire, armies, or the plague could
not dislodge them from Warsaw. The misery and sufferings of
others kept them where they were. They persevered and still perse­
vere amid such perils and sufferings, only to show mercy. Oh, how
happy they are to use this precious moment of their lives to exercise
mercy! I say, "this moment," for our entire lives are but a moment,
soon gone. Alas, the seventy-six years of my life seem now only a
momentary dream. What remains now is only the regret that I have
used this time so poorly. Think of what unhappiness we will have
at the moment of our death if we have not used this brief time of
our lives to show mercy to others. Brothers, be merciful toward
everyone. Never meet a poor person without seeking to console
him, or an uneducated person without seeking to help him under­
stand, in a few words, what he must believe and do to assure his
salvation. O Savior, do not let us abuse our vocation. Do not
withdraw from this Company the spirit of mercy. What would
become of us if you did so? Give us this, then, O Lord, together
with the spirit of meekness and humility. 23

On another occasion he said:

The Son of God could not have experienced a sense of compas­
ion in the glorious state in which he existed in heaven from all
eternity. He became man to share our miseries. For us to reign with
him in heaven we should share with others his compassion for his
people on earth. Missionaries above all other priests should be filled
with this spirit of compassion. They are obliged by their state and
their vocation to serve the most miserable, the most abandoned, and
those suffering most from corporal or spiritual ills. First, they
should feel in their hearts the sufferings of their neighbor. Second,
this sentiment ought to appear in their features and their whole
attitude, after the example of our Lord who wept over Jerusalem
because of the calamity about to come upon the city. Third, we
should use compassionate language to make our neighbors aware
that we truly have their interests and sufferings at heart. Lastly, we
must help them as much as we can to bring about a partial or
complete end to their sufferings, for the hand must be directed as
much as possible by the heart. 24

The second effect of this love for the poor was that he always helped them
as much as was in his power. He became a sort of general overseer of help

24. CED XI:77.
to the poor wherever they were, even in distant regions. He took great care to relieve their sufferings, and to provide food, clothing, shelter, and the other necessities of life. This is why other charitable persons willingly sent him their alms to distribute. He was so careful in this service that he always gave away more than he had received.

In this spirit a noble and virtuous priest who lived in a community in Paris and who had a large sum at his disposal for the relief of the poor, continued to send money to the Congregation of the Mission to distribute in remote provinces, even after the death of Monsieur Vincent at Saint Lazare. He said, “Monsieur Vincent was the true father of the poor and had a special grace and spirit to come to their aid. He has left this spirit as a precious heritage to his Congregation, who have followed his example and who walk in the footsteps of this worthy father.”

We will not repeat here what was said elsewhere about Monsieur Vincent’s activities on those occasions when the Seine overflowed. He took special care to have the bakery at Saint Lazare make bread, using the wheat of his community. It would then be brought by boat to a nearby town named Gennevilliers, about two leagues from Paris. There, the poor people, assailed by the flood waters and by famine, were reduced almost to utter ruin. They received this opportune and abundant help from the charity of this father of the poor. Two brothers were sent to distribute this food despite the danger. They distributed the bread with the help of the local pastor, who was aware of the needs of each family. This charitable service continued for as long as the flood waters lasted.

We will pass over in silence a great number of similar charitable activities of Monsieur Vincent in favor of the poor. One, however, would have been forgotten, as were many others, were it not for a document, written in his own hand, which he had to write during wartime to enable a wagon from Saint Lazare to pass through the gates of Paris. This wagon contained food destined for the poor suffering peasants, but the guards demanded proof of where it had come from, and to whom it was consigned. This certificate was written in these terms:

I, the undersigned, the superior of the Congregation of the Mission, affirm to all concerned that I have learned from some pious persons that half the people of Palaiseau are ill, and that ten or twelve die every day. I have been asked to send them some priests for the corporal and spiritual help of these people, afflicted these past twenty days by an occupation of the army. We have sent four priests and a physician there to help them. Since the vigil of the feast of Corpus Christi we have sent every day, except for one or two, sixteen large loaves of white bread, fifteen pints of wine, and
yesterday, some meat. The priests have testified to the need for some flour and a hogshead of wine for the sick of the said town and surrounding areas. I have today sent a wagon drawn by three horses, carrying four setiers of flour, two half hogsheads of wine, for the relief of the sick poor of Palaiseau and surrounding villages. Testifying to these facts, I have signed this, at Saint Lazare lez Paris, this fifth day of June, 1652. Signed, Vincent de Paul, Superior.25

This document lets us catch a glimpse of Monsieur Vincent’s charity. He sent four priests and a doctor to aid the poor and sick of Palaiseau, instead of the single priest he had been asked to send originally. While not forgetting the spiritual welfare of these poor souls, he first relieved their hunger and looked after their health. He did so at once, with all possible diligence. He sent his priests, provisions, horses from the community, and not waiting for other alms, he sent money from the community treasury amounting to 663 livres. This deprived him of all the community’s reserve, so that he had to ask the duchess of Aiguillon if she might help to relieve this pressing need. She was not able to do so, but instead called a meeting of the Ladies of Charity at her home to see what could be done. He wrote her:

I have sent another priest and a brother, and fifty more livres. The pestilence is so virulent that the first four priests have all taken sick, and also the brother who accompanied them. I had to bring them back here, where two of them are still very sick. Oh, Madame, what a harvest to gather for heaven at this time when this misery is so close to our very doors! As scripture says, the coming of the Son of God was the downfall of some and the redemption of many. In some way, we can say the same of this war, which causes the loss of so many. Yet God uses this war to give his grace, salvation, and glory to others. We have reason to hope that you are in that number, as I pray to our Lord that you are.26

This charitable intervention by Monsieur Vincent to help the poor of Palaiseau was also the occasion when he helped the people of Etampes and other places near Paris, with the help of the Ladies of Charity of Paris, and some other persons of great piety. All these persons gained great merit by their involvement in these works of mercy, and their memory will never die.

This has been but a small sample of the charitable attempts of Monsieur Vincent to aid the poor as much as he could and in every way he could. When he did all that he could, and yet saw that his own resources and those of his friends were still insufficient, his last resource was the queen mother. He did not want to make a nuisance of himself, for it was well known that she was

generous in many other works of piety. Yet in the case of extreme necessity he would present her with the pressing needs of the poor, confident that he would get a hearing. He was never disappointed.

This charitable princess would open her arms, but even more, her heart, to help him. When she had money available she would give it to him. If money was lacking, she would give him other things to help out. Once she gave him a diamond worth seven thousand livres. Another time she gave him a beautiful set of earrings, which the Ladies of Charity sold for eighteen thousand livres. Although, through a sentiment of Christian humility, Her Majesty requested Monsieur Vincent not to reveal the source of his benefactions, he did not feel obliged to accede to her request. He said to her, "Madame, Your Majesty will please pardon me if I no longer keep secret such a marvelous example of charity. It is good, Madame, that all of Paris and even all of France should know of it. I feel obliged to speak of it wherever I go."

Monsieur Vincent held this truth, that in helping the poor he should be partial to the most abandoned. Following this maxim, he had a special love for abandoned children, since they were most in need and least able to help themselves. He had a tender love for these poor innocents, but it was as effective as it was affective. Speaking to his community once on this subject he said:

Is it not the duty of fathers to look after the needs of their children? Since God has put us in the place of their parents to save the lives of these children, to raise them, and to instruct them in saving knowledge, we must take care not to fail in a task so dear to him. After their own mothers have left them exposed on the doorsteps, if we too should neglect their care and education, what would become of them? Could we consent to see them all die, as used to happen in this great city of Paris?27

A well-respected person, aware of the efforts of Monsieur Vincent for these poor little creatures, and also aware of how even the most charitable ladies who had undertaken their care were losing heart because of the large expense involved, had this to say several years before Monsieur Vincent’s death: "God alone knows how many sighs and groans Monsieur Vincent raised to heaven in favor of these small children. Who can count the number of times he asked his Company to pray for them? Who can know his efforts to feed them as economically as possible? Who can tell of his care in these last years in having the Daughters of Charity visit the wet nurses in various villages? Or the visits by a brother for the same reason for more than six weeks in 1649?"

27. Abelly’s version differs considerably from CED XII:89.
Once it was reported to him that a priest of the Congregation had complained that the care of these abandoned children caused the great poverty of the house at Saint Lazare. He charged that it was in difficult straits and in danger of complete ruin, all because the alms received for the upkeep of the house were being diverted to the care of these children. He said that their needs seemed greater and more pressing than those of the community, and that those who had been contributing to the upkeep of Saint Lazare could not support both the children and the Congregation.

Monsieur Vincent replied to these complaints:

God will forgive me this failing, which is in keeping with the sentiments of the Gospel. What a lack of faith it is to believe that by looking after these poor and abandoned children our Lord will take less care of us. Don’t forget, he has promised to repay a hundredfold whatever is done in his name. Since our loving Savior told his disciples to let the little children come to him, can we reject them or abandon them when they come to us? What kindness he showed to children. He went so far as to take them in his arms, and bless them with his hands. Did he not on that occasion give us this as a rule of salvation by showing us that we must do the same if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven? To love these children and to care for them is in some way to become their fathers. To see to the needs of these abandoned children is to replace their fathers and mothers, or rather God himself, who said that even if a mother should forget her child, he would never forget. If our Lord still lived among us on earth, and if he came across these abandoned children, do you think he would pass them by? It would offend his divine goodness even to have such a thought. We would be unfaithful to his grace if after having been chosen by Providence to provide the corporal care and spiritual good of these poor abandoned children we would desert them, all because they are causing us too much trouble.

SECTION THREE

His Alms

The subject of this section will perhaps trouble some readers. They will wonder how the superior general of a congregation, on his own initiative
and without the consent of the members, could distribute so much of the wealth of the congregation to the poor. Even more, how could Monsieur Vincent do so? He was so humble, so deferential, and so committed to evangelical poverty, that, without the approval of the community, as we saw in Book One, he would not give even a modest sum to his own nephew who had traveled two hundred leagues to visit him at great cost to the meager resources of his family. If he had insisted on obtaining the express approval of the community for this expense, how, we wonder, could he give such abundant alms to the poor? This faithful servant of God often and generously helped all sorts of poor people at the expense of his community, as we shall see in these pages.

At first sight this appears somewhat surprising. Those favorably inclined to him might probably think that he acted through one of those extraordinary inspirations of the Holy Spirit which sometimes makes the saints in themselves more admirable in their practice of virtue rather than as models to imitate. This might be true here, and we might see in the life of Monsieur Vincent the extraordinary direction of the hand of God, which made him act with that divine prudence of Jesus Christ, so opposed to the wisdom of the flesh. Nevertheless, we still can consider some aspects of the case which make his conduct more understandable.

In the first place, we must recognize Monsieur Vincent not only as the superior general, but also as the source, the founder, and the organizer of this new congregation, founded on charity. While he lived it was still in its formative stages. After God, it was he who gave it being, form, and consistency. He prescribed its organization, employments, and functions. He accepted, taught, and perfected those who came to the Congregation. They always looked upon him as their true father and in turn Monsieur Vincent regarded them as his dear children. He could speak of them in imitation of the holy apostle: *Filioli quos iterum parturio donec Christus formetur in vobis* ['You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you'].

Since this was so, we should look upon him not merely as superior general, but rather as founder and father, using the goods of the family held jointly by him and his children. He controlled these goods during their minority and gave them away, not for any personal interests but for those of Jesus Christ, and in the service and relief of his brothers and sisters, the poor. Some rigorous legalist might point out that in any case he still should have obtained the consent of the children of the family. Yet he could be answered by saying that Monsieur Vincent possessed such a union of hearts with them

that he never even considered the necessity of consulting them or seeking their authorization for his activities. They willed what he willed. What he did was so good, so holy, and so conformed to the designs and orders of God that it would insult their virtue to think they disagreed with him in the least.

Besides, we are speaking here of the beginnings of a new company, with both its temporal and spiritual traditions not yet fully formed. It is not enough to organize a community outwardly. The interior spirit proper to its own end must also be formed and communicated to its members. One of the community’s chief ends, as we have said, was the evangelization of the poor, with the obligation of providing them all possible services and help. For this to happen, a spirit of compassion would have to be developed in the community, which would be characterized by a tenderness and love for the poor. Since the inspiration of the holy founder was that the members of the Company should expose and sacrifice their very lives, to the extent needed, to achieve the salvation of the poor, he was surely justified in distributing a good part of their temporal goods to these same poor, especially when this help contributed to their spiritual progress.

The state of public affairs at the beginning of the Congregation of the Mission was tragic: calamities and miseries of all kinds had overwhelmed most of the provinces of the kingdom and even all of Europe. The extreme poverty of the peasants of the countryside, and the villages overcome by the ravages of war and other misfortunes so moved the charitable heart of Monsieur Vincent that he did everything in his power to come to their aid. He appealed to the wealthy to show compassion and mercy. He persuaded them to contribute in proportion to the extreme conditions endured by countless poor people, many on the verge of perishing.

This prudent and faithful servant of Jesus Christ was well aware that actions speak louder than words. He could not have chosen a more powerful argument for help from others in the great works of charity which he practiced during his entire life than the example of what he himself had first done before recommending it to others. What made his example even more effective was that he went beyond what was merely reasonable. He and his followers took what they gave to the poor from their own resources. Far from lessening their commitment and love for the poor, this rather increased their determination to devote themselves completely to the spiritual help of these same poor people.

All this being true, let us examine just a small part of what this father of the poor gave to them. I say just a small part, since only God knows everything he did. His humility always sought to conceal his actions from others, since he acted solely for the love of God. He was far from imitating those whom Jesus Christ condemned in the Gospel: those who blew the
trumpet before giving alms, or used other devices to attract attention to what they had done for the poor. On the contrary, he used all his ingenuity to conceal his gifts. He never spoke of them, and was visibly embarrassed when others mentioned them. He incurred other heavy expenses in favor of the poor, either by sending his Missionaries to remote places to help them, or by paying the postage on letters addressed to him. These came either from distant provinces or from the poor slaves of Algiers, Tunis, Bizerte or elsewhere, and the cost amounted to great sums. He never spoke about these matters or took this expense into account. It was enough for him that God was aware of what he did and approved of it. If some of his charitable works became known, he would make light of them, saying it was simply a case of beggars giving their scraps and rags to other beggars.

He had established the Confraternity of Charity in the parish of Saint Laurent. Because this parish lay within the bounds of the Saint Lazare section of the city, he would donate two hundred livres each year to support this confraternity, as well as the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor in this parish. In addition, every Friday he would send two priests from Saint Lazare to visit and console the sick among the poor.

When poor persons living near Saint Lazare would die, even when he did not know them, he would provide a shroud for them if they did not have one. Once, after burying a poor woman at his expense, Monsieur Vincent received her husband into the house, where the man remained quite ill for a long time. He did the same for another man, caring for him until he died.

Once, meeting an almost naked man in the street near Saint Lazare, he at once gave him a garment. This was not unusual, for he often gave away shoes, a hat, or shirts, all at the expense of the house.

Each day he received two poor people at Saint Lazare. He had them dine with the community, after first giving them any spiritual instruction which they needed. Often it was observed that this friend of the poor, after greeting them with great affability, would help them up the steps to the refectory, and seat them beside himself. He would then see to it they were well taken care of, and would himself render little services to them.

Besides these two poor persons, each day he would distribute bread, soup, and meat to poor families who would come to the door of Saint Lazare. Two other practices that he had were to distribute bread and even money to poor peasants who came to the door no matter at what hour. Another distribution of bread and soup was made at a fixed hour three times a week for whomever might be passing by, regardless of where they came from. On all these occasions a short instruction would be given on some point of the catechism or on the duties of a Christian. After explaining the chief mysteries they
should know and believe, those receiving aid were taught how to pray, how
to live good lives despite their poverty, and how to bear their sufferings and
deprivations with patience. All those points were in keeping with their state
in life, and had been arranged by Monsieur Vincent himself.

Hundreds of these poor would always come for help, and sometimes the
number reached five or six hundred. He did have to stop distributing soup two
or three years before his death, because after the establishment of the general
hospital for the poor of Paris he was forbidden to do so. When the poor would
complain to him, “Father, did not God direct that alms should be given to the
poor?” he would reply, “Yes, it is true, my friends, but God has also
commanded that we should obey the magistrates.” Despite these prohibitions,
on the occasion of a particularly severe winter which brought many poor
families to the brink of disaster, he would distribute soup and bread each day.

During the time of troubles in Paris he had this daily distribution made
to nearly two thousand people, at a great cost to the house at Saint Lazare,
which still remains in debt because of this charity. At that time he was
obliged to be away from Paris for a long time, as we related in Book One.30
He was informed of the pillage, thefts, and losses committed by the eight
hundred soldiers quartered in Saint Lazare, but realizing the great suffering
of the poor, he did not lessen his care for them. He wrote to his assistant
telling him to continue this daily distribution of bread, using up to three
setiers of flour each day, although it was then exceedingly costly. It was
impossible to find wheat in Paris, no matter what you were willing to pay.
The charity of this true father of the poor was above all such considerations,
which would have deterred anyone less generous than he. The brother baker
of the house, in charge of the wheat, has declared that in three months he
used ten muids for making bread. We must admire God’s Providence, for
three months later, around Easter, the community did not have enough bread
to live on, and seemed on the point of starvation. Just at that moment a
settlement between the warring factions was reached, and passage to the
outside countryside was again allowed. By borrowing money, the commu-
nity was finally able to buy wheat. The care which divine goodness takes of
those who help the poor was thus shown for all to see.

A virtuous priest testified to these events.

We can see the great heart of Monsieur Vincent and his incom-
parable love for the poor by considering that when he learned of the
damage done to Saint Lazare by the soldiers, and the shortages
caused by the blockade of Paris, he directed the late Monsieur
Lambert, his assistant, to provide daily aid to the poor. The house
of Saint Lazare had to borrow sixteen to twenty thousand livres to

30. Ch. 39.
carry out these directives. Each day the missionaries distributed bread and provided two or three large cauldrons of soup for the poor, all as if the wheat cost the house nothing. This continued for several months, even after the settlement of the war, and fortunately several other communities and some rich persons have imitated it. This latter effect is not the least of the blessings owed to the charitable initiative of Monsieur Vincent for the relief of the poor. He has been their father and provider everywhere and always.

What is noteworthy is that he was not content to distribute alms to those who came to Saint Lazare seeking help. He even sent out his confreres, a priest and a brother, into the hovels and caves of Paris seeking out those in need, especially the sick. Since charity has neither measure nor limits, he directed his care to persons of all classes and nations.

In this regard, he learned of a group of Irish Catholics in Paris, exiled for their faith and reduced to great misery. He called in a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, a native of Ireland, and asked what might possibly be done to help these poor refugees. He said to the priest, “Is there no way we can bring them together, to console them in their suffering, and instruct them? They do not understand our language, and they seem so abandoned. My heart is stricken for I have great compassion for them.” The priest responded that he would do what he could. “God bless you,” replied Monsieur Vincent, “here are ten pistoles. Go in the name of God, to give them whatever consolation you can.” We should remark that this help was quite apart from what he also did for some Irish priests, which we will describe below.31

Once, a young man, who had served as a tailor, returned to his own region from Saint Lazare. Aware from experience of the great charity of Monsieur Vincent, he took the liberty of writing to him, at a time when he was preoccupied with affairs at court, to ask him to send a packet of one hundred needles from Paris. He took this request seriously, and saw to it that the needles were sent. In no way did he show that he thought it strange to be bothered by such a trifling request.

Once when returning to Saint Lazare he found several poor women at the door asking for an alms. He said he would find something to give them. No sooner had he entered the house, however, than he was taken up with several important and pressing matters of business so that he forgot the women at the door. As soon as he remembered, however, he brought the alms himself, and falling on his knees before them, begged their pardon for having forgotten them and for making them wait.

Once a poor woman asked an alms from Monsieur Vincent. He sent her a half-ecu, but she complained that in her great need this was not enough.

31. Sect. 5.
Without further ado he sent her another half-sou. Such events were not unusual with him.

A poor drayman who lost his horses had recourse to Monsieur Vincent, and asked for help in making up this loss. At once his charitable benefactor gave him one hundred livres.

A tenant farmer of the community of Saint Lazare found himself unable to pay what he owed. Monsieur Vincent responded by giving him something himself. It is impossible to know how often he helped the farmers, tenants, or other debtors of the community who were unable to meet their obligations. He preferred to make new loans and risk losing everything, rather than to demand payment from them.

Through a long-term lease a farmer held a property belonging to a hospital, but being unable to pay his rent, he was evicted. After his death, he left his wife and children in great poverty. Monsieur Vincent took the two small boys into the house at Saint Lazare. He cared for them there for nearly ten years, and used the opportunity to have them taught a trade so they could earn their living. He also contributed to the support of the poor widow during this same time.

Monsieur Vincent's reputation as a man of great charity attracted a large number of people to Saint Lazare from Paris and elsewhere. Some had been prosperous or had come from respectable families. Some of these came to him in confidence to tell him of their problems, but others were ashamed at having to accept alms, and instead asked only for a loan. He gave something to everyone, to some more, to others less, often down to the last sou of the community's money. On these occasions he would borrow from Mademoiselle Le Gras, so as to have something to give to those who came to him.

There were a few others to whom he gave some money every month. One man showed up shortly before Monsieur Vincent's death, saying that for seventeen years he had been coming for these alms, which amounted to two ecus every month. He had come to regard it as a sum owed him, almost as a regular income.

One day while returning in a carriage from the country to Paris, Monsieur Vincent saw a poor person along the road. He was all covered with sores and had an otherwise revolting appearance. He had the poor man step into the carriage, and took him to his destination in Paris. He often did similar things, particularly during the winter when he would meet older or handicapped persons. He would have them get in the carriage with him, which through humility he called "my infamy," out of his sense that he was unworthy of this convenience. His attitude was that whatever he had, whether possessions or advantages, ought to be shared with the poor, so great was his love, tenderness, and compassion for them.
When he saw poor sick persons lying along the streets or lanes he would go up to them to find out what was wrong or what they needed, so he could provide some relief for them. When he saw they were not pretending but were really sick, he would offer to take them to the hospital in Paris. If he were not in his carriage, he would have them taken there. Not content to pay those who transported them, he would give the sick person an alms as well.

One day while riding through Paris he saw a young boy in distress. He stopped the carriage, went to the boy to find out what his trouble was. When the boy showed him that he had cut his hand badly, Monsieur Vincent took him at once to a doctor. He then waited until he was treated, paid the doctor, and in parting gave a bit of money to the poor child.

There was an old soldier people called "The Sieve" because of the number of wounds he had sustained in the war. He showed up one day at Saint Lazare knowing no one, but since he had heard of the charity of Monsieur Vincent he felt free to ask if he might stay at the house for several days. This was willingly accorded him, but several days later he fell sick. Monsieur Vincent moved him to a room with a stove. For two months he took care of him, and even assigned a brother to look after him until he was completely cured.

These are but a few samples of the charity which this holy man showed to the poor. We should not be surprised at these. Though he was extraordinarily generous in their behalf, what he gave came from his heart. He was even prepared to risk his life for the good of their souls. He wished nothing so much as to provide every sort of service to them, for the love of Jesus Christ whom he honored in them. He looked on the poor as true images of that infinite charity which led our divine Savior to forego all riches. He became poor for our sakes, so that, as the apostle says, we might become rich through his poverty.32

SECTION FOUR

His Affectionate Regard for the Prelates of the Church

We have already seen in Book Two some of the ways Monsieur Vincent sought to help various bishops, and at the beginning of this chapter we touched on his great love and respect for their sacred persons.33 We must

32. 2 Cor 8:9.
admit, however, that all we have said or could say on this subject would fall still far short of the full extent of his efforts. We cannot find the words to express adequately his veneration, respect, and love for prelates of the Church whom he recognized and honored as collaborators on earth of Jesus Christ and the successors of the apostles. For this reason we have thought it best to allow him to speak for himself, and to let him explain his own disposition of soul in these instances. We have taken extracts from only some of the letters which have come to our attention, among the many which he wrote at various times to many bishops in various parts of the kingdom.

A bishop of great merit, since deceased, whom Monsieur Vincent had earlier recommended for the episcopacy, wrote of the first fruits of his work in his diocese. Monsieur Vincent congratulated him:

Who could fail to recognize that it is a blessing from God for the diocese of N. to have a bishop who brings peace to souls, especially in a place that has not seen a bishop or had a visitation for a hundred years. Thus, would it be possible, Your Excellency, to esteem you enough, or to have an adequate respect for your person? May I say only that you are truly a gift from God, a bishop filled with grace, a totally apostolic man. You make Jesus Christ known to even the most desolate people. May his holy name be blessed forever, and may he confer on you many years on earth, to be crowned by a glorious eternity in heaven. There you will be received by the great army of the blessed souls who are there because of you and who will welcome you as their second savior after Jesus Christ.  

Another bishop was contemplating resigning from his diocese because he felt incapable of directing it. He wrote to Monsieur Vincent several times, asking him to help find a worthy successor. Monsieur Vincent replied in these terms:

Your Excellency, your letters have awakened in me such respect and affection for you that I have, if I dare say so, your request ever before my eyes. I scarcely recognize the person you describe when you refer to me. You, Your Excellency, are as far above the one to whom you write to as the mountain is above the valley, but wishing to be at your service I must do what you request, on this as on every other occasion.

He wrote to another bishop who, because of some difficulties he wished to avoid was likewise considering resigning his position:

Your Excellency, I cannot tell you the sorrow I felt at hearing of your illness. Only God knows the tenderness of heart that I experi-

34. CED III:532-33.
35. CED IV:105-06.
ence in everything concerning you. My consolation is that your illness has a remedy and, I hope, a cure. I too had a similar problem some time ago. I lost feeling in one of my fingers, but this has since cleared up. May it please God, Your Excellency, that you be preserved for the good of your diocese, which I hear you are thinking of leaving. If I may say so, taking this liberty because of your kindness, it seems to me that you should let things remain as they are for fear that God will not be honored in your resignation. Where is the man who would be able to walk in your footsteps or rival you in your reputation? If such a one can be found, well and good, but in our troubled times I think it is too much to expect. You, Your Excellency, have not experienced in your episcopacy difficulties as great as Saint Paul did in his, yet he carried the burden until death. None of the apostles walked away from their responsibilities, except when finally called to receive their crowns in heaven. I would be too bold, Your Excellency, to recall these examples to you, did not God himself invite you to imitate them and if the liberty I take did not flow from the great respect and boundless affection the Lord has given me for your sacred person. 36

On another occasion, a worthy bishop wrote, outlining some twenty outstanding difficulties on which he wished Monsieur Vincent's advice. The latter began his reply in these words:

Alas, Your Excellency, what are you doing? To write to me about so many important matters, to me who am a poor unlettered soul, hateful to both God and man because of my past sins and present unworthiness. I am unsuited for the honor your own humility has conferred on me, and I would keep quiet were it not that you have bidden me speak. Here then are my poor thoughts on the matters you brought to my attention, which I offer simply with the greatest respect. I cannot begin better than to thank God for all the graces he has granted you, begging him to further his own glory by bestowing success on you and your ministry which you carry out with such extraordinary zeal and devotion.

I am sure that you will be happy to know that your reverend brother has just finished a retreat with our priests at Richelieu. The superior there told me that your brother had greatly edified the small community there by his devotion, wisdom, and modesty. He has experienced such satisfaction at the exercises of piety that he plans to celebrate the feast of Christmas with them. Since I know well, Your Excellency, that nothing is closer to Your Excellency's heart

than that your close relatives give themselves to God, I pass along this information to you. I know that you will be pleased to hear it. I, too, rejoice with you. I realize also that since you are working so hard to bring about God’s kingdom in your diocese, he is doing the same for your own family.37

Responding to another prelate who wrote expressing similar difficulties, he wrote:

I have received the letter which you did me the honor of writing. I have read and reread it, Your Excellency, not to reflect on the question you raise but to admire your judgment which appears to me to be more than human. Only the Spirit of God dwelling in your sacred person could lead you to the combination of justice and charity such as you propose in this affair. It remains only for me to thank God for the sacred light he has given you, and for the regard you have shown to me, your humble servant. The problems you bring to my attention are so far beyond me that I think of them only with great hesitation. It is only because I wish to obey your request that I can bring myself to reply.38

On one occasion Monsieur Vincent became painfully aware that a bishop with whom he was friendly was involved in a lawsuit. He suggested a possible compromise to conclude the affair and at the end of the letter he wrote:

In the name of God, Bishop, pardon me if I get involved in your affairs not knowing if my initiatives here are agreeable to you. Perhaps you will not be pleased. It cannot be helped because I acted only out of my regard for you, and to see you free of the cares and distraction these annoying affairs must cause you. I would very much like to see you return with tranquility of mind to the direction and sanctification of your diocese. For this grace I often offer to God my poor prayers.

One thing pains me deeply, Bishop, and that is that you have been described to the council as a bishop so given to litigation that this is a common impression in many minds. For myself I admire our Savior Jesus Christ who disapproved of lawsuits. He did endure one, which he did not win. I do not doubt, Your Excellency, that if you are involved in litigation, it is only because you are defending your rights. I am sure that all the while you also preserve your interior peace amid all the contradictions of these affairs, looking solely to God and not to the world. You are committed to pleasing

37. CED IV:165-66.
38. CED IV:171.
his divine Majesty without regard to the remarks of others. For this I thank his divine goodness, for this trait is found only in those souls intimately united to him. But I must also tell you, Bishop, that this unfortunate opinion which the council has of you is likely to do you harm, and prevent your getting what you ask.39

This good bishop did not accept the compromise suggested by Monsieur Vincent in this letter. Monsieur Vincent did not argue the point, but wrote later in these terms:

Your Excellency, I humbly beg of you to allow me once more to suggest another compromise. I know well that you do not doubt for a minute the affection of my poor heart for you. Yet you may take offense at my lack of intelligence, and at my insistence in presenting a second compromise when the first has already been rejected.

Nevertheless, this compromise does not come from myself, but from the court secretary whom I have seen for the last two days to plead your cause. I spoke of the graces God has given you, and through you to your diocese. He replied that he was your humble servant, and that of all the people in the world he was the one who respected and esteemed you the most. In this spirit he asked me to tell you that if you would accept his advice you could settle all your difficulties. He gave me several reasons for this, among others that it would be to your benefit for a great prelate to settle the case in this way, especially in what relates to your clergy who are moved by a spirit of revolt and by their annoyance at petty grievances. He is aware of the sentiment of the council, and fears the probable outcome of these events. Several of the members of council are unaware of your saintly life and the noble motives which guide your decisions. They may thus decide against you and your dignity in this case. Bishop, please excuse my boldness in writing. My suggestions come not from me but from your own court advocate, one of the wisest men of the times and one of the best judges in the whole world. There are more people who come to him for advice than come even to the heads of the civil courts, and anyone would think himself happy to have him as an advocate. I pray God that he will restore peace to your diocese and contentment to your spirit. You know the influence you exercise over me, and the singular love God has given me for your service. If you think it proper to ask me to render you any help at all, I shall do so with all my heart.40

39. CED II:434-35.
40. CED II:435-36.
Monsieur Vincent wrote to congratulate a saintly bishop who had taken
the trouble to attend the ordination retreats every day and to give a confer­
ence:

I thank Your Excellency most humbly for the honor you have
bestowed on your seminarians by your presence and instructions
during the ordination retreats. I thank God for the favor he has
bestowed on those privileged to hear you, and to see a bishop in the
exercise of his ecclesiastical office. I hope they will carry the
memory of this all their lives, and that they will continue to benefit
from it for many years. Besides, I have received the letter with
which Your Excellency honored me, first with joy because it comes
from your hands, but second, with sorrow since it also speaks of
what happened at your synod. In this, Bishop, I appreciate the action
of God who thereby tests the virtue of one of his greatest servants,
but also I admire the good use Your Excellency has made of this
trial. I pray the divine Goodness to strengthen you more and more
in this matter, so that your patience will bring all this to a happy
end, to the shame of those who dared oppose you. 41

Several people were complaining to the king that a certain bishop was
not fulfilling the duties of his office. The king issued a lettre de cachet. 42
Monsieur Vincent became aware of this, and of the anguish it caused the
bishop in question. He therefore wrote to console him:

Your Excellency, I am so sorry to hear that you have received a
letter from the court. I was greatly astonished to hear about it. I hope
that I may find myself able to speak in your defense. Be assured
that I will use every opportunity to do so when God will give me
the means. I have always tried to make known, in every place and
circumstance, the full esteem and reverence I have for your sacred
person. Every time I consider the help you have been to our poor
missionaries in their efforts for the instruction and salvation of your
people I am moved anew. Our fathers are happy and content to work
under your kind direction. 43

He wrote to an archbishop on another subject:

Your Excellency, I blush for shame each time I read the letter
you did me the honor of writing, and more so at the way Your
Lordship abases himself before a poor swineherd who is now a
miserable old man filled with sin. I regret that I have given you
cause to plan to come here by refusing your request for additional

41. CED IV: 194.
42. A letter sealed by the king, giving permission for some action to be carried out without publicity.
43. CED V: 50-51.
men. You may be assured that I wrote not from any lack of respect or submission, but solely because of the impossibility of obeying your wishes at this time. Please give us a six-month delay, and we shall then be greatly pleased to satisfy your request, which at present it did not please God to allow. In God's name, Your Excellency, please excuse our poverty. Save your visit to Paris for a more important occasion. It would be a blessing of God to receive Your Lordship, but I would be very embarrassed to have you go to all that trouble for no reason. Your Excellency knows well that no one in the world is more disposed to receive your orders than we, and me particularly, whom God has placed under your sovereign rule.  

He wrote to another archbishop about some of his people enslaved by the Barbary pirates:

Your Excellency, I have received your letter with the respect and reverence owed to one of the greatest and most worthy prelates of the kingdom. I have a great desire to fulfill all that you were pleased to ask of me. I thank God for your desire to deliver your people from this slavery. You show an immense charity in a work most agreeable to God, to deliver them from this imminent peril, and you give a good example to other bishops in going after the stray sheep and bringing them back safely to the flock. Many are living in this dangerous condition. For our part, we are happy to respond to your request and will send some of our priests to help ransom the slaves. I have written today to the consuls of Tunis and Algiers asking for passports so that they can go there in safety, as you have asked.  

Since Monsieur Vincent was so concerned about seeing the Church served by good and holy bishops, he was disturbed at seeing some persons so zealous in their commitment to those afflicted by the plague that they endangered their own lives and thereby risked depriving the Church of their services. He felt moved for the sake of the greater good of all to write to them to ask them to temper their zeal. One of these zealous bishops replied that he would not spare himself, and that he was willing to die in the ministry if necessary. Monsieur Vincent admitted his error in having suggested that he moderate his activities, and congratulated him for his fervor and zeal in his ministry.

Your Excellency, I did suggest moderation. This was only to preserve your service for a longer time and to avoid depriving your diocese and the entire Church of the incomparable blessing of your care. If my thought is not in keeping with your own ideas, I am not

44. CED VIII:320.
45. CED V:146-47.
surprised. The human sentiments inspiring me are far beneath the eminent state to which the love of God has brought you. I am still too earthly, but you are above nature. I think less of deploring my own faults than of giving thanks to God for the holy dispositions he has given you. I beg of you most humbly, Your Excellency, to beseech him not to give me these same dispositions but rather only some small portion of them, perhaps even a few of the crumbs which fall from your table. 46

Before finishing this chapter we must consider another letter of Monsieur Vincent written to a holy bishop who wished to serve in person the plague-stricken. He first, however, wanted to take counsel of Monsieur Vincent before becoming personally involved. He received the following response, which may serve as useful advice in similar situations:

Your Excellency, I cannot express the anguish I feel at the disease that has overtaken your city. The confidence you have placed in me overwhelms me. I pray with all my heart that God may turn away this scourge from your diocese, and fill me with his spirit in replying to your request. My humble thought, Your Excellency, is that a prelate who finds himself in this predicament ought to conduct himself in such a way as to attend to the spiritual and temporal welfare of all the people of his diocese, especially during times of public calamity. He ought not be tied down to one place or to one occupation, nor to any situation that would limit his availability to others. The reason is that he is not bishop of only this or that place but of his entire diocese. He should divide this burden as much as possible. But if it is not possible to see to the salvation of souls by the help of pastors or other clergy, then I think he is obliged to risk even his life for their salvation. He should entrust the care of the others to God’s adorable Providence.

This, Your Excellency, is what one of the greatest prelates of this kingdom did, Bishop N., who urged his pastors to endanger themselves for the welfare of their parishioners. When the plague would break out in a particular place he would immediately go there to encourage his priests in their service to the people. He would advise and instruct them on the best way to alleviate the sufferings of the afflicted. He did not visit the sick in person, however, unless he found that he could not provide care for them from the local parishes. Saint Charles Borromeo acted otherwise. This appears, however, to have been by a special inspiration of God, or else because the plague was within the city of Milan itself.

46. CED IV:31.
Because it is difficult to do in a large diocese what can more easily be done in a small one, it seems, Your Excellency, that it would be good to plan on visiting the regions where the sick are, to encourage your pastors. If this proves impossible or if you are in danger of capture by the army in this time of war, you might send the archdeacons or other clergy for the same purpose. As soon as you learn of the epidemic striking another place you might send other priests there to encourage the pastors and to give some physical help to the stricken.

The queen of Poland learned that the plague had stricken the city of Krakow, and that as soon as a case of this illness was discovered, the homes of the plague stricken were quarantined. This, of course, led to both the well and the sick greatly suffering from hunger and the cold. The queen sent a large sum by two of our Missionaries, with orders to look after the feeding of the victims in their homes, but these priests were careful not to come in contact with the sick.

Some religious ran this risk by administering the sacraments to the sick. The queen may not have stopped this scourge, but at least she greatly diminished the ravages of the plague, and greatly consoled the people of that city, the capital of the kingdom. The city of Warsaw, where the king now lives, has also been stricken. One of our priests informed me that he had directed two of our Missionaries, a priest and a brother, to give the same help there.

The poor stricken people of the countryside are for the most part abandoned by all and in great need of help, particularly food. It would be something worthy of Your Excellency’s piety, if you could send alms to all the stricken places, so that the good pastors could provide bread, wine, and even some meat to the poor people. They should be alerted to the time and place where the distribution will take place. If there is question about the honesty of certain pastors, the distribution could be handled by neighboring pastors, or by some worthy laymen of the parish. You can usually find some persons in every parish for this service, especially if they do not have to come in direct contact with the sick. I hope, Your Excellency, that if God blesses this work, our Savior will be much glorified by Your Excellency’s life and even death, and by the edification your people will experience by all this. The one essential thing is that you must not shut yourself up out of harm’s way.

The Missionaries I have sent you, Bishop, have told me that the Lord has given them the grace of committing themselves to the care of the plague-stricken, either those in their own neighborhood, or
all over the city, as obedience and necessity will require. I have written them to be at your call, and I beg you most humbly to dispose of us as your great goodness will deem appropriate.

Many religious have offered to serve the sick, so I don’t doubt that you will discover some in your city. Perhaps you will find enough to take care of the city itself. You might even be able to send some to the country places as well, instead of the archdeacons and priests I spoke of earlier. You will see, Your Excellency, by the broadside I enclose, what the archbishop of Paris has done to help the stricken people there. It will give you some ideas on how you might help your own people.47

After receiving this letter, this good prelate wrote to Monsieur Vincent as follows:


Upon receiving the offer of the services of your priests to serve the plague-stricken, I must say that since they work for the entire diocese, I shall not expose them to the danger of infection without an extreme necessity. I shall follow your advice in all points. I shall be careful myself not to risk danger unless I see clearly that such is God’s will. I had put off doing anything until I had heard from you, but now the time for reflection is past, and I shall put into action what you suggest.48

SECTION FIVE

His Regard for Priests and Other Members of the Clergy

To appreciate Monsieur Vincent’s high regard for priests and other members of the clergy we have only to recall all that he did for them, as we have made abundantly clear in Books One and Two. It is not necessary to produce any other evidence or testimony. We will, however, examine the results of the ordination retreats, the spiritual conferences, the retreats, seminaries, and all the other undertakings which this great servant of God initiated for the reformation, sanctification, and perfection of the clerical state. Besides these works in general, many particular events deserve to be

47. CED IV:520-23.
48. CED IV:528.
reported to help us better understand his respect and love for all those who ministered in the Church.

In this sentiment he wrote one day to the superior of one of his houses, a seminary for clerics:

I greet you with tenderness and love for you personally and all your family. I pray our Lord will bless them abundantly and that this blessing will fall upon the seminary as well. May all those who study there, in whom you strive to inculcate the priestly spirit, be filled with this grace. I do not plead for them, for you already are well aware that they are the treasure of the Church.49

Speaking to another priest on the same subject, he said:

How happy you are to serve our Lord as the instrument for providing good priests. You are a person who can both enlighten and inflame your students. You fulfill the role of the Holy Spirit, who alone enlightens and warms hearts. Rather, the Holy Spirit fulfills this function through you. He resides and works in you, not only to help you to live the divine life, but also to bring that same life to birth in these gentlemen, your students. They are called to the highest possible ministry upon earth, which is to imitate the two great virtues of Jesus Christ, worship of his Father, and charity for others. Consider then, Monsieur, if any earthly occupation is more necessary or more desirable than yours. For myself, I do not know of any, and I imagine God has favored you with this same appreciation since you give yourself so completely to your ministry. God has given you his grace to ensure success in your work. Humble yourself before him, always have full confidence in his goodness so that you may become united to him.50

The regard Monsieur Vincent had for the clergy can be seen by the courteous way he treated all other religious communities, and the way he tried to duplicate these in other places as the opportunity presented itself. In this regard he once received an urgent letter from a worthy priest who had set up a community of priests in his benefice in Anjou. The letter requested several priests of the Mission to help in this attempt, but Monsieur Vincent found it impossible to comply. He sent the following reply:

The Spirit of God has evidently shed his graces abundantly upon you. Zeal and charity have taken deep root in your soul, and nothing stands in your way to work for the greater glory of God within your benefice, both for the present and future.

May it please the divine goodness, Monsieur, to prosper your

49. CED V:382.
50. CED VI:393-94.
good intentions and bring them to a happy fulfillment. I thank you from my heart for the patience you show toward us who are unable to accept the honor or the financial arrangements you offer, nor to respond to your expectations. I hope, Monsieur, that you will be able to find satisfaction elsewhere. I don’t know exactly where you might seek this help, because I doubt if the fathers of Saint Sulpice or those of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet would give you some priests. These are two saintly communities. They do great good in the Church and produce many good results, but the first is committed to seminaries in the main cities, and the second is taken up with so many forms of service to the Church that I doubt they would be able to help you on such short notice. I think, however, that it would be good to send your request to them, since both are more suited and proper than ourselves to begin and sustain the work you have so much at heart.51

He once wrote to a highly placed woman to persuade her to devote to the seminary established by the priests of Saint Sulpice the revenue of a legacy left by her predecessors for the training of good priests.

If you apply this legacy here, Madame, you may be certain that it will be carried out in full accord with the wishes of the donors for the advancement of the clerical state. To be convinced of this you may see the good done at Saint Sulpice itself. You can expect the same in this new location, for the community is animated by the same spirit, and has but one goal, the greater glory of God.52

Not by words alone did Monsieur Vincent show his esteem for religious institutions or individuals among the clergy. He was always disposed to welcome, console, or serve all sorts of clerics, according to their status and needs. It was enough for someone to be a priest or to have the external marks of a cleric to receive a favorable reception from the servant of God. He used boundless charity in finding employment for priests who appealed to him. For some who were capable, he found positions as pastors or other benefices. Others he placed as chaplains to bishops or in noble families. For still others he was able to find positions as assistants in the parishes of smaller towns, or as confessors or chaplains of religious houses or in hospitals. For all clerics, great or small, he showed a great esteem and affection. He urged the men of his own Congregation to have a great regard for all clerics, to speak well of them, especially when in the pulpit. One day he showed how sensitive he was on this point. He traveled from Saint Lazare to a parish some five or

52. CED VI:175.
six leagues away to beg pardon of the clerics there for the hasty words said by one of his own priests.

It was once reported that when a certain priest had fallen into some great difficulty Monsieur Vincent did all he could to straighten out the problem. He even wrote to Rome on his behalf, and provided a place for him to stay while awaiting the absolution from there. Later he found a way to provide for his future needs.

Another priest was sent to Saint Lazare because of some great sacrilege. Monsieur Vincent spoke to him so convincingly and so mildly that he was deeply moved. He was allowed to remain at Saint Lazare for several weeks at the expense of the house until he and his bishop were finally reconciled.

Another cleric took sick at the seminary of Bons Enfants, but wanted to receive a costly treatment beyond what he was able to pay for, or for that matter, beyond what he needed. The missionaries at the seminary were displeased and wanted him sent away, but Monsieur Vincent would have none of it. With his usual charity he insisted that the cleric be supplied with whatever he requested at the expense of the seminary, even though this was not strictly required by his condition.

Another priest fell sick in this same house, but quite unlike the previous priest he made no demands. He realized his inability to pay for his care, and feared that he might become a burden for the house. Monsieur Vincent heard of this, visited him, and assured him that he must not be concerned about money. There were chalices and other sacred vessels in the house which he would willingly sell rather than deprive him of anything he needed.

Another priest, previously unknown to Monsieur Vincent, was referred to him as being sick and in need. Monsieur Vincent received him with great charity, and housed and nursed him until he regained his health.

Yet another priest came to Saint Lazare to make a retreat but fell sick while there. Monsieur Vincent took every imaginable care of him. He recovered after a lengthy illness, and even received a breviary and cassock from his benefactor, together with ten ecus to help him over the next few days.

Another clergyman stopping by Saint Lazare for a single night’s lodging was welcomed, although poorly dressed and unknown to anyone. The next morning he left without saying good-bye to anyone, having made off with a cassock and a long mantle. It was immediately suggested that he should be followed and the stolen clothes returned, but Monsieur Vincent would not allow it. Instead, he said that the man must obviously have had great need of these things if he went so far as to steal them. He further said that rather than having him bring back the missing articles, they should take others to give to him.
Another poor priest found himself needing to take a trip, but had no money to cover the expense, nor the necessary clothes. Monsieur Vincent gave the man what he asked, even a pair of boots, and twenty ecus besides.

Another priest told us himself that he once came to Paris on some business matters, but not knowing anyone in the city, he had to spend the night in a tavern. Monsieur Vincent found out about this, sent to find where he was staying, and brought him to Saint Lazare. He stayed there nearly a month at the expense of the community until his business was completed.

A good clergyman of the diocese of Tours was involved in a lawsuit in Paris that he felt obliged to pursue to redeem his personal honor. He contacted Monsieur Vincent as the most helpful person of all the clergy of Paris on whom he could rely. He wrote that without Monsieur Vincent's help he could not come to the city, nor hire a lawyer to plead his cause. Monsieur Vincent replied that he knew of just the lawyer to help out, and would pay for his services. He also provided lodging and board in Paris during this whole affair which lasted over a year, all at the expense of the house of Saint Lazare. The lawsuit was finally concluded in favor of the pastor, a good, honest man.

This great respecter of the priesthood of Jesus Christ helped restore, largely by his kindly attitude toward them, several clerics who had fallen into serious difficulties. He was helpful in removing them from occasions of sin, and provided for their pensions and subsistence. For several years, he even supported an Italian priest who was a bit unbalanced, and who had taught faulty doctrine in various places.

Another priest of Paris, a confessor to a group of women religious, fell sick. Monsieur Vincent had three clerics take his place during his illness which lasted three entire years, so that he could retain his rights to the stipends involved.

Another priest would occasionally come from quite a distance to seek some aid from Monsieur Vincent, since his own region was entirely devastated by the wars. The procurator urged Monsieur Vincent to tell this priest that he should no longer come this long way. Alms would be sent to him if he were in severe need. Monsieur Vincent replied: Non alligabis os bovi trituranti ["You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain"], which implied that he preferred to leave this poor priest at liberty to come as often as he wanted, to ask for help.

Lastly, the great charity he displayed toward all clerics encouraged all poor priests to come to him as their father, full of confidence in him. Since they came from all sides, from France and elsewhere, hardly a day passed that someone did not seek his aid. Those who appealed most to his heart

53. 1 Cor 9:9, citing Deut 25:4.
were the priests from Ireland, refugees in France because of their religion. Not only did he seek help for them from people he knew, but he also gave much from the resources of Saint Lazare for the relief of their needs. The priests of the house would often contribute something from the stipend Monsieur Vincent gave them each month. Over several years he supported a poor blind Irish priest and provided for a young boy to look after him. Besides the money he gave or solicited from his friends, he invited him and his young helper to his table whenever they came to Saint Lazare, which happened often. Moreover, he became aware of some younger Irish priests in Paris who were trying to complete their studies, even though they had no means of support. He arranged for them to transfer to some other provinces, where they could live more reasonably than in Paris. He contacted some of his friends in these outlying areas, and they helped in the support of these exiles. Besides all this, he provided the money to allow them to move to the provinces.

Monsieur Vincent’s concern was not limited to the clerics who came to Paris to seek his help. He would help other pastors and priests, especially those in the regions devastated by war. He would mainly send priests of the Mission to help out in their most pressing needs, and send whatever was required for divine service, and especially for the holy sacrifice of the mass. He supplied, to sick and well alike, the clothes, cassocks and everything else required for staying alive in those troubled times. He did all this by collecting alms from many charitable people, and made it a scrupulous obligation to distribute carefully everything he had received.

Concerning this, one day a priest of the Mission was traveling in Champagne on some business when the pastor of a town met him and asked him who he was. When he learned that the traveler was a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, he publicly embraced him. Then he brought him to his home, and he recounted the great spiritual and temporal gifts the whole region had received from the charity of Monsieur Vincent. As for himself, he showed his visitor the very cassock he was wearing, and said, *Et hac me veste contexit* [*And he clothed me with this garment.*] These were the same words our Lord had earlier said to Saint Martin after he had given his cloak to a poor beggar.\(^{54}\)

We could add to this recital of Monsieur Vincent’s charity toward clerics his regard for religious as well. He had a singular respect and love for them, which became evident whenever a religious would come to visit Saint Lazare. They would be received as an angel from heaven. He would often throw himself at their feet, asking for their blessing, and in humility would not rise until he had received it. On these occasions he showed great

\(^{54}\) Cited from the fourth lesson from matins of the saint’s feast, November 11.
hospitality toward his visitors, doing them all sorts of little services. In turn, he wanted his priests to act this same way. In this matter he often recommended them to esteem and respect all other orders and religious communities. He said that they should not allow the least envy, jealousy, or any other sentiment contrary to the humility and charity of Jesus Christ to enter their minds. He wanted them always to speak of religious with respect and love. In a word he wanted his Congregation to look only for the good in other groups, and to praise publicly all the marvels they were accomplishing.

One day, when one of his priests asked him how he should act toward some religious whom he thought had behaved poorly toward himself, he said:

You ask me, how you should act toward these good religious who have opposed you. Here is what I answer: you should try to serve them on every occasion that presents itself. Every time you meet them, show them that you are well disposed toward them. You should visit them from time to time. Never take a stand against them. Don’t interfere in their affairs, except to defend them. Speak of them only on first-hand knowledge. Say nothing from the pulpit or in private that could cause them the least pain. In short, do all you can. Have others do the same, in words and deeds, to do all the good you can for them, even if they do not reciprocate. This is what I wish that we all do, and further, we should make it a duty to honor and serve them as often as we can.55

The charity of Monsieur Vincent toward religious was made known too by the good advice he gave when asked, as he was on several occasions. Among other incidents is the case of a religious of a distinguished order who was thinking of leaving his present situation to enter another order. He first thought was to ask Monsieur Vincent’s opinion, since he regarded him as an enlightened and charitable person. The response of Monsieur Vincent was as follows:

I have received your letter with respect, most reverend Father, but even more so with confusion. You have sent it to the person recognized by everyone as the most earthly and least spiritual of all men. Be this as it may, I send you my thoughts, not by way of advice, but only because of the solicitude our Lord wishes us to have for our neighbor. I am consoled to note the attraction you have for perfect union with our Savior, and how you have cooperated with this attraction, and with the tenderness of the divine goodness for you. I recognize the great difficulties and contradictions you have experienced, the other spiritual states you have passed through, and

55. CED VII:156-58.
finally, the great attraction you have for that teacher of the spiritual life, Saint Theresa.

With all of this, I think, Father, that you will have more security if you remain in the common life of your present order, under the direction of your religious superior, rather than pass to another, even if it should be more holy. First, because of the maxim that a religious ought to strive to acquire the spirit of his order, lest he have solely its habit and not its spirit. Since your order is recognized as being among the most perfect in the Church, you have a great obligation to persevere, to work to gain its spirit, practicing those things that will help you attain it. Second, another maxim has it that the spirit of our Savior is marked by meekness and kindness. Nature and the evil spirit, on the other hand, act harshly and shrilly. It appears to me in all that you tell me that your way of acting is just that, and that you hold too firmly to your own opinions against those of your superiors, even to what your own temperament inclines you to. All things considered, Father, I would think that you ought to give yourself anew to our Savior. You should renounce your own spirit to accomplish his will in the state to which his divine Providence has called you.\(^56\)

Another religious, a doctor in theology, had a dispute with his congregation, and wanted to bring his complaint to Rome. He sought the help of Monsieur Vincent as intermediary, but this is the reply he received:

I am sympathetic, Father, at what you must bear. I pray that our Lord will deliver you from this burden, or give you strength to bear it. Since you bear it in a good cause you might console yourself that you are among the blessed who suffer persecution for justice’s sake. Be patient, Father, and place your trust in our Lord who allows you to be tried. He will see to it that the congregation in which he had placed you, like a leaky boat, will bring you happily to port. I cannot beseech God, as you requested, that he help you pass to another order, for it seems that this is not his will. There are crosses everywhere, and your advanced age should urge you to avoid those you would find in such a change of state. As to the help you asked to obtain a rescript, that is another matter. I most humbly beg you to dispense me from the obligation of presenting your propositions to Rome.\(^57\)

Monsieur Vincent’s same respect for the religious state also made him sensitive to the plight of those women religious he encountered living

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\(^56\) CED IV:576-77.
\(^57\) CED IV:124-25.
outside of their convents for whatever reason. He tried with great gentleness to have them return to their own houses, but if this was not possible, at least to go to some other convent or monastery. He wrote to an abbess on this matter: Madame, I make bold to ask you to receive in your abbey one of your own religious. She was the prioress of N., but now cannot live there because of the misery of the times. She is in need, subject to reproach and the ridicule of the world, and of the soldiers. Perhaps, Madame, you have reasons for not wishing to take her back, or at least it would be difficult for you to do so. Even so, I felt I must write, for charity obliges me to do so on behalf of a person like this. She hopes for your acceptance. Living outside her “center,” I mean to say outside her monastery, she is not at ease, and feels unsafe. If it should be that she cannot return, I most humbly request that you contribute something for her upkeep, should we have to place her in a boarding house in this city. In God’s name, Madame, forgive me for making this suggestion to you.\footnote{CED IV:123-24.}

If we were obliged to speak of all the expressions of esteem, and all the services Monsieur Vincent rendered to religious men and women, a whole volume would be needed. It suffices to say that he never let an opportunity pass to help or serve them. There is hardly any particular act or charitable function that he did not do in their favor. He made it obvious to all that he cherished, honored, helped, served, and protected them to the full extent of his ability. He covered their faults, published their virtues, and praised their state in life. By a loving humility, all the more praiseworthy because it is so rare, he portrayed his own Congregation as the least of all others, to make theirs shine forth even more. He wanted his own community to think of themselves as the least of all the congregations.

**SECTION SIX**

*His Charity Toward the Members of His Own Congregation*

We have seen in the previous parts of this book how charitable Monsieur Vincent was. Who can doubt that this virtue in him was well ordered, when we realize that the virtue which does not have this quality can hardly be called charity at all. According to the doctrine of Saint Thomas and other
theologians, charity demands that we have a special love for those closest to us, those Providence has put in our path. Monsieur Vincent had such an intimate union with those God had given him as his spiritual sons that he could say with the apostle that he had given birth to them by the Gospel in Jesus Christ.\(^59\) He carried them in his heart and loved them most tenderly, after the example of the love Jesus Christ had for his apostles and disciples.

By imitating his divine master, he showed this love by the instructions, urgings, encouragement, and consolation he gave them, and by bestowing on them every good a child might expect from attentive parents. He often addressed them in moving talks, animated with the spirit of Jesus Christ, not only in the regularly scheduled meetings, but also on all sorts of other occasions. He would take the trouble to say a word of edification to one, sometimes after mental prayer, or on the occasion of some letter he may have received, or maybe on hearing some good or bad news, or possibly to recommend something special to their prayers. Like a good and wise father of the family he freely distributed the bread of souls, which is the word of God.

This way of acting was not limited to his Congregation in general, but was directed to each confere in particular. He spoke sometimes to one, sometimes to another, according to circumstances. He would encourage one in his difficulties, to another he would offer sympathy in his sufferings. He would admonish someone for his failings, or give some prudent advice in times of perplexity. On all occasions he was generous in instructing and encouraging his followers about the best means of progressing along the way of perfection. When absent from them he wrote in a similar fashion, taking the trouble amid the constant flood of pressing and important affairs to carry on an almost unlimited correspondence with them. He warned, instructed, exhorted, consoled, and encouraged. These letters alone allow us to see his boundless charity for his own confreres.

Since one of the principal and most important lessons Jesus Christ gave his disciples was that they should love one another, his servant Vincent de Paul often repeated this to his own followers. He often made it the subject of his conferences with them. He has even left a handwritten copy of a talk, something he did for no other subject. On this question of fraternal charity, he said among many other things: "It is a sign of predestination, since by this virtue one is recognized as a disciple of Jesus Christ."

One day, on the feast of Saint John the Evangelist, while exhorting the priests and brothers to love one another by recalling the words of the apostle *filioli diligite alterutrum* ["Little children, love one another"],\(^60\) he said: "The

\(^{59}\) 1 Cor 4:15.

\(^{60}\) Based on 1 John 4:7.
Congregation of the Mission will endure only as long as charity reigns in it." He roundly cursed anyone who would destroy the virtue of charity and thus cause the ruin of the Congregation, or even a lessening of this virtue, thereby making the Congregation less perfect than it might otherwise be.61

He then said:

Charity is the soul of the virtues, and the paradise of communities. The house of Saint Lazare will be a paradise if charity is found there. Paradise is none other than love, union, and charity. The blessed in heaven are wholly taken up with the love of the divine. Nothing is more desirable than to live with those we love, knowing that we in our turn are loved as well.

He also said:

Christian love begotten of charity is not only superior to natural inclination, a product of the sensible appetite and usually more harmful than helpful, but is beyond even rational affection. Christian love is a love by which we love one another in God, for God, and as God wills. It is an affection which makes us love our neighbors for the same purpose God loves them, to make them saints in this world and blessed in the next. As a result of this love we must see God alone, and nothing but God, in each of those we love.

Those who would live in a community without support and without charity would be at the mercy of the humors and vagaries of those with whom they lived. They would be like a ship without anchor or rudder, traveling among reefs, at the mercy of wind and wave battering it from all sides and finally destroying it.

He concluded:

The Missionaries ought not limit their mutual love to a merely interior sentiment or to their words only. They should show this by their deeds, and by coming to the aid of their confreres in a spirit of good will, being always disposed to their welfare.

He ardently desired that God would inspire this charity in the hearts of all the members of the Congregation, since, he said, "by mutual support the strong will support the weak, and the work of God will be accomplished."62

Because detraction is the chief enemy of charity and this vice occasionally intrudes into even the most saintly community, the charitable father of the Missionaries fought this vice to the end. To prevent it from finding a place among his Missionaries, he often exhorted them to be vigilant and on their guard. He compared this vice to a ravenous wolf seeking to destroy the flock.

61. CED XII:435.
62. Abelly's version differs considerably from CED XII:260-76.
He asserted that one of the greatest ills that could overtake a community was to harbor someone who slandered, murmured, and who found it necessary to speak to everyone of his own unhappiness. He said also that anyone who lent an ear to the slanderer was as guilty as the original offender, as the ancient fathers taught.

To warn his confreres against this vice, for which he had an extreme horror, he gave conferences on this theme from time to time. He referred to all the occasions and temptations which might lead to this failing. Once, he repeated this same talk on seven successive Fridays, and had the members of his community discuss it among themselves. After each talk he collected the results of these discussions in his efforts to eliminate this scandal from his Congregation. At the end of the seven weeks, he summarized in a forceful presentation all that had been said.

It was not by words alone that Monsieur Vincent expressed his affection for his confreres. In all sorts of encounters he manifested an openness of heart and a paternal affection for all, from the greatest to the least among them. He wanted all to be aware of his high regard for each of them. When anyone came to speak with him, either out of some particular need or for any other reason, he welcomed him cordially. He stopped whatever else he was doing to listen to what the person had to say. If he could not give his visitor the time he needed, he appointed another time for him to return, when he would have the leisure to hear him out. The priests and brothers openly spoke to him of their desires, sufferings, their evil inclinations, and even their faults. He listened in a way that showed his affection, like a doctor receiving a patient. He replied appropriately to each one according to his needs and expectations, always happily, for he had a special gift of knowing how to send away happy everyone who came to him. He was able to console and edify each of his visitors. He was blessed with a marvelous spirit of adaptability, becoming all to all, adjusting to the dispositions of each one who came. He would often lapse into the language of the region from which they came. He would speak Picard with those from Picardy, Gascon with someone from Guienne, Basque with a Basque, and even a few words of German with someone from that country.

This is the way he spoke with those who came to see him, but he did not limit this cordiality to these meetings. Whenever he had occasion to refer to any of his confreres, he showed his respect and esteem. He would praise them for their life of virtue, and speak honorably of even the least among them.

On this subject we recall that one day the father of one of the brothers of the community came to speak of his son. “He is much more important than I am,” said Monsieur Vincent, “and many others say the same thing.” On
another occasion he said to one of his members who brought up the
temptation he was experiencing of wanting to leave the Congregation, that
he felt as bad when someone was leaving the community as if he were losing
an arm or a leg. He was heard to say on several other occasions while
speaking to the members of his community that he loved the vocation in
which he lived more than his own life, and that when someone announced
his withdrawal he felt as though he was being cut to the quick.

Once, he threw himself on his knees and remained in this posture for
nearly two hours at the feet of a priest of his Congregation thinking of leaving
the community. He begged him, in the name and for the love of our Savior
Jesus Christ, not to succumb to this temptation. “No,” he said, “I will not
rise until you agree with what I am asking. I want, at least, to be as insistent
on this point as is your tempter, the devil.”

If he would notice that someone was depressed, he would do all in his
power to bring him out of this condition, or at least do something to relieve
and console him. He would sometimes say some little pleasantry to distract
him, or invite him to his room as a mark of his esteem. He might assign him
to some occupation suitable for the relief of his symptoms.

Once, there was a servant in the house, not a member of the Congregation,
but one for whom Monsieur Vincent had a special regard. The servant
unfortunately had some cross words with a brother of the house, whereupon
Monsieur Vincent immediately dismissed him. It was pointed out to him that
this servant was capable and even necessary for the good running the house,
but Monsieur Vincent was adamant. He would not allow a servant to speak
disrespectfully to a brother. Monsieur Vincent did help him find another
position with the good letter of recommendation he wrote for him.

One day a brother came to Monsieur Vincent to complain that one of the
officials of the house had treated him rudely. He was received with great
kindness and meekness, and Monsieur Vincent said to him: “You were well
advised to come to tell me this. I’ll handle it. Come at any time to see me
whenever you have a complaint, for you know how fond I am of you.” These
gentle words, according to the brother himself, calmed his spirit, and left
him with further reason to admire the goodness of his superior.

Another brother came to speak about some doubts he was experiencing. He
expressed the fear that he might be disturbing Monsieur Vincent, but he replied:
“No, brother, have no fear that you are bothering me. You must realize that
one appointed by God to be at the service of others is no more put out by the
demands made on him than a father would be in regard to his children.”

He wrote the following to a priest of the Congregation who feared that
the information he had given about himself would diminish Monsieur
Vincent’s good opinion of him.
Thinking of your remark that possibly your confidences might lessen the esteem I have always had for you, I must assure you that this is not the case. I am aware that these enemies occasionally attack even the most virtuous, and that the thoughts of leaving the community are Providence’s way of proving those whom he loves the most. He often leads them by ways of difficult and thorny paths to merit the extraordinary graces he has in store for them. Rather than having had the least thought to your disadvantage, I have thought of you as being even more faithful to God. This is especially so because you have resisted these temptations, and despite all your work, you have not neglected your ordinary spiritual exercises. In addition, after your letter to me explaining your case, you have willingly accepted the response I sent.

One day a priest of the Congregation was speaking of the state of his soul to Monsieur Vincent. Among other things he remarked that he had formed an aversion against him and was angry at him. At these words the charitable father rose, embraced him tenderly, and congratulated him for being able to speak so frankly: "If up to now I have not given my heart to you, I do so now, totally."

Another priest went to see him in his room. The priest was downcast, and was resolved to quit the community. He stated that his mind was made up, and he wanted to return to his own region. Monsieur Vincent smiled, and looking upon him with kindness and tenderness said to him, "When do you plan to leave? Are you going by foot, or will you take a horse?" The priest was so surprised by this response that Monsieur Vincent had given to distract him from this temptation, when he expected some sort of severe reprimand, that he was completely freed from this wish to leave.

Another of his priests who worked in a remote province wrote that the brother with him wished to withdraw from the Congregation. Monsieur Vincent replied:

I always expected that this good brother would be tempted by the demon of sloth, and he perhaps may remember that I warned him about this. Please help him, and encourage him to repel this temptation. But do it gently, by way of persuasion rather than by direction, as you know you are in the habit of doing. Those tempted in this way have a greater need of being treated, or should I say pampered, even more gently and charitably than those who have a physical ailment.

Another brother wrote several times to ask permission to leave the Congregation. Each time Monsieur Vincent wrote in a way that showed his fatherly love, and encouraged him to remain. We will record here only the
ending of the last letter, to show the tenderness he displayed for the members of his community.

No, my dear brother, I cannot consent to your leaving, for I see that it is not God's will that you do so. Also, your immortal soul, so dear to me, would be in peril. If you do not believe me, please, at least do not leave the Congregation except through the same door that you entered. I mean to say, before taking a step of such great importance, make a spiritual retreat. Choose one of the three houses closest to you. Be assured that you will be well received wherever you decide to go. The goodness of your heart has earned my love for you, with no other goal than the glory of God and your own sanctification. You are aware of this, I know, and you know also that I am entirely yours, in the love of our Savior.63

When he would send one of his confreres to a mission assignment, he would always send a note to the superior, asking him to take care of him. He would usually say, "I hope that he will have much confidence in you when he sees the goodness, support, and charity which our Lord has given you for those whom he now confides to your direction."

He wrote to one of his priests, who in his devotion to God had agreed to serve in a remote place:

Reflecting on the extraordinary graces God has conferred on you, by calling you to serve the people in that distant place, I embrace you in spirit with joy and tenderness. You deserve this, as a soul chosen by God from among all the people in the whole world, and as one who has left all to follow this call, to bring a great number of these people to heaven. Who would not love a soul so detached from temporal things, from his own selfish interests, and even from the care of his own body to carry out the designs of God, his only ambition? But who would not care for the body, which serves to bring light to the blind, and raises the dead to life again? This is why I beseech you, Monsieur, to look upon your body as an instrument of God for the salvation of many, and to care for it for this reason.64

Another time he wrote a similar letter to several of his priests at work together in a foreign land, urging them to care for their health.

You are aware that your health will be in danger in this new climate until you have acclimated yourselves. I warn you about going out in the full sun, and suggest that in the beginning you use your time in a study of the language. Become like little children again as you learn to speak. In that spirit allow yourselves to be

63. CED III:484.
64. CED V:565-66.
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guided by Monsieur N., [Mousnier] who will act as a father to you, or by Monsieur N. [Bourdaise]. Please look on them as taking the place of our Lord, and as our Lord acting through them. Even should you lack the help of either one or the other, you shall experience the special help of God himself, for has he not said "that even if a mother forget the child of her womb I will not forget you?"65 You ought to be convinced that he will have care for you, my dear fathers, watching over you, keeping you, protecting you. You have abandoned yourselves to him and placed all your trust in his protection. Be careful, gentlemen, to love one another, and help each other. Support one another and you shall see that God, who has chosen you for his great purposes, will preserve you for carrying out his designs.66

Monsieur Vincent had the custom of falling on his knees to embrace those he was sending to the missions, or those who were returning. He saw to it that they were not lacking in anything they needed. Above all others, he showed his great love particularly for the sick. He would graciously ask about the state of their health, and often would suggest remedies for their illnesses. When circumstances dictated, he would send for the doctor, or for those able to be up and about, he would send them to the doctor to be examined. He saw to it that the infirmarians took care of the sick, and directed the superiors of the various houses to spare no expense in taking care of the sick. He was often heard to say that it was better to sell the sacred vessels of the altar rather than deprive the sick of anything they needed. To those who complained that the sick were a drain on the community, he would say that, on the contrary, they were a blessing on any house where they were.67 Despite all his other preoccupations he never failed to pray for them, and to recommend them to the prayers of the community. As often as he could he visited the sick. On his various trips he would ask about them, the care being taken of them, and whether they lacked anything they required. He would not allow among his community any lack of charity or tenderness of heart for the sick.

One of his priests wrote on this matter:

I personally experienced the charity he showed to the sick during two serious bouts of illness I had while in the house of Saint Lazare. God would have done me a favor if he had then called me from this world, for it seemed to me that I was well disposed to die by the help and prayers of Monsieur Vincent, who visited me several times. He did not want to spare anything when it had to do with the

65. Isa 49:15.
66. CED V:434-35. The missionaries were probably going to Madagascar.
67. CED XI:73; XII:29.
sick because, as he used to say, they deserve more because of their sufferings than others do by their work. I often heard him say that it would be preferable to sell the sacred chalices to help them. When he came to visit he would discreetly ask about the treatment they were receiving. He relieved their pain by his compassion, and during their convalescence he would tell some interesting stories for their amusement, often with a moral attached.

In keeping with his priorities, he neglected nothing in the spiritual care of the sick, besides the attention paid to their physical needs. For those not too ill, he gently and paternally suggested that they not omit their usual spiritual exercises, “lest the sickness of the body extend to the soul, and make it lax and unmortified.”

Lastly, we can be sure that his solicitude for the welfare and care of the sick extended to those in health as well. We are assured of this by the account we have of a missionary working in Champagne for the relief of the poor. The missionary wrote to ask, among other things, if a cap could be sent to him. None was to be found in the house, but this charitable father took his own off his head and asked the brother, who told us of the incident, to send it to the priest. When it was suggested that perhaps someone could go into town to buy one, Monsieur Vincent replied: “No, my brother, we must not make him wait, for he may be in a hurry for it. Please send it, together with the other things he has asked for.”

Not content with expressing his love and appreciation toward his own, he extended this concern to their relatives in as many ways as he could. When he learned that any suffering had come to the relatives of the priests or brothers of his Congregation, he wanted all to sympathize and help the families as much as possible. He himself was the first to sense their grief and offer his consolation in the best way he knew how.

Speaking to his community, he said: “We pray God for the N. family, which has experienced such a loss. We should sympathize with the brother who suffers, for we owe this to one another.” Sometimes, according to the circumstances, he would say, “I request the priests who have no particular intention for their mass to offer it for the grieving N. family. I plan to do the same in the mass I am about to celebrate, and I would like the brothers to receive communion for this same intention.” Besides his prayers for the relatives of the members of the Congregation, he provided other more tangible help when they found themselves in reduced circumstances.

68. The brother was Louis Robineau.
SECTION SEVEN

*His Charity Toward His Adversaries*

When it comes to relationships with our enemies, Christian charity is most in opposition to our natural impulses. The grace of Jesus Christ alone can conquer the principles of the world by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Considering the love of our enemies, there is no more assured mark of divine adoption as true children of the heavenly Father. He causes his sun to shine on both good and bad alike, and allows his dew and rain to fall on sinners as well as the just.

Monsieur Vincent was so careful about all other aspects of the virtue of charity that it is not surprising to see that he had a high regard for this aspect of charity, especially since Jesus Christ had explicitly recommended it in his Gospel.

We have spoken at length of how this great servant of God related to all classes of people. He was full of respect and submission to the great of this world, of adaptability and charity for the lesser ones, and of justice and deference to all. Perhaps there never was a person more committed to all sorts of works of public service, and as a result, more exposed to criticism, slander and calumny than he. He met with little opposition. What difficulties did come his way divine Providence allowed to enable him to be more closely identified with his divine Master. Jesus Christ suffered great outrages and bad treatment and willed to be numbered among those who suffered for justice’s sake.

Two situations were likely to arouse the displeasure of some of his associates. The first was his position at court where he had a part to play in the distribution of benefices. He was adamant in insisting on acting according to what he saw as right, but it was obviously impossible to please everyone seeking an appointment. Sometimes there were more than a dozen candidates for a single benefice. Those who were unsuccessful would sometimes complain loudly to others, often attributing things to him which were not true. In response, he would bless God, continue to greet these people when they met, and express his desire to help them. When an occasion would present itself he would do so more willingly than before.

The second instance which led to misunderstandings was his position as superior of a congregation. This obliged him to look after the goods of the community and to manage what had been given for the service of others. He regarded himself as the steward and not the owner of these things. He felt
obligated in conscience to protect the right of ownership at Saint Lazare and other properties, as well as the fruits of a benefice he held. On this point he sometimes found that he had to resist those who would interfere in his affairs, if attempts at accommodation proved unsuccessful. The result would sometimes be that he was slandered and opposed. These sentiments gave him the opportunity to offer the same prayer as our Savior on the cross, a prayer for his enemies.

We will now give some examples of how this good servant of God behaved toward those who maltreated either himself or his Congregation.

A nobleman of some standing was unsuccessful in obtaining a benefice for a friend because of Monsieur Vincent’s opposition in the council to the appointment. Monsieur Vincent judged the person proposed to be incapable of fulfilling the obligations of the office. Several days later he chanced to meet Monsieur Vincent in the Louvre where he began to berate him publicly, although he had never before complained to anyone. The queen, told of the incident, ordered the nobleman to retire from the court. Monsieur Vincent was so insistent that he be recalled that the queen finally relented. This is an example of how Monsieur Vincent showed such charity toward an opponent by doing more for him than he would have done for the best of his friends.

Another incident illustrates both his humility and his charity. Returning once from the city to Saint Lazare, he met in the faubourg Saint Denis a man who was aware of Monsieur Vincent’s close association with the queen and her chief ministers. He publicly blamed him for the troubled times, and for the heavy taxes borne by the people. The holy priest himself customarily blamed his own sins as the cause of public difficulties. On this occasion he got off his horse, fell to his knees, and admitted that he was a miserable sinner. He begged pardon of God and of his accuser, the source of the troubles being spoken of. The person in question was so taken aback at the sight of this humble priest abasing himself and so aware of his own boldness, that he came to Saint Lazare the next day to ask pardon of Monsieur Vincent. He received him as an old friend. He was persuaded to stay six or seven days in the house, and to take the occasion to make a spiritual retreat and a good general confession. The story illustrates how charity completed what humility began.

He opposed any spite or grudges to such an extent that he not only bore no ill will to anyone, but he did not want anyone to harbor bad feelings against him if it were possible to avoid them. Once he noticed that a well-placed person seemed to have grown cold in his dealings with him, whereas before he had been quite friendly. When this continued, he went directly to him. With a smile he said: “Monsieur, I am unhappy if, without knowing what, I have given you some reason to be displeased with me. I
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have come to ask you to let me know what I may have done, so that I can correct myself.” The nobleman, struck by his openness, admitted his displeasure: “It is true, Monsieur Vincent, that on such and such an occasion your actions have given me trouble.” For his part, Monsieur Vincent imitated in his charity what the sun does by its light. He dissipated the shadows of doubt from his mind, and softened the hardness of his heart in such a way that the nobleman from that time on became friendlier than before.

Once while vesting for mass in the chapel of the College des Bons Enfants, he remembered that a certain religious of Paris had a grievance against him. He at once put off his vestments, went to find this person, and asked pardon for the trouble he had caused. He assured him that he esteemed and honored both him and his order. Only after he had done this did he return to celebrate mass.

Once Monsieur Vincent became aware that the superior of a well-known religious order in Paris was disturbed by the way he had handled a certain business matter. At once he went to see the superior, threw himself at his feet, and asked pardon for any offense he had given. Unfortunately the superior received Monsieur Vincent with coldness, and despite his efforts to conciliate the superior, he put Monsieur Vincent off with offensive words, and he had to leave. Yet he was happy to have had the opportunity to suffer rebuff for the love of his Master. Some time later, it became necessary to borrow some vestments for the chapel of the College des Bons Enfants. When Monsieur Vincent was asked if the superior mentioned earlier should be approached, he replied: “Yes, ask him for me if he would lend these things to us.” The one who had asked him was astonished, but did as he was told. The superior in turn was amazed: “What! Doesn’t Monsieur Vincent remember what I said to him? Is this all he can recall? Ah, gentlemen, the hand of God is here. Now I see that Monsieur Vincent is led by the Spirit of God.” After lending these vestments, the superior was moved to go himself to visit Monsieur Vincent at Saint Lazare, where he was received with much joy by both.

Once, he heard from Marseilles that a certain religious had spoken ill of the Congregation in a matter of some importance. This was all the more galling because he had received some notable favors from the community. In reply, Monsieur Vincent wrote to one of his priests: “The words coming from this priest are an occasion for us to rejoice, seeing that we are innocent of the calumnies he spreads, thanks be to God. We will be blessed if we are found worthy to suffer something for justice’s sake, especially if it helps us rejoice in embarrassment, and learn to return good for evil.”

The Congregation of the Mission had applied to the Holy Father, Pope

69. CED IV:301.
Alexander VII, at the beginning of his pontificate, to approve an important matter about the Institute. The superior of the house at Rome wrote to Monsieur Vincent to alert him that some powerful persons were working against this petition. When he received this letter he remarked to someone with him: "I understand by this letter that certain men (naming them) are against us. Even if they were to pull out my eyes I would not cease to love them, respect them, and serve them all my life. I pray that God will give me the grace to do this."\textsuperscript{70} This is how he acted, always taking their part, defending their reputations, emphasizing their virtues, appreciating and praising their good works in general and for each one in particular. He rendered them all imaginable services, deference, and submission.

Several foreign clerics who were refugees in Paris because of the persecution in their own country found themselves in great physical and spiritual need. Monsieur Vincent requested one of his own priests from the same country and known to most of the clerics, to organize weekly meetings for their benefit. Together they could learn what was appropriate for their profession, and be prepared for future employment as a way out of their present want and idleness. Monsieur Vincent said: "We must find a way to help them when they assemble because they seem ready to prepare themselves to become more useful and more edifying than they now are. Monsieur, please look after this." The priest replied: "Monsieur, you are aware that as you requested, we tried these meetings. We even continued them for some time, but we are dealing with some difficult personalities. They were disagreeing among themselves, just like the provinces of their homeland, and we had to stop these meetings. They argue, and are jealous of one another. Despite all you have done for them they show no appreciation. They complain constantly, and have even gone so far as to have written to Rome to have you stop meddling in their affairs. It seems to me, Monsieur, that their ingratitude dictates that you no longer do anything for them." To this, Monsieur Vincent responded: "Monsieur! What are you saying? We must do so precisely because of this." He did more than simply talk. He continued to do all the good for them that he possibly could, in all sorts of situations.

Once, someone involved in a lawsuit asked him to write on his behalf to the judge in the case. Monsieur Vincent excused himself by saying that he had no influence in such matters. He would sometimes write such letters, although he preferred as a practice not to become involved in these affairs. Some time later, the one who had asked for this favor, thinking he had lost his case, came to complain bitterly about Monsieur Vincent's failure to write

\textsuperscript{70}. See the letter to Etienne Blatiron, \textit{CED} V:395-96. This matter concerned the approbation of the vows which came in spite of opposition from some within the community. Nevertheless, Vincent consistently and charitably defended his position in favor of the vows. \textit{CED} I:162-65.
in his support. Monsieur Vincent not only accepted this criticism meekly, but asked pardon on his knees for having caused him such annoyance. The man discovered only later that the report of his having lost the case was erroneous. In fact, he won it. He then returned to Saint Lazare to beg pardon, for having complained and abused Monsieur Vincent so unjustly.

Several soldiers came upon two clerics from Saint Lazare, walking in the neighborhood. They seized their cloaks from them by force, but were observed by some people of the quarter. They ran after them, caught them, and had them put in the local jail. Afterward, Monsieur Vincent saw to their being fed, visited, and arranged for them to make general confessions. With their promise not to steal again, he released them without the penalty they so richly deserved.

Occasionally others would be caught in their robberies in the house of Saint Lazare or on the farms which depended upon it. These included grain stolen from the fields by night, trees cut from the woods, fruit taken from the orchards, or vegetables from the garden. Monsieur Vincent felt great uneasiness in allowing these people to be put in prison, and when they were, he would secure their release. Sometimes he would even go beyond this. He would offer excuses for them, invite them to eat with the community, and sometimes give them money to speed them on their way. There were many such cases, when Monsieur Vincent not only pardoned those who did him harm, but aided them, as well. He used to say, "How I pity these poor people!"

In 1654 a young German Lutheran came to Paris to abjure his heresy. Possibly he felt that he would find greater sympathy there than in his native country. He was recommended to Monsieur Vincent by a religious superior of a community of nuns at whose convent he was staying. She suggested that this young man might possibly become a member of the Congregation of the Mission, for he showed much promise. Monsieur Vincent received him at Saint Lazare to make a spiritual retreat of eight days. During the exercises his guest slipped into one of the rooms, took a cassock and long cloak and some other things as well. He dressed himself in these clothes, then left by a side door of the church to go to the section of the city called Saint Germain to meet the minister Monsieur Drelincourt.\footnote{Charles Drelincourt, a Protestant minister and controversialist. He died in Paris in 1669.} He presented himself as a member of the Congregation of the Mission who had come to embrace the religion of the minister. He, seeing his visitor dressed as a cleric, was taken in. He led him through the streets to show off a great conquest—a member of the Congregation of the Mission who had become a Huguenot. He was taken to the homes of several of these heretics to be strengthened in his decision by their flattery and attention.
While walking in the city, they were seen by Monsieur [Nicolas] des Isles, a man well versed in the religious controversy of the day. Seeing the minister walking with a cleric raised some doubts in his mind, which led him to follow the pair to the first house, where they all entered together. He allowed the minister to go upstairs, while he himself remained to talk with the young man, who told him the whole story of his dealings with the minister. This false Missionary spoke of his stay at Saint Lazare, and of his deception. Monsieur des Isles left, saw the pastor of Saint Sulpice, and because of the scandal given by assuming the habit and title of the Congregation of the Mission, had the young man committed to the Chatelet prison. He also alerted Monsieur Vincent to the case. Many people in turn advised him to contact the authorities to see that this young man be punished for the robberies he had committed, and for the scandal he had given.

This charitable priest thanked those who had advised him, but said that he would do what had to be done. He did contact the authorities, not to demand justice, but rather mercy, for this unfortunate person. He took the trouble to go himself to see the royal prosecutor and the police lieutenant to inform them that the Congregation they did not wish to press charges, for it had forgiven the loss and the scandal that had been given. He requested most humbly that the prisoner be set free, remembering that God forgives, and it would thus please his divine Majesty if this poor stranger were released. He added, to the great edification of these gentlemen, that he looked upon the whole episode as simply a young man's prank. On this occasion Monsieur Vincent showed clearly that he had personally accepted the maxims of the Savior too completely to act otherwise than the Savior himself. Jesus not only said that he had come to save sinners and not to condemn or punish them, but had acted in this same spirit in forgiving the adulterous woman, and forgiving all kinds of sinners, even the traitor Judas.

In 1655 another young member of the Congregation decided to leave it, contrary to the advice of Monsieur Vincent. He joined the Swiss Guards, but left a short time afterward, though not in such favorable circumstances as his leaving the Congregation of the Mission. He was apprehended as a deserter from the army, and was charged with other serious crimes as well. He was imprisoned, and later condemned to be executed. In this serious situation he had recourse to Monsieur Vincent, whose guiding maxim was always to render good for evil. Monsieur Vincent forgot that this unfortunate man had once rejected his advice, and came to his aid, and was successful in saving his life.

A poor person appeared at the door of Saint Lazare once, asking if he

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72. See CED XII:295, where Vincent speaks of this person to his priests.
73. One of a troop of elite guards in the royal service, coming originally from Switzerland.
could tell Monsieur Vincent what people were saying about him. “Yes, my friend, speak.” The man then said that people in Paris were blaming him for the fact the poor were being taken off the streets and placed in the city hospital. Monsieur Vincent’s only response to this was to say, with his usual mildness, that he would pray to God for those who spoke this way about him.

The charity of Monsieur Vincent for those who mistreated him is shown well in the matter of a serious business loss affecting the Congregation. The loss suffered by the community was about fifty thousand livres, the greatest loss Monsieur Vincent ever sustained during his life. He wrote the following to a friend of the community, a man knowledgeable in these matters:

Monsieur, good friends share in both good and bad fortune. As you are one of the closest we have in the whole world, I want you to know of the loss we suffered in this affair whose background you know. I do not speak of a misfortune which has happened, but of a grace that God has sent us, so I trust you will join with us in thanking him. I call the afflictions he sends a grace, provided they are accepted. His goodness has disposed us to accept this loss and to receive this accident with entire resignation. I dare even to say that we rejoice as much as if we had won our case. Surely this would be a paradox to anyone less sensitive to heavenly matters than yourself, and one less able to submit himself to the good pleasure of God in the adversities of life. This is a greater good than all temporal advantages. I beg of you most humbly to look on things in this way, so that we both share the same sentiments.74

What is most remarkable in this loss is the affection, respect, and charity of Monsieur Vincent for those involved in this matter. He manifested in every meeting a disposition to return good for evil, honor for dishonor, good treatment for bad. As he said himself, and as the Holy Spirit says in the Scriptures, he wished to heap coals of fire upon the heads of all his adversaries.75

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74. CED VII:252-53.
75. Rom 12:20.
CHAPTER TWELVE

His Meekness

CHARITY REACHES its perfection, Blessed Francis de Sales said, “when it is not only patient, but mild and good mannered.” Meekness is like the flower of this divine virtue. It reveals more and more of its beauty as it struggles with difficulty to overcome the outbursts of nature. These so often appear under the guise of zeal, but only seek to give greater freedom to the fits of human passions.

Monsieur Vincent was by temperament a bilious character. His spirit was lively, and therefore given to anger. He had so dominated this passion by the help of grace, and by the practice of its opposite virtue, meekness, that not only did he not offend, but he seemed not even to feel the first movements of anger. While he was in the household of the wife of the general of the galleys, as he himself mentioned to a confidant, he sometimes showed his bilious and melancholic temperament. This caused this good lady to wonder if perhaps there was something in the house which displeased him. It became apparent later that God was calling him to live in community where he would be dealing with all sorts of diverse personalities. “I addressed myself to God,” he said, “to beg him earnestly to change this curt and forbidding disposition of mine for a meek and benign one. By the grace of our Lord and with some effort on my part to repress the outbursts of passion, I was able to get rid of my black disposition.”

Monsieur Vincent never spoke of himself unless he thought it necessary to do so, or if it would help the edification of those with whom he conversed. His humility was such that even in these cases he would later beg pardon for having spoken in this way, for fear of having scandalized his hearers.

Monsieur Vincent has told us how, with the grace of God, he was able to acquire this virtue of meekness, even though it was not natural to him. He earned it by his prayer to God and by practice. Once, speaking to his community he said:

Sometimes we see persons who seem to be gifted with great meekness, a feature of their natural disposition. This, however, is not the Christian virtue of meekness, whose proper role is the suppression of the opposite vice. A chaste person is not one who never experiences the urgings of lust, but one who resists them when they occur. We have an example right in our own community of a most truly meek person, Monsieur N. I don’t hesitate to say it for he is not present.
You are aware that his natural disposition is dry and laconic. You may judge for yourself if there are two people in the whole world more crude and surly than he and I! Yet this man has so conquered himself that he has become more than he is. And how is that? It is the virtue of meekness, at which he has worked so hard, while miserable me, I have remained dry as a thorn. Gentlemen, please do not let your eyes rest on the bad example I give, but rather I exhort you (to use the words of the apostle) to walk worthily in all meekness and good manners in the vocation to which God has called you.

It is not enough to have acquired a virtue. It must be preserved and cultivated. The virtue must be practiced often in real situations. This faithful servant of God did this, for, before instructing others, he always put his lessons into practice himself. We give here an abridgement of the advice he gave on this matter, and which he himself had already observed.

In order not to be surprised by those occasions when we might offend against this virtue of meekness, we must first foresee situations which might arouse our anger. We then can prepare our hearts in advance the acts of meekness we want to practice.

Second, we must detest the vice of anger, seeing that it displeases God. Yet even here we must not get annoyed nor angry with ourselves if we are subject to this vice. We must hate this vice, and love the opposite virtue, not because we are unhappy with ourselves but solely for the love of God. He is pleased by this virtue and displeased by this vice. If we act this way, the sorrow we feel for faults committed against this virtue will be calm and peaceful.

Third, when the passion of anger moves us, we must not act or speak, or even decide anything, until the passion has passed. What we do in anger is not fully controlled by reason, for passion troubles and obscures this faculty. Even if later what we do seems right, it will never be perfect.

Fourth, when we feel angry we must make an effort to ensure that no trace of this emotion appears on our face, which is the image of the soul. Rather, an expression of Christian meekness should appear. This is not against simplicity, for we do this not to appear other than what we are. We are to act through the sincere desire that the virtue of meekness, which resides in the superior part of the soul, appear in our features, on our tongue, and in our exterior actions, to please God and the neighbor for the love of God.

Lastly, in the fifth place, we must above all be careful to restrain the tongue. Despite the storm of anger and all the sentiments of zeal...

we may think we have, we must use kind and agreeable language if we are to gain others to God. Sometimes it takes only a soft word to convert a hardened sinner, and on the contrary, a harsh word can upset a soul, and can cause it endless sufferings.²

In this connection he recalled that on only three occasions did he use harsh words in reprimanding others, believing he had good reason to do so. But each time he regretted having done so, for it proved not to be helpful. On the contrary, he never failed to obtain what he sought when he acted with kindness.

There is a big difference between true and false meekness. Meekness which is so only in appearance is soft, cowardly, and indulgent. True meekness is not foreign to firmness in doing good. It is always a part of it, for true virtues are all interrelated. On this subject Monsieur Vincent said:

No one is more constant or more firm in the good than the person who is meek and well-mannered. On the contrary, those given to anger and the passion of the irascible appetite are usually most inconstant, for they act by fits and starts. They are like raging torrents which have power only when bursting down the stream, but quiet down as soon as the flow of water stops. Rivers represent milder persons, without noise or show, flowing on without pause.³

One of his favorite maxims was attigit a fine ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter ["She reaches from end to end mightily and governs all things well"]).⁴ To accomplish our end we must remain firm, yet all must be done with gentleness. He recalled the example of Blessed Francis de Sales, bishop of Geneva, who he said "was the meekest and gentlest person I have ever met. The very first time I saw him, I saw from the outset that his expression, his way of speaking and conversing with others was an expression of the meekness of our Lord Jesus Christ who had taken possession of his heart."

We could say in truth that Monsieur Vincent profited well from the example of the blessed prelate. Like him, he conveyed at first encounter a mildness and marvelous affability, and the most respectful language toward all classes of people.

One day he said to his community:

We have great need of affability because by our vocation we must often talk with one another and with our neighbor. What contributes to the difficulty of such conversation is that we come from such diverse backgrounds, in our place of origin, our temperament, and our dispositions. Dealing with our neighbor we will have

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³ CED XI:65.
⁴ Wis 8:1.
much to put up with. Yet affability will ease the problems, for it is like the soul of good conversation. Affability will make it not only useful, but agreeable as well. Affability will help us converse with pleasure, with mutual respect for all. As charity is the virtue which unites us as members of the one body, affability is the virtue which perfects that union.⁵

He recommended that this virtue be particularly observed in dealing with the poor country people.

Otherwise, they will pull back, and fear to deal with us, thinking us too severe or too lordly for them. When they are treated affably and cordially, they feel otherwise, and are better disposed to profit from the good we seek to do for them. Since God has destined us to serve them, we must do so in a way that is most helpful, and therefore treat them with great affability. Each of us should take the words of the wise man in Scripture as addressed to ourselves: *Congregatio pauperum affabilem te facito,* “make yourself agreeable to the assembly of the poor.”⁶

Although Monsieur Vincent was most affable in his speech, he was in no way a flatterer. On the contrary, he strongly opposed those who used such speech to insinuate themselves into the good graces of others. He said once to his community: “Be affable, but never a flatterer. Nothing is worse or more unworthy of a Christian than flattery. A truly virtuous man holds nothing in such horror as this particular vice.”

Another maxim concerning this virtue of his, was that we must never dispute with others, even when trying to convert the most vicious. He wanted only mild and affable language to be used, as prudence and charity demanded. Acting on this principle he forbade his priests to enter into debates and disputes when it was a question of meeting with heretics, for he believed they were more influenced by mild and amicable words. He reported on a trip he had once made to Beauvais, when he had converted three heretics he had met. His mild manner contributed more to their conversion than anything else in their conversation. He said:

When we argue, it becomes obvious that our effort is designed to gain the upper hand over our opponent. This is why he prepares a resistance rather than a recognition of the truth. In this sort of debate, rather than finding a way to his mind, we ordinarily succeed in having him close the door of his heart to us. Mildness and affability, however, would have opened it. We have a good example of this in Blessed Francis de Sales, who though well versed in

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⁵. *CED XI:*68.
controversy, converted heretics by his kindness and not by his teaching. On this subject, Cardinal du Perron used to say that he worked hard at convincing the heretics of their error, but the bishop of Geneva alone converted them.7

Recall the words of Saint Paul to the great missionary, Saint Timothy: *Servum Domini non oportet litigare.*8 A servant of Jesus Christ ought not enter into controversies and disputes. I can tell you frankly, I have never seen or heard of a single heretic converted by the force of a debate or a subtle argument, but only by the kindness he had experienced. This virtue alone has enough strength to gain men back to God.9

The kindness of Monsieur Vincent was most evident in the corrections or admonitions he was obliged to make from time to time. He acted with such moderation and meekness and spoke so graciously but effectively, that the hardest hearts were softened. They could hardly resist the strength of his meekness. We will give here only a single example to show not only his kindness but also the prudence of the wise and charitable superior when he had to reprove one of his own. On one occasion he heard that a priest of the Congregation was not applying himself well to the work of the mission, even though he was capable of doing so. Also, when he did preach, he was rude to the poor people in church.

Monsieur Vincent wrote him a letter exhorting him to be committed to the work and more gentle toward the poor people before him. He did so in a manner that was kindly, prudent, yet energetic, with no show of personal displeasure, or hint of who had raised the question of his failings.

I write to you to ask for news, and to give you news from here. How are things going with you after all your work? How many missions have you given? Do you find the people well disposed to follow the exercises and to draw from them the fruit we hope for? I shall be much obliged if you inform me about on these matters.

I am in good contact with other houses of the Congregation. They all report that they have great success, thanks be to God. They don’t quite reach the example of Monsieur N., who has been working in his mission only nine months, but who works without ceasing. It is a marvelous thing to see the strength God gives him and the extraordinary good he does, as I hear from all sides. The vicars general have written to me, others have either told me or have written, and even neighboring religious have written. The happy

8. 2 Tim 2:24.
success he has had is attributed largely to the care he uses to speak to these poor people with mildness and kindness. It had made me resolve more than ever to recommend to the entire Congregation to be committed more and more to these two virtues. If God has blessed our first missions we may say that it is because we have acted amiably, humbly, and sincerely toward all sorts of persons. It has pleased God to use the most miserable members of all in our Congregation for the conversion of several heretics. They themselves stated that because of the patience and cordiality shown them they were moved to return to the Church.

The convicts among whom I lived reacted the same way. When I spoke to them impersonally I spoiled everything. On the other hand, I began to praise them for their resignation, sympathize with their sufferings, and pointed out how fortunate they were to be making their purgatory in this life. I also kissed their chains, shared their sorrows, and spoke against their bad treatment. After that, they began to listen to me, give glory to God, and enter upon the road of salvation. Monsieur, please join me in thanking God for this. Let us ask him to give all our Missionaries this custom of treating our neighbor kindly, humbly, and charitably, both in public and in private, even hardened sinners, without ever using invectives, reproaches, or crude language against anyone. I have no doubt, Monsieur, that you will strive to avoid this unfortunate way of serving souls. It tends merely to annoy them and drive them away, rather than attracting them to you. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the meek master of men and of angels. By the practice of this same virtue you will go to him and bring others to him as well.10

SECTION ONE

Continuation of the Same Topic

The great meekness which Monsieur Vincent displayed in his correspondences and corrections came from a maxim he had learned from Saint Gregory the Great, that the faults of our neighbor ought to arouse our pity

10. CED IV:52-53.
more than our anger, and that true justice leads to compassion rather than indignation in dealing with sinners.\textsuperscript{11} This holy man, Monsieur Vincent, often used to say that he was not surprised to see men fail. Just as it is in the nature of thorns and thistles to be prickly, so it is in the nature of fallen man to fail, since he was conceived and born in sin. Even the just man, according to the Wisdom of Solomon, falls seven times, that is, several times a day. He added that the spirit of a man is subject to indispositions just as his body is. Rather than being troubled and discouraged, he ought to recognize his miserable condition, humble himself, and say to God, as David did after his sin: \textit{Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me, ut discam justificationes tuas}. It is good that you have humbled me that I may learn your justice.\textsuperscript{12} He must learn to live with himself in his weaknesses and imperfections, all the while working to overcome them.

This knowledge of the common misery of men made him act with compassion and meekness toward sinners, and even cover their failings with prudence and a marvelous charity. He used to say that it was forbidden to judge anyone harshly, and it was even less licit to speak ill of anyone, since the apostle says charity must cover a multitude of sins.\textsuperscript{13} In this regard, he quoted the word of the sage of holy Scripture: \textit{Audisti verbum adversus proximum tuum? Commoriatur in te}: Have you heard something against your neighbor? You must let it die within you.\textsuperscript{14} He would often refer to this virtue as being present in the person of the wife of the general of the galleys. Her tenderness and purity of conscience would not allow her to speak ill of anyone, and she would not tolerate anyone else doing so in her presence.

When several confreres withdrew from the Congregation, through temptation or for some other reason, some would gossip about the case even though they did not know the full story. Monsieur Vincent, of course, held to the maxim of never complaining of those who left and never discussing the reasons for their departure. On the contrary, when the opportunity presented itself, and he could do so honestly, he would speak to their advantage. He would provide all sorts of favors for them when he could, even though he knew some had been poorly disposed toward him. Several of the original members of the Congregation, and others who later came and persevered in the community, have said that after God they owed their perseverance in their vocations to the meekness and charitable support they had received from Monsieur Vincent.

Although he corrected the faults of others directly, it still was with an attitude of excusing and minimizing the failures as much as he could. He did

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} PL 76.2:1246.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ps 119:71.
\item \textsuperscript{13} 1 Peter 4:8.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Sir 19:9.
\end{itemize}
so with such expressions of esteem and love for those who had offended that
his reprimand in no way broke their spirit. On the contrary, it renewed their
courage and increased their confidence in God. He greatly edified them by
being, in his remarkable charity, the first to humble himself.

We might cite some extracts from his letters to allow us to better see his
thoughts about the meekness that should accompany correction, and about
the great concern he had to establish mutual support among the members of
the Congregation.

Writing to the superior of one of the houses, he said:

I praise God that you have gone yourself to take care of the
matters Monsieur N. refused to do. You did well to act in this way,
rather than insist that he go. There are those good and virtuous
persons who fear God and do not want to offend him, but still fail
in some matters. When this happens we must stand by them and not
insist on our own way. Since God grants pardon in the confessional,
I would judge that you would do well to act in this same spirit. Make
allowances here for his failures since, thanks be to God, he is not a
person of bad will.

The harsh words of the other priest you wrote about may have
come from a natural outburst and not from a disordered mind. Even
the wisest people sometimes say things under the influence of
passion which they are sorry for soon after. Others speak adversely
about people or about their work, and still manage to do good. With
some people, Monsieur, as you know only too well, we will always
have something to put up with, but we must gain merit, too. I hope
he of whom we just spoke will be won over by the charitable way
in which he is handled, and that he is warned mildly and with
prudence, and prayed for to God, as I do for your family.\footnote{CED V:56-57.}

He wrote to another superior on the same subject:

The priest you mention is a good man. He is striving to be
virtuous, and had a good reputation in the world before he was
received into the Congregation. If, now that he is among us, he has
a restless spirit, is too occupied with external things and concerns
for his relatives, and is a nuisance to the others, you must support
him with patience. If he did not have these faults he would undoubt-
edly have others, and if you had nothing to suffer your charity would
have little chance to be tested. You must make your response to him
resemble the Lord’s. He had to deal with his crude disciples, who
lacked many refinements of personality, to teach us by his meekness
and support how those in charge of others must act. Monsieur,
please model yourself on this example. It will lead you not only to support your confreres but help them to overcome their imperfections. You must not tolerate evil, it is true, but you should seek to remedy it with gentleness.\textsuperscript{16}

He wrote to a third, who worked in a distant diocese with another priest:

I trust the goodness of our Lord will bless your work if cordiality and support for one another exists between you both. In God's name, Monsieur, please make this your first care. As you are the older and also the superior, support him who is with you with as much gentleness as you can. You must abandon any sense of superiority over him, adjusting yourself to him in a spirit of charity. This is the way our Lord won over and strengthened his apostles, and is the way you will win over this good priest. You must make some allowance for his moods. Don't scold him immediately when you first see some failing, but only later, and then humbly and cordially. Above all else, never let any division be seen between you, for you are in the public eye, and a single display of annoyance would ruin everything. I hope you will use the advice I give you, and that God will use the countless acts of virtue you practice as the base and foundation for the good he wishes to accomplish by you.\textsuperscript{17}

In effect he recommended nothing so much by his letters and his conferences to the superiors and members of the Congregation, as meekness and mutual support to be a source of peace and a bond of perfection uniting all hearts. When the superior of a house would ask for the transfer of a sick member of their local house because he could no longer contribute to the work of the mission, he would reply that it was only just that he should remain. He had taken sick there, and it would be an opportunity for the other members of the mission to practice fraternal support and charity. If he would be asked to change someone because of his faults, he would say the others should support him because there was no one without faults. It was quite possible that the person taking his place might have even greater ones than he.

If some officers of the Congregation or other confreres would fail to follow his directives, doing something other than what he had been told, as happened more than once, he would say, "Monsieur, or, my brother, perhaps if you had done this in the way I asked you, God would have given it his blessing." On other occasions he would say nothing. He would allow his silence and patience to make the correction, if it were not an important matter, or not a case of formal disobedience that would require him to act more directly.

\textsuperscript{16} CED VII:136.
\textsuperscript{17} CED I:112-13.
Above all else, he had a marvelous meekness and support for the sick of mind or body. He never complained of the cost of caring for them, but putting himself in their place, he gave them the same care and treatment that he would have wished to receive if he were in their state. We should remark here that among those seeking admission to the Congregation some would occasionally be found who to all appearances ought not to have been received into the body of the Company. Monsieur Vincent would not send them away, but would provide medicines and additional rest, and use other remedies he thought proper. Although some others recommended to him that these persons be dismissed, he insisted that they be kept and supported. In many cases cures took place, and these confreres then rendered good service to God in the Congregation.

If he used a charitable gentleness toward those still on probation before being accepted into his Congregation, he was even more definite in regard to those who were already members. He would send no one away for health reasons, regardless of his illness. He looked upon the sick as those who would attract the blessings of God upon the Congregation. This is what he wrote to one of his priests who was thinking of leaving the Company because of his poor health. "Do not fear that you may be in any way a burden to the Company because of sickness, and you must be convinced you never will be. By God’s grace, the sick will never burden us. On the contrary, it is a blessing to have them." This was the mind and practice of Monsieur Vincent on this point, and his Company was so much of this same spirit that no one was ever sent away because of sickness.

He was especially gentle with the brothers of the Congregation, especially the most rustic and the least able. He never wanted to send them away because of their lack of skill or use to the community. He would have them speak in the conferences and spiritual colloquies of the community to open their minds. Even though they sometimes spoke too long, tediously, or off the topic, he would allow them to say what they wished without interruption. He never showed his disapproval of what they said, unless they said something untrue or erroneous that needed to be corrected. In these cases he spoke most paternally and gently not to discourage or sadden them. He would put a good interpretation on what they had said or excuse what he could, but pointed out how they might have been mistaken.

His kindness and understanding went beyond the natural faults of mind and body, and extended to those committed against the moral law. From time to time he met in his own or in other communities those who had fallen from the way of virtue. They caused more harm than good by their complaining, slander, or other failings. When these were publicly known, people

18. CED VI:491-92.
were surprised that Monsieur Vincent did not dismiss them from the Congregation, and he was sometimes urged to do so. This charitable and meek superior supported them all with an almost unbelievable charity and patience, to give the offenders time to come to their senses, but he nevertheless used appropriate means to remedy their failings.

The superior of one of the missions of the Congregation was happy to be rid of some lax confreres with difficult personalities. He wrote to Monsieur Vincent that such people should be put out of the Company. Monsieur Vincent responded to him in a remarkable way, revealing his thoughts on the subject we are discussing:

I agree with you about the person you describe. I do not think he will improve, but on the contrary I fear he will continue to cause much trouble to this house where we have had him report. Not only do I fear this, but I begin to see it myself, and I must tell you that he and two others give us much grief. One has left, after we had put up with all we could, and it would be helpful if the others too would go away. To cut away the gangrenous members would do justice to the Company, and even prudence suggests we should do so. But because we are called upon to practice all the virtues, we must show support, meekness, patience, and charity, while hoping for their amendment. We will attempt to apply appropriate remedies, threats, prayers, admonitions, all with no other hope than what it will please God to bring about by his grace. Our Lord did not reject Saint Peter because he had denied him three times, nor even Judas, though it seems he died in his sin. I think, then, that the divine Goodness will be pleased if the Company will extend its charity to these two troublemakers, and to spare or neglect nothing to gain them for God. Only after they show no improvement should we then resort to amputation.¹⁹

Some timorous and scrupulous souls, a trial to themselves and bearing an almost insupportable burden, often tested the charity of Monsieur Vincent, and gave him the opportunity to practice the virtue of support and meekness. Among his confreres were some who for years were afflicted by scruples. They were the likely source of much annoyance by their incessant demands upon him, yet he never complained nor put them off. He supported them and received them graciously, to give them no cause for discouragement or sadness. In whatever company he happened to be, he would rise at once when he saw them approaching, and allow them to speak to him in a corner of the room where he was. Although they would return to speak of the same thing several times over, even sometimes three or four times in a single hour, he would receive them with the same serenity as before. He would listen to

¹⁹. CED IV:36-37.
them patiently, and reply with his customary meekness. This is what one of these unfortunate persons reported later:

Monsieur Vincent was always a great support for me, and treated me with great kindness during my depression. I interrupted him continually, even when he was preparing to celebrate mass or to recite the divine office. When I had heard his response, and left, and then came back again to speak with him several times in succession and at length, I never heard from him a single harsh word. On the contrary, he would always speak to me gently, and never scolded me, something he would have been entirely justified in doing, seeing the constant demands I made upon him. Even after he told me what I must do, I would allow new doubts to arise. He took the trouble to write out in his own hand what he had said to help me remember it, and to support this effort he would then have me read it aloud in his presence. Whenever hour I went to see him, even late in the evening, or even when he was occupied with others in matters of business, he would always receive me with the same kindness. He would listen to me, and reply with such gentleness and charity that I can hardly express it.

Another confrere reported he had often tried the patience and charity of Monsieur Vincent by asking him to repeat several times what he had said. This charitable superior did so graciously with no trace of displeasure, repeating what he had said as often as requested, and each time explaining just what he meant. He would show as much interest and concern the final time as he had shown the very first. Once, as happened on several other occasions also, when he was occupied with the business of some persons of rank, he called a brother to say something to him. This brother did not understand exactly what was meant. He had Monsieur Vincent repeat it more than four times, which he did without the least sign of impatience. He spoke the fifth time with the same mildness and tranquility of spirit as he did the first, showing by a smile that he was amused rather than annoyed.

SECTION TWO

Some Remarkable Words of Monsieur Vincent About the Meekness We Should Practice in Regard to Our Neighbor

These remarks are taken from a collection of his remarks on this subject, gathered by one of his confreres from his various talks:
Meekness and humility are two sisters who go hand in hand. We are urged to study them carefully in the person of Jesus Christ, who said of himself, “Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart.” The Son of God tells us, “Learn of me.” O my Savior, what a lesson! What happiness to be your pupil, to learn this short but excellent lesson which makes us so like yourself. Should you not exercise the same influence over us as the ancient philosophers did over their followers? They had such a reputation among them that they had only to say “the master has said” to end all discussion.

If by their reasonings philosophers could develop such committed disciples in regard to human affairs, how much more, my brothers, Eternal Wisdom deserves to be believed and followed in the things of the spirit? What would we answer at this very moment, if we were called upon to recite the lessons he has given us? What will we say at the hour of death when he will reproach us for having learned these lessons so imperfectly? “Learn of me,” he said, “to be meek.” If it were Saint Paul or Saint Peter who had told us to learn this lesson of him, we might have found an excuse, but it was God made man, come to point out the way we must act to be pleasing to his Father. The Teacher of Teachers had taught us to be meek. Give us, O Lord, some share in your great meekness, but we pray so gently and meekly that you cannot refuse our request.

Meekness has several aspects, but they can be reduced to three, the first of which is further divided into two parts. This first act of the virtue of meekness represses the first movements of the passion of anger. These are the first outbursts of this fire which rises to our features, troubles the soul, makes us lose control of ourselves, and changes the color of our face, making it either dark as a cloud or all inflamed. What of meekness? It stops these changes, it prevents him who has this virtue from experiencing these bad results. He does not allow the passion to influence him, but holds firm, not to be carried away. There may sometimes be a tint in the face, but this immediately goes away. We must not be surprised at this, for the movements of nature precede those of grace, but grace triumphs. We must not wonder at attacks of anger. We should rather ask grace to conquer them, being well convinced that even when we feel this revolt within ourselves contrary to meekness, we still may be overcoming it. This, then, is the first part of this first act of meekness. It is a beautiful virtue. It prevents the vice from showing itself in our physical makeup, and has its effects even on our minds.

and souls, for it not only tempers the fires of anger but eliminates the least trace of its action.

The second part of this first act of meekness consists in allowing anger to develop within us, on those occasions when we see that it is expedient that we do so. Yet even then this comes about by our conscious decision, not by the movement of natural forces. This was the case when our Lord called Saint Peter, Satan, and when he said to the Jews, "Woe to you, hypocrites," not once, but several times. This word is repeated ten or twelve times in a single chapter. On another occasion he chased the sellers from the Temple, overturned the tables, and gave other signs of being angry. Was he carried away by anger then? No, for he possessed meekness in an infinite degree. In us, this virtue makes us masters of the passion. In our Lord, who was not ruled by any passion properly so-called, he simply allowed the acts of anger to manifest themselves as he thought best. If on some occasion he who is meek and kind showed himself to be angry, he did so to correct those he spoke to, to oppose sin and to avoid scandal. He did this to build up souls and for our instruction. What great fruit the Savior gained by acting in this way! His corrections were well received because reason dictated them and not simple inclination.

When he spoke with such vigor, it was not by reason of his anger, but solely for the good of the person concerned. Since our Lord ought to be our model wherever we find ourselves, those who lead others ought to see how he conducted himself, and be guided by him. He guided by love. Sometimes he promised a reward, but at other times he threatened punishment. We must do the same, but always under the banner of love. We are then in the same state as the prophet, when he said, *Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me* ["O Lord, in your anger punish me not"]. It seemed to the poor king that God was in anger against him, and he prayed not to be punished when God was in this state. Everyone is like that. None of us wants to be corrected in anger. It is a favor granted to only a few not to feel the first emotions of anger, as I have said. The meek person quickly comes to himself and conquers anger and vengeance, so that nothing comes from him but what is ruled by love. This is, then, the first act of meekness. It represses the first signs of anger, either entirely, or in using them reasonably when this is necessary, but

22. Matt 23:14,15, etc.
even then, meekly. This is why, gentlemen, now that we speak of it, any time that you are annoyed, stop at once to recollect yourself, and raise your mind to God, saying to him, "Lord, you see me tempted. Deliver me from any evil it may suggest."

The second act of meekness is to have a great affability, cordiality, and serenity of expression for everyone we meet, so as to be agreeable to them. Those who have a smiling and agreeable countenance please everyone. God gave them this grace, by which they seem to offer their hearts and invite others to open theirs. Others present themselves with a sad and disagreeable face, all contrary to meekness. A Missionary must strive to be affable, and so cordial and simple that he puts everyone he meets at ease. Hearts are attracted and gained, according to this word of the Lord, "the meek shall inherit the land." On the contrary, we have seen people in authority who are so cold and grave they make people afraid of them, and we avoid them.

Since our work takes us among the poor country people, the ordinands, the retreatants, and all sorts of people, it is not possible for us to produce any good fruit if we are like arid land, capable of growing only thorns. We must be attractive to others, with a pleasant exterior that will repel no one.

I was consoled just three or four days ago at the sight of someone leaving here. He was all smiles, and said to me, "I noticed here a gentleness, an openness of heart, and a certain charming simplicity (these were his words) which touched me deeply."

Isaiah says of our Lord: Butyrum et mel comedet, ut sciat reprobare malum, et eligere bonum. He shall eat butter and honey so that he may know how to reprove evil and choose the good. This discernment is given, I think, only to meek souls. Since anger is a passion which disturbs reason, it must be the contrary virtue which gives discernment and light to reason.

The third act of meekness consists of not reacting adversely, even interiorly, when we have received some discourtesy from someone. We say within ourselves: maybe he did not really think this, or maybe he acted too hastily, or perhaps he was surprised by a moment of passion, or anything else which might deflect thinking we have received a deliberate insult. If someone says unkind words to us, the meek person does not open his mouth to reply, but acts as though he heard nothing.

25. Matt 5:5.
It is related of a chancellor of France who one day was leaving the king’s council, that he met a man who had lost his case before the court. He told the official he was a wicked judge for having fined him and ruined his family by his decision. He called down upon him the judgment of God and his punishments. The chancellor said not a word, but continued walking, looking neither to the right or left. If Christian meekness or some other quality enabled him to act in this way, I do not know. Be that as it may, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves sometimes to be carried away by trifles, seeing that the first minister of justice in the entire kingdom endured the insults of a citizen without making the least reply. What an admirable thing considering his rank and his great power to punish such disrespect.

But you, O Savior, do you not have even greater power over us? We see you practicing an incomparable meekness toward the most guilty, but we do not imitate your meekness. When will we be moved by your example and learn from the lessons we are given in your school?

Meekness does not make us simply excuse the affronts and unjust treatment we receive, but goes so far as to make us say a kind word to those who have offended us. Even if we are insulted by a slap in the face, we suffer it for God. This is the way meekness works. Yes, a servant of God who is truly meek offers the rude treatment he receives to God, and remains in peace.

If the Son of God was so condescending in his usual meetings with people, how much more so did he show his meekness during his sufferings. He carried it to the point of not saying a word of protest against the deicides who covered him with insults and mocked his sufferings. “My friend,” he said to Judas, even while he was delivering him up to his enemies. He overcame the treachery by this salutation, “my friend.” He spoke with the same courtesy to those who came to arrest him: “Whom do you seek? Here I am.”

Let us meditate on this, gentlemen, for we will see these are powerful acts of meekness which surpass human understanding. O Jesus, my God! What an example for us who have undertaken to imitate you. What a lesson for those who are unwilling to suffer anything; or, if they do suffer, become anxious and bitter.

After thinking of all this, should we not love this virtue of meekness by which God gives us the grace not only to stifle the

27. Nicolas Brulart, marquis of Sillery.
movements of anger, but to deal with our neighbor most graciously and to return good for evil? It enables us to endure afflictions, wounds, torments, and even death that men may cause us. Give us the grace, my Savior, to profit from the pains you endured with such love and meekness. Some have already profited from this gift of your goodness. Possibly I am the only one here present who has not yet begun to be gentle and patient.30

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

His Humility

The Son of God proclaimed the truth that he who praises himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.\(^1\) God's providence allows us to see this truth verified every day. It also lets us recognize what a great doctor of the Church has said that nothing makes us more agreeable in the eyes of God and so acceptable to others, as when a person joins a saintly and virtuous life to feelings of sincere humility.

This was exemplified in the person of Monsieur Vincent, who was exalted by the great things God did in him and by him, and by his evident humility. The more profoundly he abased himself before God, the more he was raised up, and the more graces he received for himself and all his holy enterprises.

It is true that after his death it was said of him, as indeed it was said during his life, that his true character was not well known. He was admittedly a humble man. Yet the common opinion never regarded his humility as the main disposition which attracted the graces with which he was inundated, and which were the foundation and root of all the great works he did. Those who judged him most favorably felt that his zeal was the main source of his works, and his prudence happily guided them to a successful conclusion.

While these two virtues were indeed highly developed in him and contributed much to his success, we must recognize that his profound humility drew down the plenitude of lights and graces which caused his works to prosper. To speak of this in a better way, we could say that his zeal led him to humble himself at every turn, and his prudence consisted in simply following the maxims and examples of the Son of God and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. He kept himself in the disposition of heart of considering himself incapable of doing any good, and being without any virtue and strength. In this sentiment he often repeated within himself this lesson of humility he had learned from his divine master, saying in his heart, “I am a worm and no man, creeping upon the earth, not knowing where I am going, but seeking only to hide myself in you, O my God, who are my all in all. I am a poor blind man unable to take a single step in the way of goodness unless you extend your hand of mercy to guide me.”

These were the sentiments of Vincent de Paul. He followed the example of his patron, the apostle Paul, and found no better occasion of correspon-

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dence and cooperation with the designs of God than when he was stricken
to the ground in profound abasement. He closed his eyes to all human
considerations, abandoned himself to the designs of his divine master, said
in his heart, like this great apostle, “Lord, what would you have me do?” In
this spirit of dependence, he never undertook an enterprise of his own
accord. He waited instead for divine Providence to show the work to be
undertaken, either by the orders of those he regarded as his superiors, by the
advice and persuasion of those he recognized as virtuous persons, or lastly
by the contemporary conditions and needs that manifested the will of God
to him, which he always followed but never anticipated.

When he spoke of the greatest of his works, the founding of his own
Congregation, he always openly said that God alone called those received
into the Company. He had never said a word to attract anyone. He stated he
had not become a missionary through personal choice, but had been drawn
in solely by God’s will, hardly aware of what was happening. God alone was
the author of any good accomplished in the missions, in all the activities of
the missionaries, and in all the good works they were connected with. All
this was done without his having planned it, and not knowing where God
was leading him.

To speak in greater detail of the humility of this great servant of God is
difficult because of his constant effort to keep this virtue hidden not only
from others but even from himself. Nevertheless, we shall attempt to trace
its main features, drawn from what we have seen and known of him, heard
from his own lips or taken from the recollections of persons of great piety.

We have already said that although God wished to use Monsieur Vincent
for great things, he himself thought of himself as being unsuited for even
the least of these. Even more, he thought himself more likely to tear down
rather than to build up. He recognized himself as a child of Adam, and
therefore mistrusted himself as one attracted to evil as a result of the fall of
our first parents. For this reason he had formed a great mistrust of himself.
He avoided honors and praise like the plague. He never justified himself
when he was accused, and by preference took the part of the accuser, even
when he was the innocent party. He condemned the least faults in himself
with greater exactitude than some others did with the greatest of their sins.
He judged his slightest lapses of understanding or memory as though they
were serious failures. Because of this attitude he did not push himself into
any undertaking, no matter what, and was more pleased to see God working
good through others than through himself.

In this same spirit he tried to hide, as much as he could, his special graces
received from God. He would have revealed none but those he could not

conceal without lacking in charity for his neighbor, or made necessary by some other obligation. He had a habitual attitude of concealing his gifts and activities and all he had undertaken for the good of others. He did this to such an extent that even members of his own Congregation knew only a fraction of the good works he had been involved with, and how many spiritual and corporal works of charity he had performed for all sorts of persons. Many of his confreres were astonished to read in this present work things they had never before known.

Not content to hide the good he had done, he took every occasion to abase himself, to lessen himself in the esteem of others as far as he was able, imitating the humility of the Son of God. Although he was the splendor of the glory of his Father and the image of God’s substance, he submitted to the opprobrium of men and to being treated like an outcast by the people. He spoke willingly of those things likely to draw down the contempt of others upon himself. He fled with horror from anything that might directly or indirectly tend to his honor or praise. When he went to Paris, he never said that he was called “de Paul,” lest this usage give the impression he belonged to some notable family. He called himself simply Monsieur Vincent, his baptismal name, as one would say Monsieur Pierre or Monsieur Jacques. Also, although he had a licentiate in theology, he spoke of himself as a simple secondary school student. It was remarked about him that he tried on all occasions to appear to be mean and contemptible, and to pass as a nobody. When some issue would arise in which he would be blamed, he accepted the blame willingly and with such a joy that it was as though he had stumbled upon a treasure.

He referred to his Congregation as the “little, the very little, (or) the wretched Company.” He never wanted his confreres to conduct missions in the large cities but only in the villages, especially the tiniest of them, to evangelize and instruct the poor peasants, for this duty was the least respected in the public eye. He wanted his Company to be regarded as the least and last of all the orders. Being obliged once to send some representatives from the house of Saint Lazare to a general meeting of the city, one of the recommendations he gave to the priest, one of the leading priests of his community, and to his companion representing Saint Lazare was that they must insist on taking the last place of all the clergy present.4

He would not allow anyone to say anything in praise of the Congregation. He always referred to it as “the poor and wretched Company”, and said that he asked nothing of God for it, so much as the gift of humility. One day, speaking to his community, he said:

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3. Actually, a licentiate in canon law. CED XIII:60.
4. The priest was Lambert aux Couteaux. His companion was Brother Louis Robineau, who composed the memoirs which Abelly probably consulted.
Is it not a strange thing that the members of the Company, the
Peters, Johns, and Jameses, should flee honors and love rejection,
but the Company and community should, they say, enjoy the esteem
and honor of everybody? I must ask you, how can it be that Peter,
John, and James truly and sincerely loved and sought to be badly
regarded, and yet the Company which is composed of these same
people should seek to be respected and honored? We must surely
see that the two things are incompatible. Therefore all the mission­
aries should be glad, not only when they experience some occasion
of rejection and disrespect for themselves, but also when the entire
Congregation is so judged. This would be a sign that they are truly
humble.5

His humility was so sincere that it could be read on his face, in his eyes, and
in the posture of his body. He thus made it obvious that his humility and
abasements came from the depths of his heart, where this virtue was so deeply
engraved. He believed he had no right to the use of any creatures, even those
necessary to conserve life or necessary to advance God's glory, much less those
which were simply useful. In this sentiment he asked nothing for himself, but
rather was always ready to deprive himself of everything. We are not at all
surprised to hear that he refused the ecclesiastical dignities offered him,
knowing that he considered himself unworthy of the least things.

Although his humility was as we have just spoken, he could still be
constant and generous when it was a question of sustaining the interests of
God or of his Church. On these occasions he showed that humility (as was
so well taught by the Angelic Doctor) is not contrary to magnanimity, but
rather that this virtue is perfected by humility.6 Humility gives magnanimity
a solid base, being solely dependent upon God and yet possessed of a just
mean not going beyond what it should, and having no tie to vanity.

One day, he told his community that humility is compatible with gener­
osity and courage. He used as proof the example of Saint Louis, whose
humility led him to serve the poor with his own hands. He would go into the
hospitals to seek out the most repulsive of the sick and wounded to serve
them in person. Yet he was one of the most generous and valiant kings ever
to bear the crown of France, as was shown in the important victories he won
over the Albigensians and in the two trips he made to the holy land to battle
the infidel. From this he drew the lesson that we must ask of God a
generosity founded upon humility.7

5. CED XI:60.
6. Summa Theologiae Ia-IIae, q. 129, a. 3; and q. 161, a. 2.
7. CED XI:301-03.
SECTION ONE

Some Examples of Monsieur Vincent’s Practice of the Virtue of Humility

A virtuous priest who knew Monsieur Vincent well said most correctly that he had never seen any ambitious person with greater desire of advancing his career, of being well regarded, and of arriving at the summit of honors, than this humble servant of God had of doing just the opposite. He sought to see himself abased, regarded as abject and contemptible, and ready to embrace all humiliations and confusions. He seems to have treasured this virtue, seizing every opportunity to practice it, and taking care to humble himself on every conceivable occasion.

Besides what we have already said in this chapter, we shall give several more particular examples in what follows.

He was far from parading the gifts and talents he had received from God, but on the contrary he strove, as much as possible, as we have already said, to hide them. When he had to reveal these gifts in the service of God and the neighbor, he displayed only what was strictly needed. His maxim in this regard is the more worthy of being respected as it is rare among us. Although we have written of it elsewhere, it bears repeating, for it deserves to be known and practiced by all.

If I do a public action and can make myself look good, I will not do so. I will refrain from pushing myself forward, not doing what would likely give me a certain reputation. If two thoughts come to me about a particular topic, if charity does not require me to do otherwise, I will speak of the lesser of these, to humble myself, and retain the better as a sacrifice to God in the secret of my heart. Our Savior takes pleasure in the humble of heart, and in the simplicity of our words and actions. 8

When he had to speak of the works which God had accomplished by him, or the blessings showered upon his direction of them, he would do so in the name of the Congregation, not of his own. He would say, for example, “God used the Congregation for this or that purpose. His infinite goodness bestowed such and such a grace upon the Company.” When he spoke of what he planned to do in carrying out some project, he would speak in the plural, saying, for example, “We will seek to supply a remedy for this need, or, to

8. CED XII:222.
accomplish this purpose we will send this or that help.” He spoke this way in a spirit of humility, not wishing to make it appear that he was the one responsible. He would not say, for example, “I will remedy this, or I will look to that, or I will send such help,” or similar words, such as are often used by those who have some power and authority. He would say: “Please, thank you, I beg your pardon, I am responsible that these things did not work out as well as we had hoped, or that such an unfortunate situation developed,” because these expressions are in some way humiliating. He wanted to save for himself whatever smacked of abjection or lack of success.

He had a marvelous ability to attribute good to others, and to turn any praise directed to himself to another. He acted as if he had taken no part in the happy outcome, giving any praise and all honor to God and to the neighbor. If there was any excess in his actions, it was in heaping too much praise on others, and too much disparagement on himself. When he referred to himself it was in such humble terms that it was sometimes embarrassing to hear him.

Once, responding to a person of great piety who recommended herself to his prayers,9 he said: “I shall recommend you to God since you ask me to do so. Yet I need the help of good friends more than any person in the world because of the miseries that overwhelm me. They make me look upon the good opinion people have of me as a punishment for my hypocrisy, since it makes me pass myself off for other than I am.”10

A worthy bishop, noticing that Monsieur Vincent humbled himself in all things, could not help saying that he was a perfect Christian. This humble servant of God answered: “Oh, bishop, what are you saying? Me, a perfect Christian? I should be considered as a reprobate, and the greatest sinner of the universe.”

A new member of the Congregation of the Mission spoke in a conference in the presence of Monsieur Vincent. He said he was mortified in profiting so little from the marvelous good example he saw in the founder. Monsieur Vincent allowed these words to pass so as not to interrupt him. After the conference, however, he commented in public: “Monsieur, we have this practice among us not to praise anyone to his face, in his presence. I am truly a marvel, but a marvel of malice, more wicked than the demon, who has no more reason to be in hell than myself. I do not say this by way of exaggeration, but according to the way I really see things.”11

A person given to Jansenism12 once spoke to him in an effort to persuade him to come over to that party. When he finished speaking, but with little to

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9. Marie Henriette de Rochechouart, superior of one of the Paris Visitation monasteries.
10. CED V:580.
12. The Abbe de Saint Cyran.
show for his efforts, he became angry. He reproached Monsieur Vincent, saying he was a true ignoramus, and he was astonished that his Congregation would tolerate him as superior general. Monsieur Vincent replied that he himself was astonished at the same thing, because, he said, "I am even more ignorant than you know."

Once he consoled a student of the Congregation who was tempted to despair. When he answered some difficulties troubling him against hope by urging him to have confidence in God, he added: "If the devil returns with this same evil suggestion, use the same response I have just explained to you. Say to this unhappy tempter it was Vincent, an ignoramus who never finished school, who taught you that."

A priest of the Congregation wrote to Monsieur Vincent that the superior of the mission where he lived was not sufficiently cultivated for that particular place. Monsieur Vincent replied, saying much good of this virtuous superior, and then added, "And me, what should I do: How have I been tolerated in the position I hold? I am more crude, more ridiculous, more stupid than any among whom I live. I cannot say six words in succession without showing my ignorance and lack of prudence. Even worse, I have none of the virtues of the man we are speaking of."

It was his custom in meetings of all sorts of persons, especially when there was some honorable reference to himself, to insist that he was a simple peasant, a guardian of sheep. He enjoyed saying the same thing to gatherings of the poor, to show them that he was of the same stock. In this connection, a peasant came to the door of Saint Lazare once, asking to see him, but the porter told him Monsieur Vincent was busy speaking to noblemen. This good man replied: "This could not be Monsieur Vincent, for he often said he was a simple peasant like myself."

Once, Monsieur Vincent accompanied a priest to the door at Saint Lazare, where a poor woman called out, "My lord, an alms, please." Monsieur Vincent replied, "My poor woman, you do not know me well. I am a poor pig farmer, the son of a poor villager." Another time he was met by a woman at the door as he bade farewell to some noble visitors. She begged an alms, and said she had been formerly the servant of Madame his mother. Monsieur Vincent replied, in the presence of his guests, "My good woman, you mistake me for someone else. My mother never had a servant, but was a servant herself, being the wife, and I the son, of a peasant."

A young man, the relative of a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, declined to sit beside him out of respect for him. Monsieur Vincent said, "Why, Monsieur, do you make such a big thing out of sitting next to a swineherd, and the son of a peasant?" The young man was very surprised at this.
Once he visited a person of rank, who wished to accompany him to the door at the conclusion of their business. He did what he could to dissuade him. He said, among other things: “You know well, Monsieur, that I am the son of a poor villager, and in my youth I tended the sheep in the fields.” The lord, a man of some learning, reminded him that one of the greatest of the kings who ever lived was David, who too was taken from this same occupation. Monsieur Vincent seemed confused and humbled by this response.

In the assemblies of piety which he attended, his humility led him always to defer to the opinion of others, and to prefer them to his own, even though his own were the more cogent. One day at an assembly of the Ladies of Charity of Paris, at which he presided, the participants deliberated on some matters of importance about helping the poor. One of the ladies in the group noted that, with his usual humility, he adopted the opinion of others. She could not refrain from chiding him gently that he was not firm enough in holding to his own view, even though it was clearly superior. He replied in keeping with his humility: “May God forbid, Madame, that my wretched thoughts prevail over those of others. I am pleased that God works his marvels without me, miserable man that I am.”

The attraction he had for the virtue of humility, and the treasures of grace he found in its practice, moved him to extend to his Congregation the sentiments he had. This is why he usually referred to it in unflattering terms. In this spirit, he once replied to a priest who asked to be received into the Company, preferring it to all others, as the best route to take to the kingdom of heaven. “Your own goodness makes you say that, and makes you think this way. But the other communities are truly holy, while ours is the miserable one, and more miserable than miserable.”

To another, who asked the same favor, he said, “What, Monsieur, you want to be a missionary? What makes you look to our tiny Company, for we are poor specimens?” The one he spoke to later mentioned that he was greatly edified at the humility of Monsieur Vincent, who spoke the way he did about his own Congregation at the very moment others were asking to enter.

Not satisfied with simply speaking this way, he tried to inculcate this spirit of humility into the Company from its very first days. While still living at the College des Bons Enfants, he fell to his knees before the seven or eight priests who then composed the community. He admitted in their presence the gravest sins of his past life. These priests were stunned by this action. They admired the action of grace in their superior which enabled him to overcome the natural inclination which all men have of hiding their failings,

and to adopt rather the stance of attempting to destroy any natural esteem they may have had for him. He had the custom, also, on the anniversary of his baptism, of kneeling before the community to ask God's pardon for all the sins he had committed during the time the divine Goodness had allowed him to spend on earth. He would beg the Company to pardon the scandal he may have caused, and to pray to God for his mercy.

Besides, when he felt that something was not up to his ideals, he would humble himself. He did this even for interior failings, such as the first movements of impatience which had not manifested themselves exteriorly, or perhaps for some words lacking in meekness to an individual, or even for the least inadvertences.

Once, he suggested to one of the brothers of the house at Saint Lazare to give lodging to a poor person passing through. This brother opposed the idea with reasons and hesitations. Monsieur Vincent felt he had to speak more firmly to have him carry out his orders, but later his humility caused him some remorse. He went to the garden, where some older priests of the Congregation were gathered, to ask pardon of the Company for the scandal he continued to give, and which he only recently had given in speaking rudely to a brother of the poultry yard. One of the priests who was present for this humiliation added: "What he did was known to everyone. That same evening, however, I went to his room as was my custom, after the community's general examination of conscience. I saw him kissing the feet of that brother."

It was not on this occasion alone, but on a countless number of others that he was seen at the feet of his inferiors, even the least in the house. We will give here only a few examples.

Once, thinking he had offended a brother by having suggested too strongly that he must have patience in a matter that arose, he would not say mass until he had begged pardon of this brother. Not finding him in the kitchen, he went to the cellar to express his regrets for having caused him some uneasiness.

Once on a fast day he stopped by a poor inn during one of his trips. He asked for a bit of oil to put on some dried mussels he had been served, but almost immediately his humility made him fear that he had given bad example to his traveling companions. He immediately fell to his knees before them, asking their pardon.

Another time, traveling with three of his priests, he enlivened the time by some stories of what had happened to him some time before. His audience was deeply interested, but just as deeply surprised when he stopped in the middle of a sentence. He struck his breast and said he was a miserable sinner, filled with vainglory and pride, knowing only how to talk about himself. He changed
the subject, and once they arrived at their destination he begged pardon of them, on his knees, for the scandal he had given, in speaking of himself.

When he took sick at Richelieu in 1649, the brother infirman from Saint Lazare was summoned to take care of him, because he was well acquainted with what had to be done. He welcomed the brother and received him with much affection, but Monsieur Vincent said that he sorry to have caused him the trouble of coming such a distance for nothing but a carcass. Later he felt that he had not been sufficiently generous in his welcome. He fell to his knees to ask pardon, not only at Richelieu, but again at Saint Lazare when he returned. In the presence of his assistant, who reported the event, he said, “Do you see this good brother, Monsieur? He came all the way to Richelieu to help me, and I was not as welcoming as I should have been. I ask his pardon, in your presence, and ask you to pray to God for me not to commit such faults in the future.”

Once a nephew of his came from his native town of Dax to Paris. The porter of the College des Bons Enfants, where he then lived, alerted Monsieur Vincent that his nephew wished to see him. At this, Monsieur Vincent felt the first movement of some uneasiness at his arrival, and asked to have him shown to his room. Almost immediately, he changed his mind, and went himself to receive him humbly at the door. The canon of the village of Dax was in the College des Bons Enfants at the time, and he continued the story.

I cannot pass over an act of virtue of Monsieur Vincent which I witnessed on the occasion of his nephew’s visit. He instructed the porter to go to the street to meet the young man, dressed in the typical garb of peasants of his region, and bring him to his room. At once this good servant of God overcame his reluctance to receive him. He came down from his room to the street, embraced him, kissed him, and led him to the garden where he had called all the members of the community. He described his nephew as the most respectable man of his entire family, and had him meet all the priests and brothers. He would do the same for persons of rank who visited him. In the first spiritual exercise after this event, he accused himself publicly of having some shame at the arrival of his nephew, and of wanting to take him unnoticed to his room just because he was a peasant and so poorly dressed.

He went further in his practice of humility in the first ordination retreats held at Saint Lazare for, speaking to these candidates for the ecclesiastical state, he brought up some humiliating things from his past. He mentioned that one of his relatives had been condemned to the galleys. He repeated this on several other occasions, but the truth was this relative was distant, more than the fourth degree of kindred removed.
While he was so anxious to obtain humiliations for himself, he was equally receptive to those which came from others. One of the chief magistrates of Parlement one day was reported to him to have said in public that the missionaries of Saint Lazare hardly gave missions any more. Monsieur Vincent was astonished at this. His contact replied that the magistrate spoke without knowing that the missionaries had for a long time been giving countless missions, and even now were continuing to do so. He urged Monsieur Vincent to inform the magistrate, otherwise he might continue to berate the Congregation. Monsieur Vincent replied to this, “we must leave him alone. I will never justify myself except by letting my actions speak for me.”

When a house of the Congregation had been seriously hurt, though innocent of any cause, Monsieur Vincent showed himself joyous rather than sad. He exhorted the community to thank God for this trial and to ask the grace to make good use of it. “To be treated the way our Lord was, is true happiness.”

To establish the spirit of humility well in the Company, he proposed as a subject of prayer for the community once a month, for several years, a meditation on the horrors of pride. He said:

The Congregation cannot subsist without the virtue of humility. When this virtue is lacking in a company, each one thinks of his own particular house, and this leads to partiality, schism, and destruction. If the missionaries should ask for one thing from the Lord, it is humility. They should be sad and weep when they receive applause, for our Lord has said: Vae cum benedixerint vobis homines. Cursed shall you be, when men shall praise you.14

His humility became most evident chiefly in his service in the court, for it was shown in the circumstances where honors were commonplace and well deserved for virtue and good conduct. In the beginning when he was summoned to the Council with the late Prince of Conde and several other lords, the prince invited him to sit beside him. He replied, “My lord, you do me too great an honor even allowing me to be in your presence, for I am but the son of a poor swineherd.” At this, the prince quoted a verse from the poet: Moribus et vita nobilitatur homo, [“Man is ennobled by his morals and life,”] adding, “I did not just learn of your ability.” He then brought up in this first meeting some disputed points. Monsieur Vincent responded so directly to them that the prince said, “Ha, Monsieur Vincent, you tell everyone you are an ignoramus, and yet you have given us a solution to one of our greatest problems with the Huguenots in just a few words.” He then proposed several other difficult cases in canon law. Monsieur Vincent

answered with the same assurance. This led the prince to say he understood perfectly why Her Majesty had invited him to serve on the Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs, having to do with benefices and other church matters.

While this service at the court was most important and honorable, and brought him into immediate contact with the queen mother during the regency, he never wore a new cassock in going to the Louvre. He dressed the same as he did in preaching and instructing poor peasants, always neat, but in a simple and humble manner.

Speaking once of his position at court, he said: “I ask God that I may be regarded as a simpleton, as I am, so as not to have to continue in this position. In that way I would have greater leisure to do penance, and give less bad example to our little Company.” This position weighed heavily upon him, not because of any lack of appreciation for Her Majesty, for whose service he would willingly have given his life, but because of the people he had to deal with. He accepted the difficulties which arose, and the calumnies that came his way, never seeking to justify himself, and still less to complain of his lot. Far from resenting those who caused him trouble, he humbled himself before them, and begged their pardon for any supposed failing against them. This occurred with a person of some standing who treated him with contempt, and also with a young gentleman who in an outburst called him an old fool. He knelt before both, asking pardon for having incited them to such conduct.

On another occasion he prevented the king from appointing an unfit person to a bishopric. His action caused the man’s relatives to be most resentful. They then invented a calumny against him, adding just enough detail to convince the court of the truth of this charge. These things came to the ear of the queen, who at the first opportunity asked him, smiling, if he knew what people were saying. He replied quietly: “Madame, I am a great sinner.” When Her Majesty retorted that he ought to justify himself, he replied: “Such things and more were said against our Lord, and he never justified himself.”

During this same time he was at court, one of his friends alerted him to what a priest, who happened to die soon after, was spreading about the city. He was even reporting to one of the most qualified of people in Paris that Monsieur Vincent had bestowed a benefice upon someone, in return for a library, and a large sum of money. This good servant of God was at first moved to respond to this calumny, and took up his pen, as he later recounted, to write a justification of his actions. As he began to form the first letters, he recollected himself, and thought of what he was about to do. “O miserable one! What are you thinking of? What, you want to justify yourself? We have just heard of a Christian falsely accused in Tunis, who lived three whole
days in sufferings, and finally died without uttering a word of complaint, although he was innocent of the crime he was accused of. And do you want to excuse yourself? No, it shall not be so!” He put down his pen, and took no action to justify himself.

To progress more in humility, he devised another tactic to further it. He brought together in Paris in 1641 some of the oldest and leading members of the Congregation to deliberate on some important matters. After several conferences, he recalled the faults of his administration, his incapacity for governance, and the need to have someone else chosen as head of the Congregation. “Since you are now assembled, the office of superior general is in your hands. In the name of God, elect someone from among yourselves to be our superior.” With that he left the place of the meeting, to a small chapel adjacent to the church, where he prayed turned toward the main altar of the church.

The assembled priests were surprised at this suggestion and, seeing no reason to debate it, sent to have him return to the assembly. He was found, after much searching, in the chapel, on his knees. He was informed that no one else was willing to assume this responsibility. The members earnestly requested him to return, to resolve some of their other pressing business. He excused himself, and used new persuasions to urge them to a new election, saying he had resigned, and they must choose someone else to replace him. This was reported to the others in the assembly, but they left in a body to urge him to continue as superior. They said, finally: “You are the one whom we elected as our superior general, and as long as God preserves you upon this earth, we will have no other.” He did all he could to resist, but finally he bowed his head, accepting the will of God and submitting himself anew to this burden. While retaining for himself all that was painful, he would not accept any of the honors and titles going with the office, not even using the term Superior General of the Congregation except in public acts, or in Letters Patent, when it was absolutely necessary to do so. Instead, he would add after his name, on some letters or documents, “Unworthy Priest of the Congregation of the Mission,” or “unworthy superior.” He wrote to some of his priests that at the beginning of their letters to him, they should leave no more blank spaces, as signs of deference, than he used in writing to them. He wanted no such signs of respect from his inferiors, in their dealings with him.

In this connection, one of the older priests of the community of Saint Lazare proposed that Monsieur Vincent should be shown some special marks of reverence as their common father and superior general. When he

15. This assembly took place in October of 1642.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN, SECTION ONE

approached, all should stop, and bow or make a sign of reverence until he had gone by. When Monsieur Vincent realized this, he put a stop to it at once. When it was pointed out that this was a common usage in the other orders, he said: "I know this well, and we must respect their reasons for doing so. For my part I ought not to be compared to the least of men, I who am the worst of the lot."

The chair that was placed in the choir of the church of Saint Lazare when he officiated, was raised above the others. He would not agree to this, saying it was proper to do this for Their Excellencies, the bishops, but not for a miserable priest such as he was.

He always used the humblest vestments for the sacred liturgy. Once the queen mother, with her usual piety, presented Saint Lazare with some silver vestments on the occasion of the birth of the king. Her Majesty sent them with the request to use them on the feast of Christmas, but when Monsieur Vincent saw the rich vestments ready for use he objected, and asked for the usual ones. No matter what was said his humility would not allow him to be the first to use these splendid vestments. The deacon and subdeacon, too, used the common ones, for the sake of uniformity.

He was not happy at the little services given him because of his age or sicknesses. He would thank those who helped him with such profusion he repaid with interest what he had received. On the contrary, he was delighted when he could serve others, either at table or even in the kitchen, doing the most humble tasks.

His humility went so far as to have him ask the blessing of his inferiors. This is what he wrote once to one of his priests, speaking of another who was dangerously ill. "Alas, Monsieur, I am anxious about the condition of our dear sick! What a loss for the Congregation if God should call him from this life! But may his holy will be done. If he is still alive when you get this, embrace him for me, and tell him of my sorrow, and recommend me to his prayers. Ask his blessing on the entire Company, and especially for me, who ask it prostrate in spirit at his feet."

We should not be surprised that he acted this way, in view of the low opinion he had of himself. He judged and proclaimed on all occasions that he was unworthy of the office of superior general and of the character of the priesthood. He said on several occasions that if he had not yet received orders, and knew his own unworthiness as he now did, he would never have consented to ordination. He would have chosen rather the humble condition of a brother in the Company, or even a simple farmer, as his own father was. Although he very worthily fulfilled all the functions and duties of the priesthood, his great humility had a deep effect on his spirit. Far from

17. Louis XIV, son of Anne of Austria and Louis XIII, was born September 5, 1638.
presuming on his own merits, he felt himself as an obstacle to good, and feared being responsible before God for heresies, disorders, and public calamities, because he had not prevented them, as he felt he should have as a priest. This he stated on several occasions, and this is what he wrote to Monsieur de Saint Martin, canon of Dax, his long-time friend. We present his letter here, because it gives us a good insight into his humble opinion of himself and his high regard for the priesthood.

I thank you for your care of my grand-nephew, whom I must say I have never thought should become a cleric, and even less that I should do anything to encourage him. This state is the most sublime upon earth, the one our Lord took and exercised himself. If I had known what was involved when I first dared enter it, as I now know, I would have preferred to be a common farmer than to enter such an exalted state. I have said this more than a hundred times to the poor peasants, when I have encouraged them to be content with their lot. I have told them I would be happy in their state. As I grow older, I think this way even more. Every day I see I am farther from the perfection I should attain. Certainly, priests of our time have good reason to fear God’s judgments. Besides their own sins they must answer for the sins of their people, and must make satisfaction for them. The worst of all is that God shall hold them responsible for the scourges he has sent the Church, such as the plague, war, famine, and the heresies which attack it from all sides. We would say more, Monsieur, that the evil life of priests has brought about all these disasters which have so despoiled the bride of the Savior and so disfigured her that she is scarcely recognizable. What would those Fathers of the Church say now, who saw her in her pristine beauty, if they were to see the impiety and profanations which we see? Those fathers, in their day, thought few priests would be saved, although those of their time were in their greatest fervor.

All these considerations, Monsieur, lead me to think that it would be more suitable for this poor child to give himself to the profession of his father rather than to undertake the sublime and difficult state in which we are, for those not called are almost surely lost. Since I do not see any assured signs of a vocation, I suggest you advise him to continue to work as a peasant to gain his livelihood. Exhort him to fear God, to make himself worthy of his mercy in this life and in the next. This is the best advice I can give.

Please look into the work of Monsieur N., who said recently in a conference he gave here, speaking of a pastor in Brittany who had written a book on this subject, that today’s priests, such as they are,
are the greatest enemies of the Church of God. If all priests were like you and he, there would not be so much truth in it.\textsuperscript{18}

\section*{SECTION TWO}

\textit{Some Thoughts of Monsieur Vincent About the Virtue of Humility}

Although Monsieur Vincent sought to humble himself on all occasions, as we have said in this chapter, and all sorts of situations gave him opportunities for practicing this virtue, there were two main motives, like two pivots, on which his thoughts ever turned. They guided his own practice and the counsels he gave to others.

The first of these was the exalted knowledge and appreciation he had for the infinite perfections of God and for the failings of creatures. These made him regard it as unjust not to humble himself everywhere and in all things, because of the miserable condition of man and the grandeur and infinite perfections of God. This is how he spoke to his community on one occasion:

In truth, gentlemen and my brothers, if we all study ourselves well, we will find it most just and reasonable to despise ourselves. If we consider only the corruption of our nature, the flightiness of our minds, the darkness of our understanding, the lack of control of our will, and the impurity of our affections, and besides, if we weigh in the scales of the sanctuary our works and our projects, we will find them all worthy of contempt. But you will say to me, what do you make of the many sermons we have preached, the confessions heard, the trouble taken to help our neighbor and to serve our Lord? Yes, gentlemen, if we reflect on even our best actions, we will find them ruined by the way they were done or in their motive, and in whatever way we look at them there is as much evil as good in them. Tell me, please, what would you expect from the weakness of man? What do you expect from nothingness? Who commits sin? What do we have of ourselves but nothingness and sin? You must hold it as certain that in everything and everywhere we are worthy only of rejection. We are always most contemptible because of the innate opposition within ourselves to the sanctity and other perfections of

\textsuperscript{18} CED V:567-69.
God, to imitating the life of Jesus Christ, to responding to the workings of his grace.

To persuade ourselves more of this truth, think of the natural and constant inclination we have for evil, our helplessness to achieve any good, and the experience we all have even when we think we have succeeded well in what we attempted, or things have gone as we suggested. Yet it happens just the opposite of what we expected, and God often allows us to be mistaken. If then we look into ourselves well, we will see that in all we think, say, or do, either in itself or in its circumstances, we are filled with confusion and contempt. If we do not give way to flattering ourselves, we will see that we are not only more evil than other men, but in some way worse than the devils in hell. If these unhappy spirits had been given the graces and opportunities given to us to make us better, they would have used them a thousand times better than we have. 19

The second motive for the humility of Monsieur Vincent was the example and words of Jesus Christ. He kept Jesus Christ ever in view, and held him up for others to imitate. Speaking of this once in a conference to his community, he recalled the words of our Lord, “Learn of me, for I am humble of heart,” 20 and, “He who humbles himself will be exalted, and he who exalts himself shall be humbled.” 21 He then added:

What was the life of this divine Savior but one continuous humiliation? He loved it so that he was never without humiliations during his whole life. Even after his death he willed that the Church should represent his divine person by the image of the crucifix, appearing before our eyes in a state of ignominy, as a criminal, and as suffering the most shameful and infamous death imaginable. Why is this? Because he knew the excellence of humility and the malice of the contrary vice. It not only makes other sins more grave, but even ruins other acts which of themselves are not bad. It can infect and corrupt even the good things we do, no matter how holy they may be. 22

The mind and heart of Monsieur Vincent were filled with these two great and powerful motives of humility. We should therefore not be surprised if on all occasions he showed great appreciation for this virtue, and attempted to have it solidly implanted, sending down deep roots in the hearts of all sorts of people, especially his own dear confreres. Here is what he said to his community on one occasion:

22. CED XI:61.
Humility is a virtue so complete, so difficult, and so necessary, that we cannot think of it too often. This was the virtue of Jesus Christ and of his mother, the virtue of the greatest of the saints, and it is the virtue of all missionaries. What am I saying? I repeat, I would wish we all had this virtue, for when I said it is the virtue of missionaries, I mean it is the virtue we most need, and which we should ardently desire. This wretched Company, the least of all, was founded on humility as its proper virtue. Without it we will do nothing of value, neither for others nor for ourselves. Without humility we can expect to make no progress ourselves, nor do any good for our neighbor.

O Savior, give us this holy virtue, which is yours, which you brought to the world, and which you loved so dearly. And you, gentlemen, those of you who want to become true missionaries, you must work to acquire this virtue and advance in its practice. Above all, be on your guard against thoughts of pride, ambition, and vanity, as the greatest enemies you could have. You must flee from them as soon as they appear to put an end to them, and must watch carefully to give them no entrance. Yes, I say it once again, if you wish to be a true missionary, each one of you personally must be pleased if you are looked upon as poor and wretched, as persons without virtue, as ignoramuses, or if you are harmed and despised, or blamed for your faults, or declared to be insufferable because of your miseries and imperfections.  

I would go even further and say that we should be pleased when our Congregation in general is reviled as useless for the Church, composed of poor specimens. Be pleased when it does poorly whatever it tries to do, when its efforts for the poor peasants bear no fruit, the seminaries are useless, and the ordination retreats have little to recommend them. Yes, if we have the spirit of Jesus Christ, we ought to rejoice to be treated like this, as I have just said. Possibly someone will say, Monsieur, what are you saying? Durus est hic sermo ["This is a hard saying"]. I will admit it, this is hard for nature. It is difficult to persuade ourselves we have done poorly, and even harder to have others think and speak this way and blame us. But all this is easy for a truly humble soul to understand, one who has true humility and knows himself as he really is. Far from this causing him any sadness, he, on the contrary, will rejoice and be content to see God exalted and glorified through his humility and

23. CED XI:56-57.
nothingness. I know well that our Lord has given this grace to several in the Company, to run swiftly in the pursuit of this virtue, and to animate their actions in the hope of their own diminution, and in the desire to remain hidden and unappreciated. We must ask this grace for all the rest of us, so that we may have no other ambition than to see ourselves lowered and annihilated for the love and glory of God, and to ensure that the characteristic virtue of the missionary is humility.

To make you appreciate this more, notice what I am about to say: if you have ever heard outsiders say that something good has been done by the Company, you will find that it was because they found some small bit of humility in it, and they have seen some humiliating and abject actions done, such as instructing the peasants or serving the poor. Also, if you have ever noticed the ordinands leaving their exercises edified at what they had seen in our house, if you look closely you will notice that they have been struck by the humble and simple way they have seen us act. This is something new for them, and it is this which charms and attracts everyone. I know that in the last ordination retreat, a priest who attended left behind accidentally some notes in which he expressed how much he was affected by the displays of humility he had seen.25

Another time, he spoke to his community on this same virtue:

Pay attention to the recommendation of our Lord in these words: "Learn of me for I am humble of heart,"26 and ask him to give you a full understanding of them. If he gives us only an ardent desire for humility, that will be enough, even though we do not fully appreciate this virtue as our Lord did. He knew of its relationship to the perfections of God his Father, and to the vileness of sinful man. It is true that we will never see this, except dimly in this life, but we in our darkness should have confidence that, if our heart is set on humiliations, God will give us humility, we will preserve it, and it will grow in us by the acts we will do. One act of virtue well made disposes us for the next, and so the first degree of humility leads to the second, the second to the third, and so on for all the others.27 Remember, gentlemen and my brothers, that Jesus Christ, speaking of the publican's humility, said that God heard his prayer. If he had said this of a man who had done wrong all his life, what should be our hope, provided we are truly humble? On the contrary,

25. CED XII:202-04.
27. To the foregoing fragment, Abelly added the following either from another conference, or from a much different version.
what happened to the Pharisee? This was a man whose position separated him from the rest of the people, because it was like a sect among the Jews. The Pharisees prayed, fasted, and did many other good deeds, yet these did not keep Jesus from reproving him. Why was this? Because he looked upon these good deeds with pleasure, and gave way to vanity, as though they were owed to himself alone.

Look, then, at a just man and a sinner before the throne of God. Because the just man has no humility, he is rejected and reproved, along with his good works. What appeared as virtue in him turns out to be vice. On the other hand, the sinner recognizes his misery. Moved by a true sentiment of humility, he stays at the door of the temple, striking his breast, and does not dare to lift his eyes to heaven. By this humble disposition of heart, though he came to the temple guilty of many sins, he is cleansed of them. All this comes from a single act of humiliation, which for him proved to be his means of salvation. We should see from this that humility, when it is true, brings other virtues into the soul, and in humbling himself profoundly and sincerely, the sinner becomes the just. Even if we are wicked criminals but turn to humility, we shall be justified. On the contrary, if we are like the angels themselves, and excel in the practice of the greatest virtues, but lack humility, these virtues will be destroyed in us. They have no foundation because of our lack of humility, and we will become like the damned, totally deprived of all virtue.

Let us hold on to this truth, gentlemen. Let each one engrave it carefully on his heart and say to himself: though I had all virtues, and yet did not have humility I would be mistaken for thinking myself to be virtuous. I would be nothing but a proud pharisee and an abominable missionary. O Savior Jesus Christ, spread over us your divine light that filled your own soul, that made you prefer contempt to praise! Touch our hearts with these holy desires which burned and consumed your own, and which made you seek the glory of your heavenly Father in your own abnegation. Grant us in your grace that we may begin from this moment to reject all that does not lead to your honor and our own rejection. Take from us all that caters to our own vanity, ostentation, and self-esteem, that we may renounce once and for all the false applause of men and vain complacency in the success of our own efforts. O Savior, may we learn by your grace and by your example, to be truly humble of heart.28

One morning after meditation, he questioned one of the missionaries before the assembled community about the thoughts he had entertained in his meditation. He replied that he had experienced great uneasiness during a large part of the prayer. Monsieur Vincent took the occasion to speak to the community:

It is good to speak of such humiliating things when prudence allows us to reveal them. We can draw profit from them by overcoming the natural repugnance we have to reveal what our pride would wish to keep hidden. Saint Augustine published the secret sins of his youth in his autobiography, letting the whole world know of his errors and the excesses of his debauchery. And did not that vessel of election, the great apostle Saint Paul, raised to the third heavens in vision, confess that he had persecuted the Church? He put this in his writings so that until the end of time he would be known as a persecutor of the Church. Certainly, if we listened to ourselves, and did not do violence to ourselves, we would never speak of our misery and our faults. No, we would hide everything leading to our own confusion. This we have inherited from our first parent, Adam, who went into hiding after he had offended God.

On many occasions I have visited various convents, where I have asked the religious there what virtue most appealed to them. I asked this question even of some I knew had little attraction for humility. Of the twenty or so I asked I found scarcely one who did not say it was the virtue of humility, so true it is that all find this virtue beautiful and attractive. How does it come about, then, that so few embrace it and even fewer possess it? This is because they are satisfied with thinking about it, but do not take the trouble to practice it. They are enthralled at speculation, but practice has a stark face. Practicing humility displeases us because it makes us choose the lowest place, after all others, even the least. It has us suffer calumnies, seek contempt, love abjection, all things for which we have a natural aversion. But we must rise above this repugnance, and make an effort to arrive at the actual practice of this virtue, or else we will never acquire it.

I am well aware that some here, by God's grace, practice this divine virtue, and do not entertain a lofty opinion of their talents, their knowledge, or their virtue. They recognize themselves as miserable creatures and are willing to be taken for such, and put

30. 1 Tim 1:13.
themselves beneath all other creatures. I must confess that I never meet these persons without being thrown into confusion. They are a silent reproach to my pride, abominable as I am. These poor souls are always at peace, their joy appearing on their faces. The Holy Spirit dwells in them, blessing them so with his gift of peace that nothing can trouble them. If they are contradicted, they give way. If calumniated, they bear it. If forgotten, they assume that it is with good reason. If they are overwhelmed with duties, they work willingly, doing whatever they can. The more difficult a thing commanded is, the more willingly they accept it, confiding in the power of holy obedience. Temptations which come to them serve only to strengthen their humility, making them have recourse to God and bringing them victories over the devil. They have no more enemies to combat, save only pride. It gives no truce during life, but attacks even the greatest saints in various ways. It causes some to take vain complacency in the good they have done, or has others rejoice in the knowledge they have acquired. One assumes that he is especially enlightened, while another thinks of himself as better and more stable than others. This is why we have great reason to pray that God would protect us, and save us from this pernicious vice. It is to be feared precisely because we have such a natural inclination toward it.

We should, therefore, be on our guard, and do the contrary of what corrupt nature urges. If it puffs us up, we should abase ourselves. If we are inclined to self-esteem, we should think of our weakness. If we discover a desire to be known and appreciated, we should conceal what would make us noticed. We should prefer base and vile actions to those which have a certain flair and which are honorable. Finally, we should return often to our love of abjection as an assured refuge from all these disturbances which this unhappy bent for pride ever raises within us. Let us pray our Lord to attach us to himself by the merits of the adorable humility of his life and death. Let us offer him, each of us individually, and all of us in common solidarity, all that we can practice of this virtue. Let us give ourselves to this with the sole motive of honoring him and confounding ourselves.32

Another time, he spoke to his community of what had been said in a recent clergy conference.

These clergy who came here took as their topic of conversation last Tuesday what each had noticed of the virtues of the late

32. CED XI:53-56.
Monsieur Olier, a member of their company. Among other remarks, one of the more important was that the great servant of God often spoke of humility. Among all his other virtues this seemed to be the most prominent.

While they were speaking of this, I glanced at the various portraits adorning the walls of our room. I said to myself, Lord my God, if we could penetrate Christian truths as they are and act accordingly, how differently we would act! For example, looking at the portrait of the Blessed Bishop of Geneva, I thought that if we looked upon the things of the world in the same way he did, and if we spoke with his sentiments, and if our eyes were open to eternal truths as were his, vanity would have little room to occupy our minds and hearts.

Above all, gentlemen, if we look carefully at the most beautiful picture of all, that admirable example of humility, our Lord Jesus Christ, would we allow any good opinion of ourselves to enter our minds, seeing that we are so far from his profound abasements? Would we be so rash as to prefer ourselves to others, seeing that a murderer was chosen over him? Are we afraid of being looked upon as miserable, seeing the innocent lamb treated as a malefactor, and dying between two criminals, as if he were the worst of the three? Let us pray to God, gentlemen, to save us from this blindness. Let us ask him for the grace to tend always to the lowest, confessing to him and before men that of ourselves we are but sin, ignorance, and malice. Let us hope others will believe this of us, and will say so, and hold us in contempt. Lose no opportunity to annihilate yourself by the practice of this holy virtue. It is not enough to appreciate this virtue and to resolve to practice it, as some have done. We must do violence to ourselves to practice the acts of this virtue, which we have not sufficiently done.33

A priest of the Mission working in Artois, his native region, had a small pamphlet printed on his own initiative, which discussed the Congregation of the Mission.34 When Monsieur Vincent learned of it he was greatly troubled, since it is opposed to the spirit of humility which he had attempted to inculcate in all members of the Company. He wrote to the priest in these terms:

If on the one hand I was consoled to see you return to Artois, on the other I was sorry to learn that you had published a short account.

33. CED XI:393-94.
of our institute. I was so moved by this that I cannot adequately describe it, for it is something strongly opposed to humility to publish who we are and what we do. This goes counter to the example of our Lord who during the time he was on earth wrote no accounts of his words or his works. If there is any good in us and in our manner of life, it is for God to manifest it as he sees fit. We are but poor folk, ignorant, and sinners. We ought to hide ourselves as useless in accomplishing any good, and unworthy that anyone should think well of us. For this reason, Monsieur, God has given me the grace up to the present of never consenting to having anything printed which would make us known and esteemed, although I have been strongly urged to publish some of the accounts coming from Madagascar, Barbary, and the Hebrides Islands. For even stronger reasons, I have not allowed the printing of anything having to do with the essence and spirit, the foundation and growth of the Company, and the functions and end of our institute. May it please God that it stays this way, but since there is no remedy for the present situation, I will say no more. I would ask you only never to undertake anything affecting the Company as a whole, unless you first alert me beforehand.\footnote{CED VI:176-77.}

This truly humble servant of God could not help repeating and inculcating to his Company the beautiful lessons of this virtue of humility. This is how he spoke on another occasion:

God has not sent us to take up responsibilities and honorable positions, nor to speak and act with pomp and a show of authority. He sent us solely to evangelize the poor, and to perform the other exercises of our institute humbly, gently, and familiarly. This is why we are able to apply to ourselves what Saint John Chrysostom said in one of his homilies, that as long as we remain sheep by a true and sincere humility, not only will we not be devoured by the wolves, but we will change them into sheep.\footnote{PG 57:389.} On the other hand, as soon as we leave the humble and simple way proper to our institute, we will lose the grace attached to it. We will not find this grace in the brilliant things we undertake. Is it not right that a missionary who has made himself worthy of the blessing of heaven in his humble profession, and who gains thereby the approbation and esteem of men, should be deprived of both the one and the other when he allows himself to be drawn to works which by their splendor reflect the spirit of the world, and which are contrary to the spirit of his
state? Should he not fear that he would fade away in due time, and fall into disarray? Recall what is said about a servant who becomes a master. He becomes proud and insupportable.

The late Cardinal de Berulle, that great servant of God, used to say that it was good to remain in the lower place. The least positions are the surest, and there are untold perils in the higher places. This is why all the saints have fled honors. To convince us by his example and his words, our Lord said of himself that he had come into the world to serve and not to be served.37

Monsieur Vincent held it as a maxim that humility was the root of charity, and the more a person was humble the more charitable he was toward his neighbor. On this subject, he said to his community:

During the sixty-seven years that God has put up with me on this earth, I have thought and thought again about the best means to acquire and preserve union and charity toward God and the neighbor. I have not discovered anything better or more efficacious than holy humility to put oneself beneath all others, to think ill of no one, to regard oneself as the least and worst of all. Self-love and pride blind us and lead us to maintain our opinions against those of our neighbor.38

He said another time:

We should never look to see what is good in us, but study to know the evil and the defective. This is a fine way to preserve humility. The gift of converting souls, or all the other talents we have are not for us, for we are only the bearer of the gift. With all that, we could easily be damned. No one should congratulate himself nor take pleasure in himself, nor think much of himself, seeing that God operates his marvels through humility. He should rather humble himself, and recognize himself as an unworthy instrument which God deigns to use. God used the rod of Moses to work prodigies and miracles, although in itself it was only a worthless stick and a fragile rod.39

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

His Obedience

WE KNOW of no better way to begin this chapter on the obedience of Monsieur Vincent than to recall his words on this subject, particularly when he spoke to the religious of the first convent of the Visitation, in Paris.

These sisters have said that this great servant of God, who was their first spiritual father, often recommended the virtues of obedience and exactness in regularity, even to the smallest point. He had a special concern to have those two virtues well established in their communities. He used to say that the perfect practice of these two virtues constituted holy religion. To deepen their appreciation he used to bring them together, to speak about their excellence and beauty. He pointed out how it was necessary to perfect themselves in these virtues to please God, who takes delight in religious souls who are faithful to their practice. This divine Spouse so loved the virtue of obedience that the least delay in obeying was displeasing to him. A virtuous religious who had publicly vowed this virtue in the Church ought to be solicitous in carrying out what she had promised. One who failed in smaller observances would soon fail in greater matters.

He used to say that the good of the creature consists in the accomplishment of God’s will. This is found in the faithful practice of obedience and in the exact observance of the rules of the institute. We cannot give a better service to God than by practicing obedience, for by this virtue he accomplishes his designs upon us. God’s glory is found in the overcoming of self-love and one’s own interests, and this is what we should chiefly aim at. This practice leads the soul to the true and perfect liberty of the children of God.

He recommended strongly that they renounce their own judgment to mortify it and submit themselves to their superiors. He used to say that obedience did not consist in simply doing what one is told on this or that occasion, but in having the disposition of soul of doing all they are commanded on all occasions. They must look on the superiors as holding the place of Jesus Christ on earth, and therefore give them every mark of respect. To murmur against them is a sort of internal apostasy. Just as exterior apostasy would involve removing the habit and leaving the religious life, so internal apostasy causes one to be disunited with superiors, rejecting them in the mind, and attaching oneself to ideas contrary to their wishes. This is
the greatest of all ills that can happen in community. The religious soul will avoid these when she keeps herself in a holy indifference and allows herself to be directed by her superiors.

He also said on the topic of obedience that to have a true submission which should characterize a religious community we should consider attentively the following points:

(1) The role of superiors, who on earth take the place of Jesus Christ in our regard.

(2) The troubles which superiors endure and their solicitude to lead us to perfection cause them sometimes to pass the whole night in prayer in anguish of soul. Their subjects enjoy a peaceful rest. Their anxiety is the greater when they reflect that they will have to render an account to God of all their responsibilities.

(3) The recompense promised to truly obedient souls, even in this life. Besides the graces this virtue merits, God is pleased to fulfill the will of those who for love of him submit their wills to their superiors.

(4) The punishments the disobedient should fear. An example was given in the Old Testament of the chastisement of Korah, Dathan and Abiram for their contempt of Moses, their leader. By this contempt they had grievously offended God, who has said of those constituted in authority in the Church: “He who hears you, hears me; and he who despises you, despises me.”

(5) The example of obedience which Jesus Christ gave us. He preferred death rather than to fail in obedience. One would have to be truly hard-hearted to see God obey unto death for the sake of such wretched and miserable creatures as we are, and still refuse to subject himself for love of him.

He added that to practice this virtue perfectly, we must obey:

(1) Voluntarily, placing our will in the will of our superior.

(2) Simply, for the love of God, never allowing ourselves to question why our superiors commanded such and such a thing.

(3) Promptly, not delaying in carrying out what has been ordered.

(4) Humbly, not seeking any praise or esteem for our obedience.

(5) Courageously, not hesitating in the face of difficulties, but overcoming them with strength and generosity.

(6) Joyfully, doing what is ordered with pleasure, with no show of resentment.

(7) Perseveringly, imitating Jesus Christ who was obedient unto death.

It should not be imagined that what Monsieur Vincent said or taught on
this matter was done as a lesson from a teacher, or the exhortation of a preacher, who sometimes does not practice what he teaches others. On the contrary, these lessons were the sincere expression of the deepest sentiments of his heart, and as a sort of reflection of what he himself practiced. He showed by the example of his own life what he proposed by his words.

First, Monsieur Vincent maintained a faithful and perfect dependence on God, submitting himself to all he understood would be most agreeable to him. We can truly say that God found in him a man after his own heart. He was always ready and disposed to do God's will, as we have seen illustrated in the earlier chapters of this book.

In this frame of mind, when he first came from Rome to Paris, one of the first things he did was to seek out a spiritual director, so that in following his advice and counsel he might obey God and cooperate with his designs upon him. This spiritual director was Father de Berulle, who later became a cardinal in the Church. In submission to his guidance, Monsieur Vincent accepted the post of pastor of Clichy. Later he entered the de Gondi household to be the chaplain of the general of the galleys and of his wife, and tutor of their children. When Madame wished to have him as her confessor and her own spiritual director, he would not consent except through obedience. Only when she worked through Monsieur de Berulle, did he accept this charge. He did not want to do anything of himself, but only in following the guidance of God.

Not satisfied with his obedience to God directly, he submitted himself, in keeping with the word of the holy apostle, to all human creatures for the love of God, especially the spiritual and temporal powers, in things unpleasant and humiliating as well as in those agreeable and honorable.²

His obedience was given mainly to our Holy Father, the pope, joyfully and without reserve. He recognized him as the vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth, and as the sovereign pastor of the whole Church. He was subject to him in all his judgment and affection.

Only through obedience did he accept the responsibility of superior general of his Congregation, for Pope Urban VIII had specified this in the bull by which he approved the Congregation of the Mission.

He insisted that all the missionaries under his direction be perfectly obedient to the Holy See, and he put into writing this rule:

We will exactly obey each and all our superiors, looking upon them as taking the place of our Lord, and seeing our Lord in them, especially our Holy Father the pope, whom we will obey with all possible respect, fidelity, and sincerity.³

² 1 Peter 2:13.
³ Common Rules 5,1.
We saw earlier the esteem and veneration which Monsieur Vincent had for the bishops. We will now mention the perfect submission he always had toward them, and the perfect obedience he wished his Congregation to have in all that regarded them.

In approving the Congregation of the Mission, the Holy See had thought it expedient that the superior general should have the care and direction of its members, both in their interior lives, that is, for the progress of their souls in the practice of the virtues proper to their vocations, and in their exterior lives, in regard to the observance of the rules and constitutions, the domestic arrangements, the placement of personnel, and the choice of ministry. This was done to assure that all members of the one body might preserve the same spirit despite working in a variety of dioceses, and might be animated with the charisms which God bestowed upon their founder. It was most expedient that the superior general, with his intimate knowledge of the talents and dispositions of each of the members, could assign them to appropriate missions in a variety of possible places, all in furtherance of the work of the Congregation. Nevertheless, in anything having to do with assistance to the neighbor, Monsieur Vincent had seen to it that the Holy See subordinate his community to the bishops. This was done in such a way that the missions, the ordination retreats, the clergy conferences, the spiritual retreats, or the direction of the seminaries, all were carried out under the authority and with the permission of the ordinaries. He was careful himself to observe this always, and was insistent that this be observed also by all his Congregation, to the satisfaction of the bishop wherever they worked. The community is resolved to maintain this attitude, and with God’s help, will do so in the future.

Around 1622, long before the establishment of his own Congregation, he accepted the direction of the religious of the Visitation of Holy Mary of the city of Paris. He did so at the request of the Blessed Francis de Sales, their founder, and at the command of the archbishop of Paris. This occasion gives us a good opportunity to see his fidelity to obedience. Being extensively burdened with the affairs of his own Congregation and with the other major activities with which he was connected, he sought to be released from this supervision.

The number of sisters so increased that they filled three convents in Paris and one outside the city, and this demanded much time and attention. Several times he took steps to be relieved of this responsibility and once did succeed in stepping down. Despite efforts by people in high places, he preferred not to reassume the post, and did so only at the request of the archbishop of Paris. Nevertheless, to protect his priests, and to allow them to devote themselves

4. Book Three, ch. 9, sect. 3.
entirely to their proper functions, he forbade them from accepting the
direction of women religious. He made this a matter of rule, knowing from
his own experience how incompatible this service was with their duties, and
how unsuitable to their calling.

He wanted his priests to be obedient to the pastors when they gave a
mission in the parishes. They were to do nothing, not even, as he used to
say, to move a straw without their approval. In this connection he once wrote
to someone outside the community: “We take it as a rule to work for the
good of the people, with the concurrence of the pastors, and never against
their wishes. At the beginning and end of each mission we seek their blessing
to show our dependence upon them.”

He was faithful to this practice himself with the most marvelous humility.
Although he was sent by the bishops with full authority to work in the
parishes of their dioceses, he never wanted to act without the consent and
approval of the pastor. He was as careful about this in the small villages as
he was in the larger towns. He saw to it that his confreres acted in the same
way, and remained faithful to this practice himself.

He spoke once to his community on the obedience due to kings and
princes. He referred to the way the first Christians were obedient to the
emperors and respected their temporal power. He then added these words:

My brothers, following their example, we ought to have always
a faithful and simple obedience to kings, never complaining about
them, not murmuring, no matter what. If we should happen to be
called upon to lose our goods or our very lives, let us give them
away in this spirit of obedience rather than oppose their will,
provided that what they ask is not opposed to God’s will. We should
act this way, for kings represent on earth the sovereign power of
God.

To show with what exactitude Monsieur Vincent obeyed the king even
in the smallest things, we recall an incident so insignificant that few persons
would ever have bothered themselves about it. A brother of the community
of Saint Lazare happened upon a pheasant’s nest. He took the eggs and had
them hatched by a hen, and when the young pheasants had attained some
size he brought them in a cage to Monsieur Vincent with the thought of
giving him a bit of diversion. Monsieur Vincent recalled that the king had
issued orders forbidding the hunting of the pheasants, and said to the brother,
without showing what he had in mind, “go and see if these birds can manage
for themselves.” He accompanied the brother to the courtyard, and had the
birds set free, happy to see them run off and hide. Seeing the brother

5. CED II:199.
6. CED XI:78.
somewhat saddened at this ending to all his troubles, he said, “You must realize, my brother, that we should obey the king. His directive against hunting applies to the taking of these eggs as well as to hunting the birds themselves. We cannot disobey the king in these temporal things without displeasing God.”

Monsieur Vincent extended his obedience beyond his superiors to all sorts of persons, and recommended this same course of action to his confreres.

Our obedience ought to go beyond those who have the right to give us orders. If we are to practice obedience as recommended by Saint Peter, we should submit ourselves to all human creatures for the love of God. Do this then, and look upon all others as our superiors, and place yourself below all, smaller than even the least. Make this evident by the deference, condescension, and all sorts of services for others. What a fine thing it would be if God would confirm us in this practice.7

He exhorted his confreres to this mutual condescension, a form of obedience, by a comparison to the members of the human body, which adjust and compensate for their common welfare and conservation, so that whenever one member suffers the others adapt as much as possible. He said:

Thus should the members of a community act toward each other. The more learned should accept the weaknesses of the ignorant, at least in those areas where no error or sin is involved, and the prudent and wise should accept the humble and simple: non alta sapientes, sed humilibus consentientes [“Put away ambitious thoughts and associate with those who are lowly”].8 In this same spirit of condescension we ought not only to approve the sentiments of others in matters good or indifferent, but even prefer them to our own. We should believe others to have natural or supernatural lights and qualities superior to our own. On the other hand, we must be well on guard against showing tolerance of evil. This is not a virtue but rather a great fault, and leads to dissolute ways or else to cowardice and mediocrity.9

He practiced what he preached, for he showed himself most accommodating to others in indifferent things, even to those of modest abilities. He held the maxim that it is better to accept the will of others than to follow one’s own preferences. According to the account given by a priest who knew him well, he carried this practice so far as to follow the advice of all sorts of

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7. CED XI:69.
persons in the simplest matters, in things of no moral significance. This did not arise from his lack of knowledge of the matter at hand. His long experience in all things, coupled with the lights he received from God, allowed him to penetrate and discern what ought to be done. He preferred, instead, not to lose the merit of submission and obedience when the occasion arose to practice it.

This same quality was noticed in him about accepting the opinions of others, when it could be done without prejudice to truth or charity. He was never known to have contradicted or disputed with others, although he often had to discuss difficult questions on which there was often a difference of opinions. He deferred to the opinion of others, or after humbly stating his own position he would then maintain silence. Where there was a question touching on the service or the glory of God, he was adamant to the degree that he was known to refuse for years to budge on certain points he saw as contrary to the will of God. His great maxim in this regard was: “Be as polite as you can, provided you do not contravene God’s will.” When the glory of God, or charity toward the neighbor, or Christian prudence obliged him to refuse something, he did so with such grace, mildness, and humility, that his refusal was sometimes accepted better than a favor or benefit would have been from someone else.

In this same spirit of obedience and accommodation, he wrote to the superior of a mission experiencing some difficulties. He counseled following the advice of others rather than one’s own opinion. He cited the opinion of Saint Vincent Ferrer, who recommended this practice as a means of perfection and sanctity.

In this same spirit of condescension he agreed to consider accepting the gift of a farm offered to the community of Saint Lazare. However, this offer had been made under the condition of a life-annuity so large he felt the offer ought not to be accepted. He persisted in this refusal for two years. The owner of the farm, anxious for the annuity, convinced the late prior of Saint Lazare, for whom Monsieur Vincent had the highest regard, of the advantages of the transaction. This good prior then urged and pressured Monsieur Vincent so much that by condescension he agreed to sign the contract. Monsieur Vincent first obtained the consent of his council, who assured him there was no risk involved. He paid the annual pension to the donors until their death, as stipulated in the agreement. Later a lawsuit was instituted, which resulted in the Congregation’s loss of both the farm and a large sum. Monsieur Vincent was shown a way to circumvent this adverse judgment, but he preferred to lose both farm and money rather than show any lack of submission to the judges in any way, and so lose the merit of obedience to their decree.\footnote{10. The farm at Orsigny, 1658.}
Another incident shows his exactitude and zeal for the practice of this same virtue, on which occasion it seems that he could easily have dispensed himself. The queen had requested him to provide a mission for Fontainebleau. He sent two of his priests there, where contrary to their expectation they found a religious giving a series of sermons. In obedience to Her Majesty they felt they had to begin the mission. They held off their usual exercises at the hour this good religious was scheduled to preach, so that the people could have full liberty to attend his sermons. The people much preferred the instructions of the missionaries to the sermons of the preacher. He attracted only a few, but the church was filled when the missionaries presented their instructions and catechism lessons as was customary for the mission. The religious complained of this, leaving the priests of the Mission in a quandary. The maxim of Monsieur Vincent was to defer to everyone, on all occasions, but his instructions were also to obey the queen in her request to have the mission preached. They wrote to Monsieur Vincent, to inquire what course to follow. Seeing obedience to the queen involved, he felt it was of such consequence that he sent a man by carriagé to present a letter from himself to the queen, who was at Notre Dame de Chartres at the time. In this letter he recounted the impasse at the parish, and recalled that the usual practice of the priests of the Mission in such cases was to withdraw. He humbly begged Her Majesty to agree to their retiring, which she did. He had the missionaries go to another place, leaving the field to the good religious, out of consideration for him.

Monsieur Vincent was equally careful that obedience be observed by the members of the Congregation, as much as he himself practiced it. He wanted this virtue to be in vigor everywhere, as one of the most important ways of ensuring its prosperity. When he came upon any failure in this regard, he was quick to offer a remedy. This is what happened one day to one of the oldest and most regular of the priests. Monsieur Vincent had recommended that he remain in bed the next morning because his duties had kept him up late, and he felt this priest needed the extra rest. However, this good missionary, so punctual in making his morning mental prayer with the community at the usual hour, rose with the others. He thought that the recommendation of Monsieur Vincent was no more than a gracious wish on his part, not binding him to obedience. Monsieur Vincent, however, took another view of the matter. He called him over at the end of prayer, and in the presence of all the others, had him kneel for a good while, even though he was the oldest of the priests and the subdirector of the house, who took Monsieur Vincent’s place when he was away. Monsieur Vincent remarked that this was the first fault against obedience he had ever noticed in him. He

11. Lambert aux Couteaux.
praised his zealous exactitude in the observance of the rule, but blamed his excessive fervor in this particular situation. He spoke at some length of the virtue of obedience. He recalled the case of Saul and Jonathan in the Old Testament, and some remarkable incidents drawn from the history of France itself to show his confreres the importance of this virtue.
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

His Simplicity

SIMPLICITY IS the more praiseworthy among those who strive to follow the maxims of Jesus Christ, in that it is so poorly esteemed by the vain and false wisdom of the world. It is the virtue which discovers the paths of true justice and leads us on the right way to God's kingdom. To phrase this better with the words of Saint Gregory, "simplicity is like the serene day of the Christian soul. It is not obscured or troubled by the clouds of fraud or deceit, by envy, or by trickery or disguise. It takes its light from truth itself, and shines with the splendor of the presence of God."

This virtue was so esteemed by the great saints of the Church that Saint Ambrose, in the funeral oration over his brother Saint Satyrus, puts it among the main virtues. He stated that this noted man, coming from an exalted status in the world, developed such a love for this virtue that he became childlike in his simplicity. He showed by his manner and actions that his entire life was a perfect mirror of innocence.

We may likewise bestow the same praise upon Vincent de Paul. Living in a decadent age and being deeply involved in the world, even among the great of the court, he nevertheless preserved an innocence of life, uprightness, and simplicity. His heart was like the pearl, which though immersed in the waters of the sea, takes on none of its impurities but is nourished only by the dew of heaven.

Saint Bernard had great reason to say: "it is a rare occurrence to see humility preserved in the midst of honors." We might add that it is also rare, and maybe ever more so, to find true simplicity of heart maintaining its uprightness and purity among the vexations and intrigues of the world. This, however, is what we saw and admired so much in this great servant of God. He seemed like a lily among the thorns and corruption which abound in the world.

Simplicity allows us to go directly to God and the truth, without pomp, evasions, or subterfuge, with no thought of personal interest or of human respect. Monsieur Vincent acted this way himself. He led us to believe that

1. PL 79:605.
2. PL 16.2.1:1307.
3. Pliny popularized this opinion about pearls formed in the oyster shell by dew from heaven in his Natural History 9, 54, 107ff.
4. PL 183.3-4:85.
much of the success which he enjoyed in his various enterprises was to be attributed to the simplicity of his character. It attracted the blessing of God upon him, and the approbation of men. Nothing so pleases God and wins the affection and respect of all sorts of persons as directness and simplicity in the heart, in life, and in one’s words.

Since he esteemed this virtue so highly, he strove to cultivate it in his followers. For example, when speaking to them of Jesus Christ’s words to his disciples to be simple as doves, he said:

In sending his apostles to preach the Gospel throughout the whole world, he particularly recommended this virtue of simplicity as one of the most important, to attract the graces of heaven, and to dispose the hearts of the people to hear and believe the word. He spoke not only to the apostles, but to all those whom Providence has called to preach the Gospel, and to instruct and convert souls. Therefore, Jesus Christ speaks to us in recommending this virtue of simplicity, so agreeable to God that his good pleasure is to be with the simple of heart: *cum simplicibus sermocinatio ejus* [“with the simple is his speech”]. And, my brothers, of the consolation and happiness of those numbered among the truly simple. They are assured by the words of God that his good pleasure is to dwell with them.

Our Lord further lets us see how agreeable the virtue of simplicity is to him by these words he addresses to his Father: *Confiteor tibi Pater, quia abscondisti haec a sapientibus et prudentibus, et revelasti ea parvulis.* I acknowledge and thank you, Father, that the doctrine I have learned from you and which I have spoken to men is known only to the little ones and the simple. The learned and prudent have not understood, and the sense and spirit of this word is hidden from them.

Certainly, if we reflect on these words, we ought to be appalled, we who chase after knowledge as if our happiness depended upon it. I am not saying a priest, a missionary, ought not to have learning, but it must be needed for his ministry and not simply what will satisfy his ambition and curiosity. He ought to study and acquire learning, yes, but with sobriety, as the holy apostle says. Others pass themselves off as being well informed on every subject. God leaves them without understanding of truth and the Christian virtues, just as he does for those who are so learned in worldly wisdom. To

whom then does he give a knowledge of his truth and his doctrine? It is to the simple, the good people, most often the poor. This is seen by the difference between the faith of the poor peasants and that of persons who live in the world. I can say from long experience that lively and practical faith and the spirit of true religion are most often found among the poor and the simple. God enriches them with a lively faith. They believe and savor the words of eternal life that Jesus Christ has left them in the Gospel. Ordinarily, they bear their sicknesses with patience, their shortages and other ills without murmuring, and complain little and rarely. Where does this come from? God is pleased to confer an abundance of the gift of faith upon them, and other graces which he does not give to the rich and wise of this world.

We should also consider that everyone is attracted to simple and candid persons. These never resort to clever distinctions or duplicity but say simply and directly what is in their heart. Everyone appreciates them, even if they are at court. And high society appreciates and trusts such people. Even more remarkably, those who do not speak candidly or with simplicity, nor have such qualities in their mind, still admire those who do. Strive then, my brothers, to please God by acquiring this virtue, which by his mercy we see that some of our own confreres have. Their example invites us to imitate them.

To understand the excellence of this virtue better, we must realize that it brings us close to God, and makes us in some way resemble him. He is a totally simple being, an essence admitting of no composition. What God is by his essence we strive to become, as far as our wretched and miserable nature will allow. We must have a simple heart, a simple mind, a pure intention, and act simply. We must speak directly, act forthrightly, with no subterfuge or artifice, looking to God alone with the intention of pleasing him alone.

Simplicity comprises more than simple truth and purity of intention. It puts far from us all deceit, trickery, or duplicity. Since this virtue is shown chiefly in our words, we are obliged to say exactly what is in our heart. We must state simply what we have to say, with the pure intention of pleasing God alone. This is not to say that simplicity obliges us to say everything in our mind. This virtue is discreet and never opposed to prudence. It allows us to discern what should be said and what should not, and when we should keep quiet and when we should speak up. If, for example, I have something to say worthwhile and good in itself and in all its circumstances, I
should express myself directly and simply. If, on the contrary, some circumstances are evil or useless, then I should keep quiet. Generally, we ought not speak of things against God or our neighbor, or which might tend toward our own glorification, or would have some sensual or temporal connotation. One must be careful not to sin against one or more of the other virtues.

Simplicity in actions causes us to act directly and forthrightly, always in view of God, in our business, our employment, or in our exercises of piety, avoiding all hypocrisy, artifice, or vain pretense. Someone, for example, might make a gift to another feigning that he is doing so through affection. In reality he hopes thereby to secure something of greater worth in return. He may be acting according to worldly standards, but this is opposed to the virtue of simplicity, which never allows us to do one thing but really mean another. Just as this virtue requires us to speak the way we think, it also makes us act with Christian frankness and directness. All must be done for God, the only end of all our actions. We may infer from this that the virtue of simplicity is not honored in those who through human respect wish to appear other than what they are, or who do good deeds exteriorly to be thought virtuous, who collect quantities of books to be judged learned, who strive to preach well to have the applause and praise of others, or lastly, those who do their spiritual exercises or pious works for unworthy motives.

May I ask you, my brothers, if this virtue of simplicity is not beautiful and desirable? Is it not just and reasonable to be on your guard against all duplicity and artifice in our words and actions? But this virtue must be practiced to acquire it. This is done through frequent acts of the virtue of simplicity by which we become truly simple, with the help of God's grace, which we must often ask of him.8

We have cited at some length this conference of Monsieur Vincent on the virtue of simplicity, for we believe we could not give a better description of his own simplicity than by using his own words. He was himself, and he wished his confreres to be, just what his words conveyed. It could be said in truth that he had this virtue in such a degree, by the grace of our Lord, that all the powers of his soul were influenced by it. What he said and what he did were influenced by this virtue. His external words and deportment were always in harmony with his interior. His actions truly reflected his intentions, which ever tended to the most perfect.

In this connection he said, "To make things look good on the outside while

being otherwise within is to be like the hypocritical Pharisees. It is to imitate Satan, who disguises himself as an angel of light.” One of his maxims was: “Since prudence of the flesh and hypocrisy are so prevalent in this corrupt age, to the prejudice of the spirit of Christianity, the best way to overcome their baneful influence is by a true and sincere simplicity.”

His fidelity to the practice of this virtue was obvious in all encounters, and extended to the least things. Among other examples we could cite, we might mention that he was so taken up with diverse and important matters that he sometimes forgot simple matters, such as speaking with someone, answering a letter, or doing something else which had been recommended to him. Rather than invent an explanation, he much preferred to acknowledge his shortcomings, even when it was a source of embarrassment to him. He used to say that it was good to state things just as they are, for God blessed this frankness. On this point he once remarked: “God is very simple, or better, God is simplicity itself, and therefore where one finds simplicity one finds God. As the wise man of Scripture says: ‘He who walks simply walks with assurance, but he who uses cunning and deceit is in constant fear that he will be found out.’ If his duplicity is discovered he will never again be trusted.”

Once, when sending one of his priests to a certain province where rumor had it that dissimulation was a way of life, he gave this excellent advice: “You are going to a region where the people are for the most part cunning and devious. If that is so, the best way to be of help to them is to treat them with great simplicity. The maxims of the Gospel are utterly opposed to those of the world. Since you are going there to serve our Lord, you ought to carry his spirit, a spirit of uprightness and simplicity.” In this same spirit, some time later he founded a house of the Congregation in that same province. He sent as the first superior a priest of his Company who had a reputation for great simplicity.

Since he worked as hard as he could to cultivate in his confreres this virtue of simplicity, he would not allow them in their words or actions to show that they had lost sight of God, who should be the sole end of all they did. He was attentive that they not allow their minds or hearts to be taken up with created things. In a reply to one of his priests who had written that he had given his heart to Monsieur Vincent, he wrote:

I thank you for your letter and for the gift you give me. Your heart is too good to be put into my poor hands, but I am well aware that you give it to me merely to be passed on to our Lord to whom it belongs, and to whose love you must ever return. May your loving heart then

10. CED XI:50.
be given from this moment to Jesus Christ, fully and forever, in time and in eternity. Please ask the grace that I may share some of the candor and simplicity of your heart. I stand in great need of these two virtues, whose excellence is beyond understanding.  

He wrote to another of his community who had revealed that he had acted selfishly or through human respect:

You have done well to win the esteem of the persons you name. To tell me you did so that they might support or defend us was an unworthy motive. It is removed from the spirit of Jesus Christ, which would counsel us to do all for God alone, acting out of love for him. If on the contrary you wanted to protect our interests and use the good opinion of your friends to preserve our reputation, this is done in vain if it is not founded on truth. If our reputation is in fact based on truth, why do you fear? Another point in your letter reflects human respect, where you say that when you speak well of some people I will let their friends know of it, so that they may give him recognition. Alas, Monsieur, what are you dreaming of? Where is the simplicity of a Missionary, who ought to go directly to God? If you do not see good in these persons, don’t say anything. If you find good in them, speak of it to honor God in them, for all good comes from him. Our Lord reproved a man who called him good because his intention in acting was not good. What will he say to you if you praise unworthy persons out of deference, to put yourself in good with them, or for any other unworthy motive? I am aware that you acted only out of another good intention, for you sought the esteem and love of others only to advance the glory of God. You must, however, realize that God is never honored by duplicity, and that to be truly simple we must think of him alone. 

If Monsieur Vincent was so careful to have his community practice the virtue of simplicity on all occasions, it was particularly so in their preaching and instructing the people that he wanted this virtue to shine forth. One day he spoke to them of the desire for praise and esteem, which often creeps into the minds of many preachers:

They want to shine and have people talk about them. They love to be praised and to hear that they have been successful and have worked marvels. Behold this monster, then, which hides under beautiful pretexts. He insinuates his venom into the hearts of those who give him entrance. O cursed pride, how you corrupt and destroy the good, and how much evil you cause! You bring it about that

11. CED VI:141.
12. CED IV:484-87.
these people preach themselves and not Jesus Christ. Instead of building up the body of Christ, they tear it down and bring it to ruin.

Just today I was at a conference given by a prelate to his ordinands. Afterward, in his room, I said to him, “Bishop, today you have converted me!” He responded, “How is that?” “You spoke so directly and so simply that I was deeply touched, and could not refrain from praising and blessing God.” Then he told me, “Monsieur, I must confess, with the same forthrightness with which you have spoken, that I had prepared something more profound and more learned. I realized in time that in giving that talk I would have offended God.”

You see, gentlemen, the way this bishop was thinking. This is the way all should act who are truly seeking God and the salvation of souls. If you act this way, I can assure you, God will surely bless what you say and give strength and power to your words. Yes, God will be with you and work through you, for he is pleased to remain with the simple. He helps them, he blesses their labors and their projects, but on the contrary it would be blasphemy to think that God would favor or help those who, filled with vanity, preach only themselves, and seek glory from others.

In their preaching these persons do not exhibit either simplicity or humility. Do you think God would help a man destroy himself? A Christian should not even think such a thing. If you would reflect on the great evil it is to use the office of preacher to present the message in any other way than that used by Jesus Christ or his apostles or many great saints and servants of God, and is still used by them to this day, you would be horrified.

I must tell you that for three consecutive days I once knelt before a priest. He was at the time a member of our Company. I begged him with all possible insistence to preach and speak simply, following the outline we had given him. I was never able to make any headway with him. He gave the conferences to the ordinands, but they produced little fruit. His fine thoughts and expressions went up in smoke. Words do not profit souls, but only simplicity and humility, and they attract the grace of Jesus Christ into our hearts.

If you want to know the truth, what draws these ordinands, theologians, bachelors, licentiates of the colleges of the Sorbonne and Navarre? It is not the learning or doctrine they are shown, for they have much more than do we. It is the simplicity and humility they see, by the mercy of God, and the way which we act toward

13. The bishop of Sarlat, Nicolas Sevin. See also CED V:571-72.
them. They come here to acquire virtue, and if they do not find this among us they will not return. This is why we must desire and pray that God would be pleased to give the entire Company, and each of us in particular, the grace of acting directly and simply, of preaching the truths of the Gospel in the same way our Lord taught them, so that everyone will understand and profit from what we say.\textsuperscript{14}

We will finish this chapter by citing the testimony of a superior of one of the houses of the Mission about the virtue of simplicity which animated the heart of this holy man and which shone forth in his words and actions.

Monsieur Vincent, who himself spoke so humbly and simply, but with energy and efficacy, recommended this same humility and simplicity in the public and private utterances of his confreres. He wished to rid the community of anything smacking of pomposity or the vanity of the world. To convince us even better, he recalled as an example, among many other motives, how much more we are attracted to living animals rather than those which have been mounted for display. He used to say that this was the way it was for talks and conferences—the simpler and more direct they are, the better they are received, especially as compared with those affected and artificially polished.

He had an interest in helping me in many ways. The great number of my imperfections gave me the advantage of receiving much advice and helpful suggestions from him. I recall my days as a student of theology when it came my turn to speak to the assembled household. I prepared well, and spoke in a way I thought marvelous. That evening he called me, and in the presence of twenty people I regarded as my masters, dissected my talk at length. Finally, he summed up all with a graciousness which restored my spirits. He said I must strive to preach as Jesus Christ had done. As the Son of God, he could have talked about the deepest mysteries of religion in the most profound way, being the Word and the Wisdom of the Eternal Father. Nevertheless, he preached humbly and simply, accommodating himself to the people, giving us the model and the manner of teaching his holy word.

\textsuperscript{14} CED XII:22-25.
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

His Prudence

WE JOIN the discussion of prudence with simplicity because our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of them together in his Gospel when he taught his apostles, and in their persons all the faithful, especially those charged with the direction of others. These two virtues are so connected that one without the other, as Saint Augustine says, is of little or no advantage. Simplicity without prudence is close to folly, but prudence without simplicity soon degenerates into craftiness and cunning. While it is unworthy of a Christian to use deceit, it is unsuitable that he allow himself to be surprised or taken in by the artifices of the wicked. All this Monsieur Vincent knew well, and he possessed and practiced both these virtues, having united them in his soul to an eminent degree.

We have already in the preceding chapter given a sketch of his simplicity. In this chapter we will speak of his prudence.

Among the many other virtues of this servant of God, this particular one appeared so clearly that he was commonly held to be one of the wisest and most enlightened men of his time. People came to him from all sides to seek his counsel, and he was asked to attend meetings where most significant matters about religion and piety were discussed. Almost every day at Saint Lazare there were to be seen persons of all classes, coming to seek advice in their doubts and difficulties. The papal nuncios, Bagno and Piccolomini, honored him by coming several times to confer about various matters concerning the good of the Church. Many pastors, clerics, canons, abbots and even respected prelates consulted him in writing when they could not do so face to face. Many religious, also, sought counsel in the reform of their orders, or on other important business. Various lay people, among them the most respected and virtuous of the city of Paris, came to Saint Lazare to seek his advice. We can truly say that scarcely a project of any consequence in Paris related to religion did not have his hand in it. Even in the other provinces of the kingdom, his advice was sought by letter.

It was not without reason that this opinion of Monsieur Vincent was so universal. His mind was enlightened and capable of conceiving great ideas.

1. PL 40.6:1240-42.
2. Giovanni Francesco Guidi di Bagno (or Bagni) was the papal nuncio in Paris until 1631. He was an influential friend of the saint. Coelio Piccolomini, cardinal and archbishop of Caesarea, was papal nuncio in Paris, 1656-1663. He attended the saint’s funeral.
He also had received such light and special graces from God that they provided a marvelous addition to his acquired prudence and attracted the blessings of heaven upon the advice he gave to those who came to him.

Before citing examples of his prudence in particular cases, it would not be amiss to hear what he had to say himself on this virtue. We can see here how the Holy Spirit had fashioned it in his soul. In a conference he gave one day to his community, he spoke of prudence in this way:

It is the function of this virtue to regulate and direct our words and actions. It helps us speak wisely and to the point. It directs our conversation with circumspection and judgment when it is a question of things good in themselves and in their circumstances. It helps us keep quiet about anything which would offend God or harm the neighbor, or which would tend to our own praise, or to any other bad purpose. This same virtue makes us act with maturity, and with a good motive in all we do, in both the substance of the action and in its circumstances.

Prudence helps us act as we should, when we should, and how we should. Imprudence, on the contrary, is unmindful of the right manner, time, or motive, and this is its failure. Prudence, on the contrary, acts discreetly, and does all with weight, number, and measure.

Prudence and simplicity tend to the same end, which is to speak well and act well, in view of God. Since both must be present at the same time, our Lord recommended them together. I am well aware that a rational distinction can be made between the two virtues, but in practice they are closely allied. The prudence of the flesh, which seeks honors, pleasures, and riches, is entirely opposed to Christian prudence and simplicity. These virtues avoid these false goods for those which are more substantial and enduring. These two virtues are like two inseparable sisters, both necessary for our spiritual development. A person who knows how to profit from them will undoubtedly amass great treasures of grace and merits.

Our Lord manifested these virtues in the various encounters reported in the Gospel, but particularly in the case when the poor woman taken in adultery was brought to him. Not wishing to act as judge on this occasion, and preferring to rescue her, he said to the Jews, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." In this situation he gave an excellent example of the practice of the two virtues of simplicity and prudence: simplicity in the merciful design

to save this poor creature and fulfill the Father’s will, and prudence in the means he used to succeed in this design. In the same way, when the Pharisees tempted him by asking if it were allowed to pay tribute to Caesar, he had two choices. On the one hand he wanted to uphold the honor of his Father but not harm the people, and on the other he did not want to give his opponents the opportunity to say that he favored exorbitant taxes and oppression by the Romans. What did he reply, to avoid saying anything amiss and avoid all surprise? He asked that they show him the coin of tribute. When he heard from their lips that the image of Caesar was engraved thereon, he said, “Give to God the things that are God’s, and to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” The simplicity of this response corresponded to the intention that Jesus Christ had in his heart. He wanted to render to the King of heaven, and to those on earth, the honor which is their due. Prudence enabled him to avoid the trap they had laid for him.

It is then proper to prudence to regulate the words and actions we do, but it has another aspect too. It enables us to choose the appropriate means for reaching our end, which is to go to God and to take the most direct and assured way of getting there. We are not speaking of political or worldly prudence, which is directed to temporal success, and which is sometimes unjust and makes use of doubtful and most unsure human means. No, we speak of that prudence which our Lord counseled in the Gospel. It makes us choose the proper means for arriving at our goal, which is wholly divine. The means, then, must be otherworldly and appropriate.

We must choose means in keeping with our goal. We can do so in either of two ways: by our natural reasoning, which often is faulty, or by the maxims of faith which Jesus Christ has taught us. These are always true, and we should adopt them with no fear of deception. This is why we subject our reason to these maxims and make it an inviolable rule to judge things on all occasions as our Lord has judged. We make it a practice to say to ourselves, “How did our Lord look upon this or that? How did he handle this or that meeting? What did he do, and what did he say to this or that question?” This is the way we form our behavior according to his maxims and example.

Take this resolution, gentlemen, and walk on the royal road on which Jesus Christ is our guide and our leader. Recall that he said, “heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall never pass

away." Bless God, my brothers, and strive to think and judge as he did, and do what he recommended by word and example. Acquire his spirit to learn his way of acting. It is not enough to do good, it must be done well after the example of whom it was said, *Bene omnia fecit*, that he did all things well. No, it is not enough to fast, to observe the rules, to fulfill our duties in the house. These must be done with the mind of Jesus Christ, that is perfectly, for the goal and in the circumstances as he did. Christian prudence consists in judging, speaking, and acting as the eternal Wisdom of God, clothed in our mortal flesh, judged, spoke, and acted.

This, then, is the way Monsieur Vincent looked upon the virtue of prudence, and the way he practiced it. When there was question of deliberating upon some matter or of giving an opinion or decision, he would raise his mind to God to implore his light and grace before opening his mouth to speak, and even before considering the question at hand. He would be seen to raise his eyes to heaven, and then keep them closed as though he were consulting God himself on what to reply. If it were a matter of some moment he would take time to pray, and to invoke the help of the Holy Spirit. Since he relied solely on his divine wisdom and not on his own personal insight, he received grace and light from heaven. This enabled him to discern things which the unaided human spirit could never have known. He used to say, "where human prudence begins to diminish, there the light of divine wisdom dawns."

A certain person once came to him for advice, saying he wanted to retire from an occupation to give himself more completely to his own salvation. Monsieur Vincent replied that this seemed to be a temptation and that he should not listen to the suggestion. The man returned three different times but always got the same advice. He was to look upon this as a temptation, and if he would show more patience, and resist with more courage, he would be victorious over this trial. It happened as Monsieur Vincent had predicted, and this person later recognized that the evil spirit had suggested the move. After following Monsieur Vincent’s advice he found all his troubles disappear.

A noblewoman had entered a state of life contrary to the advice of Monsieur Vincent. When she was, several months later, obliged to leave her position, she knew she would have been much better off if she had followed the counsel of such a wise and enlightened guide.

His prudence allowed him to foresee the consequences of things in such a

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7. Mark 7:37.
way that, when a project was suggested which appeared good, useful, and even necessary, he was able to foresee the likely difficulties. This happened on several occasions which showed his strength of mind and the lights with which he was favored. Where others saw no problems, his prudence discerned many, and enabled him to judge the best course of action, or even of inaction.

SECTION ONE

Continuation of the Same Subject

We have already remarked that Monsieur Vincent held it as a principle that, when asked his advice on some matter, he would not rush but would carefully weigh all the circumstances of the matter in question. When not pressed for an immediate answer, he would usually take his time to consider the matter before God, so as to give it more careful attention. We give some examples, among many others we might have chosen.

A person of his acquaintance was anxious to have a young lawyer appointed to a noble family to serve as steward and to handle the business of the family. He requested Monsieur Vincent to use his influence in obtaining this position, but he replied, “we must think about it, but before doing anything definite we must keep our counsel for an entire month, to listen to God and to honor the silence Jesus Christ so often observed.” In doing so he wished to repress the ardor this man displayed and the pressure he brought to bear, and also to seek out the will of God. He put him off for five or six months, but he finally took steps to have the lawyer appointed to the position. In this his manner of acting differed from the ordinary procedure of people of the world. They act promptly and use all manner of ways to move heaven and earth (as they say) to achieve their wishes.

When it was a question of giving rules and constitutions to his Congregation, without which he knew it could not survive, he waited thirty-three years before finally finishing this task, although his heart was disposed to finish this important work. He meanwhile had his Company practice them. He believed strongly that to perfect the rules to the extent possible and to ensure their stability they must first be observed, and then written down. They had to be engraved on the hearts of his confreres before being put on paper.

9. Martin Husson, then a lawyer with the Parlement of Paris. He entered the service of the duke of Retz in 1650.
He was very reserved and circumspect in his words, not only to avoid anything which might cause suspicion or distrust, but also to prevent what might injure anyone. He would say nothing which had not first been carefully thought out and turned over in his mind. There is reason to believe that this is why he spoke so little, and so carefully. He used to say:

It is an attribute of prudence and of wisdom not only to speak well and to say good things, but also to say things in such a way that they will be well received and profit the one to whom we speak. Our Lord has given us the example of this on several occasions, and particularly when he spoke to the Samaritan woman who came to draw water from the well. He took the opportunity to speak of grace and inspired her to desire a conversion of life.

Once, traveling in the country, he met a young priest from a village, whom he did not know, holding a book. As a greeting, Monsieur Vincent’s prudence and charity inspired him to say, “Oh, Monsieur, how good to see you commune with our Lord by good reading. You edify me greatly, and your example shows well how we engender good thoughts.” Monsieur Vincent was not aware of what book the priest was reading, whether good or bad. Supposing in his charity that it was good, he wanted to encourage him by his gracious words to read well.

A noted pastor of Paris wished to appoint as his vicar a former member of the Congregation of the Mission. He wrote to Monsieur Vincent, asking why this priest had left the Company, how he had conducted himself, and whether he would recommend him for the position he had in mind. Monsieur Vincent was in doubt just how to reply. He did not want to harm this man, although he was well aware of his faults, and felt that they made him an unsuitable candidate for the office of vicar. Also, he did not want to deceive the pastor, nor to make him believe things that were not so. In an attempt to avoid either of these pitfalls, his prudence suggested that he use the following statement: “Monsieur, I am not well enough acquainted with the priest of whom you have written to recommend him to you, although he spent much time with us.” An older priest of the Congregation, who was present when he dictated this response, felt free to say that the pastor would surely be astonished to have him say he did not know a priest who had spent such a long time in the Company, and under his spiritual direction. He answered, “I see that, but could I improve on what our Lord said in reproving those who had prophesied in his name, that he did not know them? This meant, of course, that he did not approve their activity. Consider it fitting, then, that I follow his example in using this same language.”

While he was in the council of Her Majesty, he had no other objective than the greater good of the Church in the distribution of benefices. In
awarding these to the persons he felt most worthy, he used no other method than to commend the virtues and merits of the most worthy candidates, and the likely advantage to God's service and the public good of their appointment. He would never speak against the qualities of the other candidates, to avoid doing them any harm. In these situations he was obliged to use great prudence and circumspection in his words, to promote the interests of the Church and to wound neither truth nor charity.

Those occasions when he was obliged to warn or reprove someone give us an opportunity to appreciate his marvelous prudence. He left no bitterness or anger in those whom he admonished, but rather an effort to make good use of the reproof they had been given. The examples we give will allow us to judge how prudently he acted.

Once, he was alerted to a renowned preacher who often came to see him for other business, and who seemed to be skeptical about certain truths of the faith. When this charge seemed likely from the testimony of others, Monsieur Vincent used a charitable and prudent device to bring home to him his deficiency. We learn about this from an account he wrote under an assumed name.

Considering before God what I should do in this situation, I felt according to the rule of the Gospel that I ought to call on Damasus in private, and speak to him in parables. One day, speaking informally to him, I said, "Monsieur, I have something I would like to ask you, a renowned preacher. It sometimes happens when we are working in country places that we run into people who do not believe the truths of our holy religion. We are at a loss to know how we should proceed to convince them. I would like to ask you what you think we should do in these cases, to lead them to believe in the truths of faith." Damasus asked me with some feeling why I would ask such a thing of him. I replied, "because, Monsieur, the poor approach the rich to get some help and charity. Since we are such poorly lettered persons we do not know the way to deal with things of the spirit. We come to you to beg you to favor us with your thoughts on this matter." Damasus got control of himself quickly, and replied that to teach the Christian faith he would do so first by holy Scripture, second, by the Fathers, third, by argumentation, fourth, by the common consent of the Christian people throughout the ages, fifth, by the witness of so many martyrs who have shed their blood for these same truths, sixth, by the miracles which God has wrought in confirmation of these beliefs.

When he had finished, I said this was indeed well stated, and

10. A convention, like "So-and-so."
asked if he would put what he said in writing, simply and directly, and send it to me. He did so two or three days later, and brought it to me himself. I thanked him, saying I was much obliged to him and was happy to see such good sentiments from his own hands. Besides the use I can make of the suggestions myself, I said, I can use them for your own instruction. You may not believe what I am going to tell you, although it is true: some people think, and say, that you yourself do not agree with some truths of faith. You must acquire fully, Monsieur, what you have begun so well. After writing so well about the faith you must now give yourself to God to live in a way that will dispel all doubts from the minds of those who speak about you, and become the edification of everyone. I told him also that people in higher ranks, like himself, are the more obliged to be adorned with virtue. Those who wrote the life of Saint Charles Borromeo said that this virtue was most needed in those of higher rank. This is like the beauty of a precious stone enhanced by being mounted in a gold ring, rather than being placed in one of baser metal. Damasus agreed with all that had been said, saying that from this point on he was going to reform. Then he departed, leaving me satisfied at seeing him in such good dispositions.11

One day he was with several persons of some standing when one of them from long habit allowed himself to say “Devil take me,” and similar curses. Hearing this, Monsieur Vincent went to him, embraced him, and said with a smile, “And I, Monsieur, will hold on to you, for God’s sake.” This edified the whole group, and served as a gentle and yet efficacious reminder to the speaker. He admitted his fault and promised to abstain from such curses in the future.

A respected priest reported a similar affair, although on a totally different subject, in regard to a prelate whom they happened to meet on the street. After some usual pleasantries, Monsieur Vincent said very graciously, “Bishop, please do not forget your ring.” The prelate responded, laughing, “Ah, Monsieur, how you manage things.” As an explanation to the priest, he explained that this bishop, with whom he was friendly, had several times protested that he would never divorce his wife, that is to say his diocese, for another, no matter how rich and beautiful she might be. He showed the episcopal ring he wore on his right hand, and quoted the words of the psalmist: Oblivioni detur dextera mea, si non memineretur [“If I forget, may my right hand be forgotten”].12 He added that there was talk about this same prelate’s being considered for a wealthy archdiocese. There were many

12. Ps 137:5.
occasions such as this in the life of Monsieur Vincent which, although things were said in jest, yet showed great prudence and often had excellent results.

Another effect of prudence is to control the use of words so that they never offend anyone and never send anyone away unhappy. The superior of one of the missions said:

In my own case, I never had the honor of meeting with him that I did not leave with perfect satisfaction, whether he had granted what I asked, or had to refuse. Even on the eve of the day I was to leave Paris to go where he had sent me, I spent a long time with him, only to be interrupted by several persons who came to speak with him. I admired then, as always, the way he sent each one on his way, perfectly happy. I remember two visitors in particular. The first, a priest, asked for the release of a prisoner who had committed murder on the Saint Denis road, in the section under the jurisdiction of Saint Lazare. Monsieur Vincent received the priest graciously. He spoke with him, and showed him every mark of respect, but since the affair did not depend on himself alone, he spoke of the Providence of God manifested in his justice as well as in his mercy, and that we must accept both the one and the other. He then spoke of the circumstances of the murder committed, and of the justice of the punishments God had allowed to be enacted for such crimes. He did this so graciously that the priest left satisfied, having nothing more to say.

The second case concerned a layman who came to borrow some money. Monsieur Vincent made a thousand excuses why the house of Saint Lazare could not lend him anything, and how grieved he was at not being able to serve him on this occasion. He spoke with such gentleness and prudence that his refusal had no bad effect on his visitor, who left in peace.

On a trip he made in 1649, he visited several of his houses, among others a seminary in an episcopal city where the see was then vacant. A new bishop had been named, but the official papers had not yet come from Rome. Monsieur Vincent had been opposed to this appointment, and this prompted many complaints from the bishop. Contrary to all expectations the bishop appeared in the town, leaving Monsieur Vincent to wonder how he ought to act toward him. If I go to pay my respects (he said to himself), he will surely be taken by surprise, and may be touched. If I send to ask if my visit would be agreeable to him, I do not know how he would react. Not to go, or not to send someone would surely give this good prelate reason to be angry with me, and I must avoid this. What should I do?

13. Philibert de Beaumanoir de Lavardin, bishop of Le Mans.
The prudent humility of this wise priest suggested a way out of this dilemma. He sent the superior of the house, together with another priest, to say that Monsieur Vincent had just arrived in the diocese. As he would not dare stay without his permission, he humbly asked if he might stay seven or eight days at the house of the priests of the Mission. The bishop received this humble request well. He stated that he might remain as long as he liked and that if he did not have a place to stay he would have offered his own home. Monsieur Vincent wanted to take advantage of such an obliging reply to thank the prelate in person and pay his respects. He was, however, prevented from doing so by the bishop’s leaving unexpectedly that very day for some other place.

Monsieur Vincent took it as a rule in all his deliberations and resolutions to consult always and before all else the oracle of divine truth, that is to say, to consider what our Lord did and said about the matter under discussion, to conform himself to his example, and to submit to his teachings. This was the source from which he drew all the wise advice which he gave to others and which guided his own behavior. We are not surprised, then, that he acted with such prudence or succeeded with such blessings, since he went to the source of wisdom itself, the incarnate Word of God. It could be said of him, in the words of the wise man of Scripture, that divine Wisdom helped him, directed him, and worked in him in all his undertakings.\(^\text{14}\)

In this connection he one day asked one of his priests for some advice on a particular matter. The reply was that the thing should be done, because of the grievous consequences if it were not carried out. Monsieur Vincent pointed out that so much attention should not be paid to the consequences of an action as to the nature of the action itself and to its relationship to the words and example of Jesus Christ.

In an effort to model himself on his divine exemplar, another of his principles was to do everything with as little fanfare as possible. He chose the most simple and humble works along with the most charitable. In this way he avoided the envy and opposition of others. When Satan raised difficulties, he was challenged solely by the weapons of humility, patience, penance, and prayer. He never justified or defended himself from malicious talk or calumny, nor made use of temporal authorities to support his undertakings, judging this to be the most prudent way to act.

The purity and soundness of his prudence and wisdom appeared in his always seeking to follow and accomplish in all things the holy will of God. He did so in preference to any other consideration, with no regard for temporal advantage. He rejected this and trampled it under foot when it was a question of the interests, of the service, and of the glory of Jesus Christ.

\(^{14}\) Wis 9:10.
This was the great and only object he had in mind in all his work, and by which he carried out faithfully and constantly what he had begun. He preferred absolutely and completely this holy will of God to every other consideration, with no exception whatsoever.

To conclude this chapter we cite the testimony of a most worthy priest who wrote his appreciation of the wise and prudent conduct of Monsieur Vincent, particularly in the replies he gave to those who consulted him or sought his advice. This is the order we follow, just as this priest often observed:

Before all else, he raised his mind to God to seek his help, and usually asked those who came for counsel to do the same. By a short fervent prayer he would ask the light and grace to know the will of God in the matter under consideration. Then he would listen most attentively to what was asked, and consider it at length. If he thought it necessary, he would ask for greater details to be well aware of all the circumstances. He would never rush to give his opinion. If he felt that the matter required more thought he would ask for time to think about it, recommending meanwhile that it be prayed over in the sight of God. He was agreeable that others be consulted, and he himself was not loath to seek advice. He deferred always, if justice and charity allowed, to the opinion of others, even in face of his own contrary opinion. When, finally, he was obliged to express himself, he gave his own opinion so judiciously and yet humbly, that he left the person free to decide on his own. For example, he would say that, for this or that reason, it seems it would be good to do such and such; or, if pressed to give a definite answer, he would use similar language: it seems to me it would be good, or more expedient, to do this or that. After all this, he followed two inviolable rules. First, to keep absolutely secret what he had been consulted about, unless authorized by the person concerned to speak to others because of some necessity or utility. Second, to be firm in following whatever decision he had come to. After discerning the will of God, he would not falter. He held it as a principle that it must be carried out, and that the vice of inconstancy strongly opposes true prudence, and ruins even the most saintly and solid resolution.
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

His Justice and Gratitude

WE WILL not use the word justice in the sense that holy Scripture sometimes uses it to signify the grace that justifies and sanctifies souls, or the state of justice and sanctity. We will use the word justice to refer to a particular virtue, one of the most excellent of the moral virtues. As Saint Ambrose teaches, it gives to each what belongs to him. Not only does it not attribute to oneself the good which rightly belongs to the other, but even leaves off the most legitimate interests when the common good requires it to preserve the rights of the neighbor.¹ In this sense of the word, we can truly say that Monsieur Vincent had this virtue in an excellent degree. He practiced it on all occasions when the opportunity arose.

He often thought of and referred to the words of Jesus Christ: “Render to God the things of God, and to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.”² Following this divine rule, he carefully rendered to God all the duties of religion in virtue of his being a reasonable man, a Christian, a priest, and a missionary. He likewise gave to his neighbor in general and to each one as an individual, according to his rank and condition, whatever justice required of him. He never detoured from the straight path of this virtue. On this topic, he often said to his confreres in his conferences: “Gentlemen, have regard to the interests of others as much as of your own. Let us be straightforward and act always with loyalty and fairness to everyone.”

He was so careful to fulfill the demands of justice that he felt they superseded all other responses. In this connection, he wrote to one of his friends, saying:

Remember to pray to God for me. Yesterday I found myself in the dilemma of having to fulfill a promise I had made, or to do an act of charity for a person who could do us a lot of good or ill. Unable to do both, I left off the act of charity to fulfill my promise, but my friend was not at all pleased. I was not so much concerned with my decision in doing this act of justice as, it seems to me, in following my own inclination in the matter.

He was careful that the community paid its bills promptly, and regretted to see some people forced to come several times to Saint Lazare for payments. When these persons came to his notice, he would tell them that there was no

¹. PL 16:57.
need to go to the trouble of coming to Saint Lazare. He would send promptly to their homes what they were owed. When the community had to borrow, they remarked that he would make a note of the time and place where repayment must be made. At the given time he would send someone from the house at Saint Lazare with the payment. When it was suggested that he ought to wait until he received a notice, or until the lender would come to collect his payment, he would not agree to such a plan. He said it was not just to force someone to come seeking what was rightly due him.

One day the coachman backed up, knocking several loaves of bread from a baker’s stall, causing several to fall to the ground. At once, Monsieur Vincent, fearing the soiled loaves might not be sold, immediately paid the price asked by the baker, and brought them back to Saint Lazare.

Another time, when this same coachman backed the carriage against a large gateway fastened on the inside by a bar of half-rotten wood, the bar broke quite easily. Only the caretaker lived in this house. He could easily have fastened the door some other way, but Monsieur Vincent on his own, sent his brother companion to the carpenters. He had them make a completely new bar. It cost three or four times more than what the original one was worth.

If he felt he had offended someone by any word or deed which he felt might not be just, he would not fail to make satisfaction in full.

The mayor of a large town once asked Monsieur Vincent to do him a favor at court. The gentleman assured him that he would protect the missionaries in his town from several powerful persons who opposed their work and who had even gone to Parlement against them. Monsieur Vincent replied that if he could help, he would. He begged the mayor, however, to leave the priests of the Mission in the hands of God and the ordinary police authorities. He did not wish to have his Missionaries in any place owing to the favor or the authority of men.

In important lawsuits the Company found itself involved in, he sometimes went himself, or sent someone else, to see the judge. He did so, not so much to plead the cause of the Company, but to ask the judge to consider only the cause of justice in the case. He could be called the lawyer for the side of justice rather than the defender of his own interests. He was neither for nor against anyone, but pleaded equally for either, seeking always to have each one given what was rightfully his. He was not happy with having to be bothered with lawsuits of whatever kind. Once, a brother of the house of Saint Lazare, in charge of looking after these matters, came to ask him to visit the judge in a pending case to protect the rights of the Company. Monsieur Vincent showed his distaste for this. He said we must leave it to the Providence of God and to the court system, and besides, he did not believe these interventions did much
good, especially with certain persons. He referred to the time he was at the royal court, when he paid little attention to the recommendations made to him about appointments to the various benefices. He looked only at the merits of the case, and what would be for the greater glory of God. In this way he was little influenced by solicitations in favor of anyone.

On another occasion he told this same brother that he must adopt the practice, when asked about a case, of saying everything good about the other party. He should omit nothing, just as if the opponent were present to deduce his arguments and to defend himself, and had somehow failed to do so in the matter under consultation.

The Missionaries owned some properties in the provinces where they were established. They had much to put up with from the farmers and others there who abused their patience. The local people knew that they would not be badly treated, since they were used to the quibbling of the region, and feared little from their local courts. Because of this the superiors of several houses of the Congregation asked Monsieur Vincent to obtain a commitimus. This might serve to intimidate those who would not listen to reason. But this man of God usually deflected them from this thought, telling them that they should do whatever they were able.

The house of Saint Lazare, which submitted its own cases to the courts of the Hotel or the Palace at Paris, had cases of those who lived at a distance, particularly if they were poor, also assigned to Paris. Monsieur Vincent was troubled at this, because it would cost them more to come there to plead. “Is it just,” he would ask, “to have these poor people come so far to plead their cause?”

As the Lord of the Manor of Saint Lazare, where he was responsible for high, medium, and low justice, he made his appointments gratis. He chose capable and good men for these positions, preferring them to others who sought out these responsibilities and came powerfully recommended. He saw to it that justice was well administered, to the glory of God and to the satisfaction of those on trial.

We will speak of the virtue of gratitude here, because according to the teaching of Saint Thomas, it is joined to justice. A Christian could fail in one of his greatest obligations of justice if he were not grateful and thankful.

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3. This was Brother Louis Robineau.
4. Documents by which a person’s case would be sent to the palace courts immediately instead of to lower jurisdictions.
5. The Paris courts of Requetes de l’Hotel and Requetes du Palais were tribunals established to hear cases normally involving officials or those sent by the Parlement of Paris. In this, Saint Lazare had a privileged position not shared by the poor.
6. At a time when appointments to civil positions were usually sold to the highest bidder, Monsieur Vincent as the lord of the lands of Saint Lazare gave these positions to qualified persons without charge.
7. Summa Theologiae IIa-IIae, q.106, a.1.
for the benefits he had received, either from God, the first and principal source of all good, or from the neighbor whom the divine Bounty uses as the channel of his blessings. Monsieur Vincent was as far from the vice of ingratitude as his natural inclination and his heart, influenced by grace, were attracted to gratitude and thanksgiving toward God and his neighbor.

He used to say that nothing was so efficacious in winning the heart of God as a spirit of gratitude for his gifts and blessings. In this spirit he had the custom of thanking God often for the gifts from his bounty to all sorts of creatures, going back to the beginning of the world. He also thanked God for the good works accomplished through the inspiration of his grace, and he urged others to do the same. Coming down to particulars, he often invited his confreres to thank God for the protection and graces given to the Church and for the elements which made it up, especially the prelates, pastors, and other ecclesiastical workers engaged in its preservation and advancement. He was careful to thank God for the fruits produced by all well run companies and congregations. How can we express adequately the thanks he gave the divine bounty for the blessings he had poured forth on his own Congregation and each of its enterprises, such as the missions, the ordination retreats, the retreats, the clergy conferences, the seminaries, and the other services given to the Church? He often thanked God for the help given to the poor, for the promotion of good priests to positions of responsibility in the Church, for the happy outcome of the worthy designs of the king, for the victories he gained, for the triumphs of the king and other princes and Christian states over the heretics and schismatics, or in general, for all those events favorable to the glory of God and the good of the Catholic religion. These were the usual subjects of his thanks to God, but his own gratitude seemed to him so inadequate that he invited pious persons and even entire communities, mainly his own, to join him in his praise and glorification of God, and he asked others to offer their sacrifices and prayers for this intention.

He was often heard to say, “We must give as much time to thanking God for his favors as we have used in asking him for them.” He complained vehemently of the extreme ingratitude of men toward God. He was referring to the lament of Jesus Christ reported in the Gospel on the occasion of his curing the ten lepers. He urged his confreres to practice this virtue of gratitude and thanksgiving, without which, he used to say, we make ourselves unworthy of receiving any favors from God or men.

It is not known for what particular graces he thanked God especially, since his humility kept the gifts he had received under the cloak of silence. On the anniversary of his baptism each year, however, he would ask the community to help him thank God for having supported him for so many years upon the earth. We can form some idea of his gratitude to God by the appreciation he
showed to men. He accepted the favors of men as coming ultimately from
the liberality of God, and in thanking them, he wanted the praise to be
referred ultimately to the Creator.

His gratitude toward men was given not only for the major benefits he
received and the great services rendered him but even for the least things
done for him. This came from his profound humility, which made him think
that he deserved nothing by right and that everyone gave him more honor
and respect than he deserved. This led him to find reasons for gratitude in
those trivial things that would not even have been noticed by many others.

In this spirit of gratitude he would say to those who visited or who
rendered the least service: “I thank you for overlooking my old age;” or
again, “for having taught me something I did not know;” or, “for the patience
you have shown me;” or, “to allow me to come into your presence;” or, “for
the charity God gives you, in my regard,” etc. He extended his thanks even
to the least of the brothers, or to the one who stayed with him in his illness,
thanking him for the least services, such as lighting a lamp, bringing a book,
opening or closing a door, showing that he kept account of the least things
done for him and received them with a spirit of gratitude. This had the effect
of making others take pleasure in rendering him some kind of service.

He was equally attentive on his trips to thank those who gave him the least
help, such as helping him mount a horse, or other such small things. He would
acknowledge these favors with cordiality and graciousness, even to children.
Besides receiving his thanks, they would often receive some other token of
appreciation as well. He was so exact in his expression of gratitude that, if the
companion on his journeys was not thankful enough, or expressed himself
coldly, he would remonstrate, and regard it as a failing in him.

This venerable priest, who in all things imitated our Lord, who said he
held as done to himself what was done for the least of his brethren, thanked
and recompensed those who gave any service to the brother who accompa­
nied him on his trips, as generously as he did for those done to himself.

We spoke earlier of Monsieur Vincent’s falling into a stream near Durtal
on one of his trips from Le Mans to Angers, and that a priest who happened to
be with him immediately plunged into the water to save him.8 In due time this
priest fell from his first fervor. Failing to respond to the good example around
him, he decided to leave Saint Lazare and return to his own region against the
advice of Monsieur Vincent. He told him that this proposal was a temptation
from the devil to cause the priest to lose his vocation. He gradually lost the
spirit he had at the beginning, so that far from accomplishing the beautiful
projects he had envisioned, he found himself filled with boredom, surrounded
by difficulties, and pressed by the enemies of his salvation.

After a year or so in this condition, his eyes were opened to his spiritual condition. Although he was comfortably fixed, he began to realize that Monsieur Vincent was right in trying to dissuade him from this venture. He realized, too, that he had made a bad mistake in leaving the Company to which God had called him. He followed the example of the Prodigal Son, deciding to return to his father. He wrote letter after letter, asking pardon for his mistake, and begging to be allowed to return to one of the houses, but Monsieur Vincent made no reply.

This priest redoubled his efforts and openly said that, unless a helping hand were extended, he would be lost. Monsieur Vincent felt it was not in the best interests of the Congregation that this man should return. His previous behavior had not given enough reason to hope he would succeed, and so Monsieur Vincent remained firm in his decision not to take him back. Finally, this priest decided to attack Monsieur Vincent from the most vulnerable avenue to his heart, that of his gratitude, knowing well that this was one of his greatest virtues. He therefore, figuratively, knocked at his door with the words: "Monsieur, I once saved your life; now you must save the life of my soul." Seeing his perseverance, and hoping he would do better, the grateful superior wrote that he was to come at once to Saint Lazare, where he would be received with open arms. With this response in hand, the priest rejoiced to be again in the good graces of Monsieur Vincent. He prepared to leave for Saint Lazare, but unfortunately fell sick and died before he could carry out his designs.

After Monsieur Vincent fell into the water, as we mentioned earlier, he went to a hut nearby, which proved to be the lodging of a poor peasant. He was grateful that he took him in and dried his clothes, as though he had been welcomed into a castle by a gentleman. He thanked him and paid him a sum beyond what was appropriate. Beyond that, when this man told Monsieur Vincent that he was bothered by a hernia, he was promised a truss to relieve his pain. When Monsieur Vincent returned to Paris, three or four months later, he did not forget his promise but bought the appliance. He sent it to the poor peasant, along with a letter of thanks for the help he had received from him in his home. Not having any assured way of getting the letter and appliance to its destination, he elicited the support of a highly placed lady, the wife of a marshal of France, who owned the lands in question, to deliver the package to the place he showed on a sketch.

He appreciated even those who expected nothing of him, for example, the people who cultivated the fields. By their labors they enabled the clergy and nobility to live according to their condition. Here is how he spoke of this, in a conference to his community:

God serves as our provider, furnishing us with what we need and beyond. He gives a sufficiency and more. I do not know if we think
often enough of thanking him as we should. We live off the patrimony of Jesus Christ, off the sweat of these poor peasants. When we go to the refectory, we should consider whether we have earned the food we are going to eat. I often have this thought, and it causes me to blush. O miserable one, have you earned the bread you are about to eat? This bread and other food coming from the labor of others. At least, if we have not earned it as we should, let us pray to God for them. We should not let a day pass without offering them to our Lord, that they may have the grace to use their pains and suffering well and one day crown them with his glory.9

He was so grateful when he received a favor from someone for his Company that he publicized it widely, calling him benefactor, protector, helper, or giving him other engaging titles. He exhorted his confreres to recommend him to the Lord and would himself remember the benefits he had received whenever he met the person. A priest of the Congregation of the Mission had died in Lorraine, in the house of the Jesuit Fathers, who had him honorably buried.10 On that occasion, Monsieur Vincent gave a conference to his own community on gratitude. He sought to move his followers to pray to God for these good fathers, and to ask for the grace and opportunity to thank them for their kindness, as he had already done in every way possible. He took the side of this holy Company whenever persecutions were raised against it. He sought to divert calumnies and to publicize both their great virtues and their great accomplishments.

He looked after the board of a poor woman for twenty-five or thirty years. He even paid the rent for her room near the College des Bons Enfants because she had tended to several of the plague-stricken priests at Saint Lazare at the very beginning of the existence of the Congregation.

Once, speaking in private with a priest of his Congregation and having said something good about a woman for some favor she had done, he reflected on the praise he had just given this person. He then said: “I have two qualities in myself, gratitude, and praising the good I see in others.” It is true he had these two qualities, which he mentioned, but it was unlike his usual reticence to say anything to his own advantage without evident necessity.

He appreciated the generosity of the founders of the houses of his Congregation so much so that he set no limits on the expressions of gratitude he used. Writing to one of his priests, he said:

We cannot have too much appreciation and gratitude for the founders of our house. God gave us the grace recently to offer to give back to a founder what he had given to us, because I felt he

10. Germain de Montevit, who died at Bar le Duc in 1640. See Book Two, ch. 11.
had fallen on hard times. If he had accepted, it seems to me I would have been happy. In this case the divine bounty would have become our surety, and we would have lacked nothing. Although this did not come about, still, Monsieur, what happiness it would have been to impoverish ourselves to help out someone who had done us so much good. God gave us the grace to do so once before, in giving back what he had just given to us, and every time I think of it I have such satisfaction that I can hardly express it.\textsuperscript{11}

This letter was written in September, 1654. He wrote another to a benefactor, offering to return what he had given, for the same reason.

Monsieur, please use the goods of our Company as belonging to you. We are ready to sell all we own for you, right down to the very chalices we use at mass. In this we are observing the sacred canons, which tell us to look after our founders in their needs, since they have helped us from their abundance. What I now say, Monsieur, I do not say out of politeness, but by God’s direction, and from the bottom of my heart.\textsuperscript{12}

The truth of Monsieur Vincent’s words was borne out in several other situations. When he learned of a pressing need of one of the benefactors of the Congregation, he sent him two hundred pistoles. The benefactor refused it, however, out of concern that this would cause too much inconvenience for the missionaries.

Another time he borrowed three hundred pistoles to offer them to a benefactor of the Congregation in need. This person realized that this money could not be accepted without seriously inconveniencing the Company, so he too refused, although he was urged to accept.

A person of great piety had left a sum of money in his will for the Congregation, to be used in works of the institute. When Monsieur Vincent was informed of it, he brought together the officers of the community and some of the older members. One of them said he felt many responsibilities would be placed upon the community in accepting this legacy. Also, there was nothing in the procurator’s account, largely because the house of Saint Lazare was already burdened by a previous foundation set up by this same person.

When Monsieur Vincent heard this, he closed his eyes, and then opening them, looked to heaven and said:

Even if things are as you say (and let us assume they are) it is always something to have people give us the means of serving God and making him known. Therefore, we should be grateful for this and pray to God for him as we would for a benefactor. We see the

\textsuperscript{11} CED V:179.
\textsuperscript{12} CED V:393.
Church displaying this same gratitude toward her benefactors. It goes so far as to relax her usual regulations, and as we see in several cases, it gives laymen and women the right of patronage, although this should be reserved to priests. Why does she act this way, if not to show her appreciation for benefactions?

He was so grateful to the late prior of Saint Lazare and the religious who had preceded the missionaries in that house, that he prayed to God to apply to them the merits of the works of the Congregation as far as possible. This would make them participants in the good works they were able to accomplish because of their graciousness. He always showed great respect and deference for them, not in externals only by way of courtesy, but by a true sentiment of gratitude. He showed this spirit everywhere, whether these religious were present or not.

We would never finish if we were to give all the examples we could of his spirit of thanksgiving. We will be satisfied with what we have already said, and shall conclude this chapter by citing the words of a priest of the Congregation of the Mission:

The gratitude of Monsieur Vincent toward his benefactors was extreme. I personally witnessed the acts of virtue which he practiced in regard to the late Monsieur Le Bon, former prior of Saint Lazare. He called him “our father.” He visited him often, and when he returned from a trip the first thing he would do, after adoring the blessed sacrament in the church, would be to greet this good prior. I was delighted once in meeting them to see with what respect Monsieur Vincent greeted him. I saw the assurance Monsieur Vincent gave of preserving a grateful memory of the prior’s person, and his charity toward the Congregation of the Mission. He attended his last agony with great devotion. He had the entire community assemble in the sick room to receive his last blessing, which he asked in the name of all. This moved me deeply, as did all the other things he did and said on this occasion, which showed the gratitude he had toward him. I heard him say, speaking of the virtue of gratitude, that we must rejoice when divine Providence gives us an occasion of practicing this virtue. It is so agreeable to God, as he made known to us by establishing thanksgiving sacrifices in the Old Testament, and the Holy Eucharist in the New. This sacrament is named Eucharist, not only because it contains the author of grace, but also because our Lord in instituting it gave thanks to his Father. He required us to offer this same thanksgiving for the innumerable graces and blessings we have received, and continue to receive, from his bounty.
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

His Perfect Detachment from the Goods of This World, and His Love of Poverty

WHAT A GREAT virtue it is to despise the goods of earth! But how rare this virtue is, and how few practice it," says Saint Ambrose.1 Few indeed have the courage to weed out of their hearts the unhappy covetousness which holy Scripture calls the root of all evil. Few, too, can say with the holy apostle: Behold, Lord, we have left all to follow you and to serve you.2 As the Sage says, "He is truly happy who has not allowed his heart to run after gold and silver, and has not put his trust in riches nor in the goods of this world. Where is such a one that we may praise him, because he has done marvels in his lifetime."3

It will not take a long treatise to be persuaded of this virtuous disposition in the person of Monsieur Vincent. The whole story of his life and of his great and holy accomplishments provides ample evidence. No, we must not be surprised if we see that he possessed this virtue to an eminent degree since he had such a disregard for riches.

We will not repeat here what was already said in Book One, how this lover of the poverty of Jesus Christ imitated him on all occasions when it was a matter of his own interest or that of his Congregation. This was shown when the general of the galleys and his wife established a foundation for the support of religious works. He would not accept this for himself, but offered it first to various other communities, until he saw that this was a manifestation of the will of God for him. This too was the case when he was offered the house and priory of Saint Lazare, which he refused absolutely. He persisted in this for over a year, despite the pressure of the prior, who came to the College des Bons Enfants more than thirty times to talk to him about this. Only after taking the advice of wise and virtuous persons did Monsieur Vincent become convinced that God wished him to serve there.

These two examples alone suffice to show how his heart was detached from any love of riches or the things of this world, and how great was his love of poverty. Besides, he showed this attitude in countless other situations. We could say without exaggeration that the most avaricious person would not seek opportunities to enrich himself with such ardor as Monsieur

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1. PL 15.1:1299.
Vincent would to embrace and practice poverty. His words and actions showed his great love for this virtue.

He was heard to say on this topic that, although he still had reason to be concerned about his own financial position before he felt the call of God to the mission, he already felt within himself a desire to have nothing for himself and to live in community, beginning to put into practice his love for poverty at every opportunity.

He always selected for himself a room without a fireplace, even in his later years, that is until four or five years before his death. He was then persuaded by his community to accept another room because of his illnesses. Until his eightieth year he lived in a tiny undecorated room. It had no carpet, no other furniture but a simple uncovered wooden table, two poor chairs, and a wretched pallet and straw mattress covered with a blanket, and a pillow. Once, when he had a fever, some bed curtains were placed around his bed to protect him from drafts, but he would not agree to use it. He took from his room various pictures that one of the brothers of the house had put there. He kept only one, and said that having several was contrary to poverty. When the rooms were inspected, he wanted his to be visited like the others, to ensure that he had nothing superfluous.

In the room on the lower floor in which he received guests, a piece of material was hung at the door to protect the room from cold winds, but no sooner did he see this than he had it taken away. He took his meals in the refectory in the same spirit of poverty, saying within himself: “Ah, miserable man, you have not earned the bread you eat.” When he could, he took as his own portion the scraps left by others.

His love of poverty clearly led him to love to be poorly fed and poorly clothed. He was pleased when he lacked something, in whatever necessity. He ordinarily wore a used cassock, well patched, and his underclothes too were poor and sometimes torn. A nobleman who visited him once noticed his worn cassock, patched at the elbows. He was so touched that he reported to his friends how greatly edified he was at the poverty and neatness of Monsieur Vincent.

When he went to the Louvre to speak to the queen, or as a member of the council, he always went in his usual garb. It was poor and out of style, and he never changed into something more elegant. Once, Cardinal Mazarin took him by his frayed cincture, and presented him to the group, saying with a smile, “Look how Monsieur Vincent comes dressed for the court, and look at the beautiful cincture he wears.”

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4. By modern reckoning, Vincent died in his eightieth year. Abelly is following a flawed chronology.
5. CED XI:201.
If some member of the house protested that he should have a new cape, or that his hat was too old, he would make fun of it: "Oh, my brother, it is all the king can do to have a collar that is not torn and a new hat to wear."

When he needed to warm himself in winter he would put only a little wood on the fire, out of consideration for wasting the goods of the house. He said that these belonged to God and to the poor, and that we were simply the dispensers of these goods and not the owners. He remarked that we must render an exact account to God for our use of things, and therefore we must use only what was absolutely necessary and nothing more. 6

Several times he began a trip with no money. He would be delighted at being forced by hunger to go to some poor peasant to ask for a piece of bread for the love of God. This happened to him particularly one day when he was returning fasting from Saint Germain to Paris.

The love he had for poverty was evidenced even in the church of Saint Lazare, for he wanted it to be seen even here. He had the decorations of the church, for the normal usage of the members of the community, made from the most ordinary things, except for the greater feasts. He thought the decorations of the church too elaborate for daily use. Also, he had the carpenters of the house fashion a railing separating a corner of the church of Saint Lazare into a chapel for the use of the community.

All this did not hinder him from being prodigal when it was a question of doing something for the glory of God or for the salvation of souls. In these cases he spared nothing. Money was of no significance for him. He even went deeply into debt when he found it necessary to do so for the interests of the service of God or for the spiritual good of the neighbor.

He strove to inculcate his own love of this virtue in the members of the entire Company. Speaking one day to his community, he said:

You ought to be aware, gentlemen, that this virtue of poverty is the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission. This person who now speaks to you, by the grace of God, has never asked for anything the Company now owns. If it should ever happen that a single step or a single word could bring it about that we would be established in the provinces and in the larger cities, and involved in various significant activities, I would not say that one word. I would hope that our Lord would give me the grace never to say it. This is my attitude, to leave all to the Providence of God. 7

He spoke once of his fear that the love of poverty might not continue to be honored in the community in some future day:

Alas, what would become of this Company if it were to become

7. CED XI:78.
attached to the things of the world? What would become of it, if it were to allow entry to that covetousness which the apostle says is the root of all evil? Several great saints have said that poverty is the touchstone of religious orders. We are not true religious since it has not been found expedient for us to become such, and we are not even worthy of being such although we live in common. But we can say the same thing as they, that poverty is the touchstone of communities, especially our own. This is the virtue that detaches us from all the goods of the world to attach ourselves perfectly to God. O Savior, give us this virtue which attaches us inseparably to your service. With it, we shall wish for and seek only you and your greater glory.  

Another time, moved by his love of poverty and his desire to see it flourish in his community, he spoke forcefully against the contrary spirit. He uttered three maledictions against those of the Company who allowed themselves to be guided by self-interest and the desire of amassing goods:

Woe, woe, gentlemen and my brothers, woe to the missionary who becomes attached to the perishable goods of this world. He will be trapped by them. He remains pierced by their thorns and captured in their bonds. Should this happen to the Company, what will happen then? How shall we live? "We have a thousand livres of income, we can live at our ease. Why go running about the villages and towns? Why work so hard? Let us leave these peasants to the care of their pastors. We should live in peace." This is how the spirit of laziness will follow the spirit of covetousness, being concerned only about protecting and increasing material things, and seeking personal satisfaction. We can then say goodbye to the missions, and to the Congregation of the Mission itself, for it shall cease to exist. You have only to read your history books to see countless examples of this. Wealth and an abundance of material things have caused the loss, not only of certain clergy, but of entire communities and orders, all for not remaining faithful to their primitive spirit of poverty.

One of his priests once spoke to Monsieur Vincent about the poverty of his house. The reply of Monsieur Vincent was, "What do you do, Monsieur, when you lack what is needed by your community? Do you have recourse to God?" "Yes, sometimes," replied the priest. "Ah well," Monsieur Vincent said, "you see how poverty makes us think of God and helps us to raise our hearts to him. If we had everything we needed, we would easily forget him.

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For this reason, I rejoice when I see that real and voluntary poverty is practiced in all our houses. There is a hidden grace in this poverty which we do not realize.” The priest answered, “You take care of other poor people, all except your own.” “I pray God to forgive you these words,” said Monsieur Vincent. “I am well aware that you said this without thinking, but you must realize that we can never be richer than when we are like our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

A priest of the Mission accepted a gift given to the Congregation of the Mission by a priest of great piety for the establishment of a new house of the Congregation. Monsieur Vincent wrote to him as follows: “These gifts are all the greater because they were totally unexpected and unmerited on our part. You have acted according to the good pleasure of God, and followed our rule of allowing the Providence of God to show the way, without doing anything of ourselves to bring this about. This is the way all our houses were begun, and it should ever be the way the Company responds.”

Writing one day on this same subject to the superior of one of his houses, he said:

The proposal that you make to me of seeking the priory which you mention is contrary to the maxim and usage that exists among us of not seeking any property or establishment directly or indirectly. Providence alone has called us to all those foundations that we have, by means of the very same persons who had the property rights. And if the Company trusts me in this, it will keep itself inviolably in this wise manner of acting.

Another of his priests wrote to ask if he should accept two benefices which he had been offered in his native region, with the thought of having them come into the use of the Company. He thanked his confrere as follows:

I thank you, especially since your intention is solely to assure that God would be honored and the people helped more than ever before. This shows your zeal, which God always rewards. But in answer to your request, Monsieur, we ought never to seek other resources for the Company than those which it shall please God to send us independently of anything we do. We should not anticipate Providence, and I beg you to hold to this.

His perfect detachment from material things was never seen better than when the queen regent called him to the Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs. As a member, he had a say in the awarding of all the benefices in France normally at the disposition of the king. He never asked anything for his own

10. CED VI:8-9.
11. CED VI:8-9.
Company nor for his relatives, no matter how greatly they were in need, nor for his friends as tokens of his friendship. On the contrary, it was known that, if some relatives asked him for a benefice, he would do nothing. He preferred that they stay in their state as peasants and gain their bread by the sweat of their brows. This was not for lack of affection for them, but from a totally disinterested attitude which is rarely or never seen. He was liberal and generous toward others, but so modest and reserved toward his own that even his best friends were astonished. Also, he was heard to say, when called to this position at court, that he had taken a firm resolution before God never to take advantage of his position to favor any of his relatives. Neither would he advance the interests of his Congregation. He held to this so completely that, if we were to judge by worldly standards, his Congregation certainly lost more than it gained.  

While Monsieur Vincent was on the Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs, one of the leading magistrates of the kingdom, a man of great authority, asked, through a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, that an abbey be given to one of his sons who did not have the requisite qualities. This gentleman promised that, if the abbey were given, he would see to it that the house of Saint Lazare would regain some lands and revenues that had been lost. He was well informed of how to bring this about, with no involvement of the priests of the Congregation in this issue. Monsieur Vincent was urged to seize the opportunity while he was in office, since this was a common practice with several other orders, which the priest named. When Monsieur Vincent received this proposal, he responded: “Not for all the goods of the world would I do anything against God or my conscience. The Company will never fail because of poverty. Rather, if poverty should fail, I fear that the Company will perish.”

Monsieur Vincent would not ask anything for his Congregation, any more than he would for his relatives and friends. When some even tried to take from the Company what rightfully belonged to it, he showed himself so indifferent that even the judges were astonished. They could not help saying that surely Monsieur Vincent must be a man from another world, since he was so little attached to things of this one. When the possession of the priory of Saint Lazare was called into question, he was of a mind to allow it to be taken by the other community that sought it, rather than defend his rights in court. However, when he took counsel of a great servant of God, it was pointed out to him that it was a question of the service of God and not simply his own particular interest, and that he should defend himself in the courts. He followed this advice, but retained a personal disposition of indifference to keep the property or lose it, just as the court would decide.

13. This was the testimony given by the chancellor Michel Le Tellier. See Book Two, ch. 13.
This same thing happened with the house of the Holy Spirit in the city of Toul. He was on the verge of leaving it and recalling the Missionaries from there. He would have done this but for the advice of a person of virtue and standing which he followed, rather than his own inclination.\(^{15}\)

On another occasion when he felt he had to recall his Missionaries from a certain diocese, he instructed the superior how he should act in leaving the town where he was.

After giving an account to the vicars general of all the goods which they have given for your use, and which you are now returning to them, you must take leave of them graciously. Leave without a single word of complaint and with expressions of being at ease in leaving the locality. You must pray that God bless the town and the diocese. I beg you above all not to say anything from the pulpit or elsewhere which would show any resentment. Ask the blessing of these gentlemen upon yourself and the whole community. Ask their blessing for me, who desire to prostrate myself in spirit at their feet along with you.

Although the resolution had been taken to leave this town, God did not allow this to come about. Things changed to such a degree that this house has remained to this day.

He was equally detached from concern about the houses of the Daughters of Charity of which Congregation he was the founder, as he was about those of his own Company. He had sent these women to the villages, towns, and hamlets where they had been asked for, to serve the sick of the parishes and hospitals, even when the condition was attached that they could be sent back at any time the administrators wished. This was something almost unheard of, and yet Monsieur Vincent accepted it without question. For example, he heard that the administrators of the hospital of the city of Nantes were thinking of sending away the Daughters of Charity in favor of the Religious Hospitalers. He wrote immediately, telling the authorities that he had heard much good of these Sisters Hospitalers, and if they wanted them at Nantes they should send back the Daughters of Charity, and that this could be done without difficulty. After writing this letter he sent it unsealed to Mademoiselle le Gras, superior of the Daughters of Charity, for her information and to ask her to raise no difficulty about this withdrawal. “This was the way our Lord was treated while he was on earth. The spirit of Christianity demands that we enter into the sentiments of the neighbor, and God’s glory will come from our doing so if we allow it to happen.”\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) Book One, ch. 46.

\(^{16}\) Dodin, Supplément, 171; this is cited from the second edition of Abelly, with many textual differences from that given here.
He said more to the person who brought the letter and message to Mademoiselle le Gras. He told him that one day one of the two Daughters of Charity who served the sick poor in one of the leading parishes of Paris, which he named, decided to marry, with the blessing of the pastor upon her promising to continue her service to the poor, just as she had done before as a Daughter. Without further ado, the pastor sent the other away to Mademoiselle le Gras. Monsieur Vincent advised her not to complain but to adore and bless God for his action. He assured her that all would work out for the best. This is what happened, for the new bride did not find in her marriage the same graces she had previously enjoyed, and soon left the service of the sick. The pastor was obliged to seek out Monsieur Vincent to ask for two other Daughters of Charity. He sent them and then said these beautiful words: “How much good can be accomplished if we are ready! If the Providence of God finds us responsive to his direction, things will succeed to his greater glory, the one thing we should aspire to.”

Monsieur Vincent’s detachment from exterior things and love of poverty appeared to an astonishing degree in a lawsuit regarding a farm which had been given to the community of Saint Lazare in return for a lifetime guarantee of income to the donor. Monsieur Vincent had accepted it only at the strong insistence of the benefactor. Some time after several improvements had been made to the farm, the community of Saint Lazare was deprived of title to the farm, and with no recompense for all its improvements, amounting in all to some fifty thousand livres.

Monsieur Vincent announced this loss to the community. He told them that, soon after the decree of expulsion was handed down, a judge came to persuade him to appeal the order. He then commented:

O my God, we must be careful not to do so. You, yourself, O Lord, pronounced this decree, and it shall remain irrevocable. We shall sacrifice this property to your divine Majesty. Gentlemen and my brothers, please let it be a sacrifice of praise. Let us thank this sovereign judge of the living and the dead for having visited us with tribulation. Let us give him thanks that he has not only withdrawn our attachment to earthly goods, but has taken away what we owned, and has given us the grace to accept this purification. I would like to believe that we all rejoice at this privation of a temporal good, for our Lord said in the Apocalypse Ego, quos amo, castigo ["Whomever is dear to me I reprove and chastise"]. Should we not love these trials as a mark of his affection? It is not enough

17. The farm at Orsigny, lost in 1658.
to love them, we must rejoice. O my God, who will give us this grace? You are the source of all joy, and other than you there is no true joy. We ask you, therefore, for this grace. Yes, gentlemen, let us rejoice since it seems God has found us worthy to suffer this loss.

How is it possible to rejoice in sufferings, since they are by nature so unpleasant and we flee from them? It is like us when we take medicine which we know may be bitter, and even the best of them disturb us, but yet we take them, and why? Because we are hoping to be saved from an illness, or we seek a cure of one we already have. In the same way, afflictions which may be disagreeable to an individual or to the whole Company contribute to the welfare of a soul or a congregation. God purifies us with them like gold in the fire. Our Lord in the Garden of Olives suffered his agony and on the cross his terrible sufferings to such an extent that he seemed bereft of all human help and even abandoned by his Father. But even in this extremity, he rejoiced in fulfilling the will of his Father. Even though it was so painful, he preferred it to all the pleasures of the world. His Father's will was his food and his delight. My brothers, it ought to be our happiness too, to see his will accomplished in us by the humiliations, losses and troubles which arise. Saint Paul says: Aspicientes in auctorem fidei et consummatorem Jesum, qui proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem, confusione contempta [“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith. For the sake of the joy which lay before him he endured the cross, heedless of its shame”]. The first Christians had the same sentiments, for the same apostle tells us: Rapinam bonorum vestrorum cum gaudio suscepistis [“You joyfully assented to the confiscation of your goods”]. Why should we not rejoice with them today in the loss of our property?

Oh, my brothers, how pleased God must be to see us gathered here to speak about this and to arouse this joy in ourselves. On the one hand we are made a spectacle to the world in the opprobrium and shame of this decree. In some way it labels us as unjust holders of the belongings of others: Spectaculum facti sumus mundo et angelis et hominibus, opprobriis et tribulationibus spectaculum facti [“We have become a spectacle to the universe, to angels and men alike because of our oppression and troubles”]. On the other hand, Omne gaudium existimate, fratres mei, cum in tentationes varias incideritis [“My

20. Heb 10:34.
21. Based on 1 Cor 4:9.
brothers, count it pure joy when you are involved in every sort of trial." We must be convinced, my brothers, that our joy has come when we see ourselves fallen into various temptations and tribulations, judging that we have gained much more than we have lost. God has taken this farm from us, together with the satisfaction of owning it and the pleasure of going there on occasion. This innocent recreation, appealing to our senses, is a poisonous venom, a sharp blade, or a fire that burns and destroys. We have been saved from all that, by the mercy of God. By being more in need we have been thrown more completely on the Providence of God, and we have had to abandon ourselves completely to him for the necessities of life and for the grace of salvation. May it please God that this loss of temporal things be recompensed by an increase of confidence in his Providence, abandonment to his direction, a greater detachment from the things of earth, and a greater renunciation of our own selves. O my God! O my brothers! How happy should we be. I dare to hope from his paternal bounty, which does all for the best, that he will give us this grace.

What then are the fruits we should draw from this situation? The first is to offer to God all that remains of our goods and consolations, of body and of spirit. We must offer ourselves so completely, both individually and as a community, that he may dispose of us and of all we have according to his most holy will. We must be ready to leave all, to embrace inconveniences, abuses, and whatever afflictions might arise, and thus follow Jesus Christ in his poverty, humility, and patience.

The second effect is never to protest, no matter how right we may be. If we have to defend ourselves, let it be only after trying by all possible means to come to terms with our adversary, assuming our rights are clear and evident, for whoever trusts in human judgment is often deceived. We should practice the counsel of our Lord who said that we should also give our shirt to the one who demands our coat. May God give the Company the grace to put this into practice. Let us hope that, if the Company is faithful in establishing this usage and firm in never departing from it, God will bless it, and that if anyone robs it on one side, God will give it back on the other.

Many persons of great piety, experienced in these matters, had advised Monsieur Vincent both before and after the decree concerning the farm had been issued. They suggested that he file an appeal and assured him that the

23. Matt 5:40.
24. CED XII:52-57.
judgment would almost certainly be favorable to him. The best they could get him to do was to consult in private a lawyer of the court who had been present for the original discussion of the case. After this consultation, he wrote the following letter to the late Monsieur Desbordes, Auditor of the Chamber of Accounts of Paris. He was a longtime friend of his Company and an honest and intelligent man. He also thought that an appeal should be made. This letter was written on December 22, 1658:

Monsieur, we have sent our papers to Monsieur N. [Cousturier.] He has looked over them carefully, and believes that our appeal would be well received. He wishes to plead our case and promises that he will be successful. Although a thrifty man, he will take nothing for his services. He has even said that if we were to lose, he would recompense us in full for our loss.

We have not been able to decide to follow this advice, (1) because the large number of lawyers we consulted together and separately before the decree all assured us of our secure rights, and there was nothing to fear. We consulted Messieurs Deffita and [Jean Marie] Lhoste, who looked into the matter exhaustively, the first because he was to represent us, and the second for having prepared our documents.25 Both told us, as did Monsieur N. [Cousturier], that we were on secure ground. And yet, the court decided against us, as though we had stolen it. Opinions are so diverse, it is always dangerous to rely on the judgment of men.

(2) One of our practices during a mission is to reconcile differences among the people. We must fear that if we appeal, a procedure used by all charlatans, God will withdraw his grace from us in working for reconciliations among the people.

(3) We would give much scandal, after such a solemn decree, by attempting to overturn it. We would be blamed for being too attached to material things, a reproach often made against priests. We would cause gossip in the palace, do harm to other communities, and scandalize our friends.

Lastly, Monsieur, to tell you the truth, I am filled with anxiety, as you can imagine, about going against the advice of our Lord, that those who follow him should not go to court to sue. If we have already done so, it was because in conscience I could not leave something legitimately given to the community, of which I am but the administrator, without doing all in my power to preserve it. Now that this obligation has been removed by a sovereign decree which has nullified my efforts, I think, Monsieur, we must leave it at that.

25. Monsieur Vincent often turned to these two lawyers for advice.
Monsieur, as you are so filled with Christian maxims, please consider all these reasons, and allow us to accept things as they are.26

This is how this true servant of God showed his entire detachment from the things of this world. He accepted the great loss of his property, and argued to convince his Company and his friends to accept the decision of the court, even though he was assured that he could easily win back the lost property by engaging the lawyer who was so sure that he could win the appeal. This man wanted to take on the case and argue it alone, guaranteeing that he would pay all costs, even paying for the property if he were not successful in reversing the decree against the Missionaries. It could be said that only Monsieur Vincent was capable of refusing this offer. He gave as his reason for refusing to appeal that the judges were honorable men and that if they had given such a faulty judgment he could not help thinking that God’s Providence had so willed it, and he could do nothing better than to accept his holy will.

The procurator of Parlement, since deceased, who was involved with the affairs of the house at Saint Lazare, left a document in which he showed his admiration for such disinterestedness. He added that he had long admired the behavior of Monsieur Vincent in all other business matters of which he had knowledge. Monsieur Vincent always conducted himself without pressure or passion, either when acting in his own name as superior, or for the Congregation, no matter how much right he had on his side or how faulty the positions of his adversaries. On the contrary, no matter what advantage he had in court sentences or decrees, he was ever ready for compromise. He recalled several instances in which he had not carried out several judgments given in his favor which involved large sums. He gave as his reason that it would have caused the ruin of certain families. He delayed so long in carrying out these decrees, for fear of harming his opponents, that effectively he did nothing for his own advantage.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

His Mortification

There is nothing greater nor more elevated in the life of a Christian," says Saint Ambrose, "than to train the soul in the practice of virtue. To do so, the flesh must be mortified and reduced to submission, so that it will learn to obey and become accustomed to the direction of reason. Notwithstanding the effort and difficulty in carrying this out, the Christian must do so courageously. He should bring to fruition the good desires and holy resolutions he has conceived in his heart."

With good reason the holy doctor spoke this way, for the Sage says "It is a glorious thing to follow the Lord." The first thing that must be done to follow him, as Jesus Christ himself says in the Gospels, is to renounce oneself and to carry one's cross. A Christian ought to look upon self-denial and mortification as titles of nobility, and as a sign that he belongs to Jesus Christ and is in his band of followers. Monsieur Vincent always made a special profession of following this divine Savior and of walking in his footsteps, as we said in an earlier chapter. There is no reason to doubt that he was clothed in the livery of the Savior, and bore in his body, following the expression of the apostle, the mortification of Jesus Christ. His life was practically a constant sacrifice of the body and every sense, of the soul and all its powers, and of all desires and movements of his heart. He spoke out of the abundance of this mortified heart as he addressed his community on the words of the Gospel, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross."

This is the counsel given by our Lord to those who would follow him. He declared that the first step is to renounce themselves, then to carry the cross, and then to persevere in both for all time.

We can well apply to this matter what our Lord said on another occasion: Non omnes capiunt verbum istud ["Not everyone can accept this teaching"]. There are few who give themselves truly to Jesus Christ to follow him under these conditions. Among the many who came to listen, nearly all abandoned him and went away

1. PL 16:76.
3. Ch. 8, sect. 2.

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because they were not prepared as the Savior had directed. They were not disposed as they should have been to mortify themselves and carry their cross.

For those who would wish to be disciples of this divine Master, they must renounce their own judgment, will, senses, passions, and so on. By judgment, we mean knowledge, intelligence, and reasoning. What an advantage for a Christian to submit his own lights and his reason for the love of God! What is this but to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, and to sacrifice one’s own judgment? For example, if someone puts forth a question for discussion, each says what he thinks. To renounce yourself on this occasion is not to stay silent, but to be disposed to submit your judgment and reason to follow willingly the judgment of others in preference to your own.

Our Lord gave us the example of what it means to renounce one’s own will during his whole life, up to his death. He was careful to do not his own will, but the will of his Father. He did always what he knew to be most agreeable to him. Quae placita sunt ei, facio semper [“I always do what pleases him”]. Oh, may it please God to give us the grace to remain always in the disposition of doing his will, obeying his commandments, the rules of our state of life, the orders of obedience, and thereby becoming true disciples of his Son. As long as we remain attached to our own will, we will never be properly disposed to follow him, to bear our sufferings, or to walk with him.

We therefore ought to mortify our senses and watch over them constantly to subject them to God. How dangerous curiosity is, to see and hear everything, and so turn our minds from God! How we should pray to God to give us the grace to renounce this curiosity, which caused the fall of our first parents.

We must renounce another passion which is strong in some. It is the immoderate desire of preserving our health, and to keep ourselves in top form. This causes them to do everything possible, and even the impossible, to preserve their health. This unregulated attention and fear of suffering any inconvenience, which we see in some, occupies all their thoughts. It directs them to the care of their wretched life, to the great detriment of the service of God. It deprives them of the liberty of following Jesus Christ. Oh, gentlemen and my brothers, we are disciples of this divine Savior, and yet we find we have become slaves. To what? To an item of health, to an imaginary remedy, to an infirmary where nothing is lacking, to
a house of our taste, to a walk which will distract us, to a time of
rest to satisfy our laziness. But some will say, a doctor has told me
to cut down on my work, to take the air, to change location. O
miserable and foolish one! Do nobles leave their domains because
they feel indisposed? Does a bishop leave his diocese? A governor
his palace? A tradesman his town? A merchant his shop? Do even
kings do this? Rarely, and even then when they fall sick, they remain
where they happen to be. The late king fell sick at Saint Germain
en Laye, but stayed there four or five months until he died his truly
Christian death, worthy of a most Christian king."

On another occasion, he spoke on the same topic:

"Sensuality is found everywhere, not only in seeking the esteem
of the world, in riches, and in pleasures, but even in our devotions,
in the most saintly actions, and in books, pictures, and in a word,
everywhere. O my Savior, give us the grace to rid ourselves of
ourselves! Please give us the grace to hate ourselves, so that we may
love you more perfectly, you who are the source of all virtue and
perfection, and the mortal enemy of all sensuality. Give us the spirit
of mortification, and the grace to resist the love of self which is the
root of all our sensuality."

Up to this point we have faithfully reported the words and thoughts of
Monsieur Vincent and even more the affection and dispositions of his heart
in regard to the virtue of mortification. It could rightly be said that this was
one of the virtues he most constantly and universally practiced during his
whole life, right up to his last breath. He certainly did not project an image
of an extremely austere life. He judged that a life seemingly more ordinary
would succeed better in the service of the people and the clergy to which
God had called him. Such a life would also be closer to that of Jesus Christ
and the holy apostles, after whom he sought to model himself and his
missionaries. He felt obliged to give the example of a well ordered life,
neither too free nor too strict, neither too lenient nor too rigorous. In private
he treated himself more roughly, chastising his body in various ways and
mortifying his interior faculties to have them both perfectly submissive to
the will of God. His way of doing this was the more excellent and more holy
in that it was concealed from the eyes of others. He made himself like the
grain of wheat spoken of by Jesus Christ in the Gospel. It lies hidden in the
earth, but finally sends forth its shoots, and produces its fruit in due season.

First, he mortified that love of honor and self-esteem which is so natural
to everyone. It makes us hide anything which could cause the least lack of

7. CED XII:211-27.
8. CED XI:71.
regard from others. This holy priest resisted this natural inclination. He never allowed an occasion to pass when he could humble himself by speaking of his low birth and the poor status of his parents. He wrote to one of his priests in 1633:

Oh, Monsieur, how happy we are to honor the poor lineage of our Lord by our own poor and wretched families. I spoke most happily just recently to one community that I was the son of a poor peasant, and to another that I had been a swineherd. Would you believe, Monsieur, that I might have taken vain satisfaction in so overcoming natural feelings? It is true, the devil is artful and clever, but whoever honors the poverty of the infant of Bethlehem and of his holy parents is even greater than he.9

Monsieur Vincent mortified his affection for his relatives. He was of a generous nature despite his tender affection for them, as he has told us himself, and he had sacrificed this affection as an offering to Jesus Christ. On this subject, he spoke once to his community on separation from relatives, as directed by this divine Savior for those who wished to follow him.

Some who have gone back to their own region have become involved with the life of their family and its joys and sorrows. They have been trapped like flies caught in a spider’s web, and have not been able to extricate themselves.

I can use my own experience as witness to this truth. When I was still in service to the general of the galleys, and before the establishment of our Congregation, when the galleys were at Bordeaux, he sent me to give a mission to these poor convicts. I did so, with the help of some religious of the city of various orders, two to each galley. Before I left Paris for this trip I spoke to two of my friends. I told them I was going to my native region, but was not sure that I should visit my relatives. Both advised me to do so, telling me that my visit would be a consolation for them, and I could speak to them of God, and so forth. I hesitated because I had seen several good priests who had done wonders away from their native country, but I had noticed after a visit to their families that they returned completely changed. They became useless in their work because they were so taken up with the affairs of their relatives. They were preoccupied with that, whereas before they were not concerned with these matters but solely with what referred to the service of God, so distant is it from mere natural tendencies. I told my friends that I feared I would become too attached to my relatives after spending

eight or ten days with them, even after speaking of the way to assure
their own salvation, and to avoid covetousness, and to expect
nothing from me. Should I have a treasury of gold and silver, I told
them, I would not be able to give them anything, for a priest who
has anything owes it to God and to the poor.

The day I left I felt the sadness of leaving my poor relatives so
deeply that I wept all along the way, almost without stopping. These
tears begot the thought of helping them, and making it possible for
them to move to a better condition, to give this one something,
another something else. I thought of what I could give of what I
owned, and of what I did not possess. I say this to my own
humiliation, because perhaps God allowed this to make me under­
stand better the evangelical counsel of which we are speaking. I was
three months in this state of agitation about helping my brothers and
sisters. It weighed down my poor spirit.

When I came to my senses, I prayed God to deliver me from this
temptation. I prayed so hard that he finally took pity on me and lifted
this concern for my relatives, even though they were on the thresh­
old of beggary, and still are. This gives me the grace to commend
them to his Providence, and to recognize that they were happier than
if they were well provided for.

I say this to the Company because there is something great in this
practice recommended in the Gospel. It excluded from the number of
the disciples of Jesus Christ all those who did not hate father and
mother, brother and sister. In keeping with this, our rule exhorts us to
renounce the uncontrolled affection for our relatives. Let us pray to
God for them, and, if we can help them in charity, let us do so. But
be careful of nature, which inclines us that way, and would turn us,
if it could, from the school of Jesus Christ. Hold firm to this. 10

A priest of the Congregation from Gascony went of his own accord to
visit the relatives of Monsieur Vincent. On his return to Paris, he related how
he had found them, and among other things said: “What simplicity, piety,
and charity they showed, but they have nothing to live on except what they
earn by their own labor.” Monsieur Vincent replied to this, “Alas, are they
not happy? Could they be better off than in the situation where they carry
out the sentence pronounced by God that men should eat their bread in the
sweat of their brow?”

Poverty was not the only virtue practiced by these good folk, for they
were once defamed and denounced before a noted Parlement. Some friends
of Monsieur Vincent urged him to intercede to stop the investigation. He

10. CED XII:218-20. The date of his return to Pouy was 1623.
answered: "Is it not reasonable, gentlemen, that justice be done to satisfy the justice of God? The punishments of offenders in this life will save them from the rigors of divine justice in the next." The judges later discovered that the accusations against his relatives were pure calumny and deceit. Monsieur Vincent, however, made himself the protector of the accusers, and was able to save them from the punishment they so richly deserved. This same priest said he had learned this in Monsieur Vincent's home town. Monsieur Vincent wrote a letter about these events:

Only by a singular action of divine Providence were you defamed. God permitted this for his glory and for your good. For his glory, that you would be made like his Son, calumniated to the point of being called a seducer, ambitious, and possessed by the devil. This was allowed for your good, to satisfy the justice of God for any other sins you may have committed of which you may be unaware, but which are known to God.11

A relative of Monsieur Vincent, although he did not bear the same family name, was condemned to the galleys. He succeeded in obtaining the right to an appeal, through which he hoped to be restored to his legal rights against the designs of his accuser. He addressed letters to the Parlement of Paris hoping to profit from Monsieur Vincent's reputation, but this faithful servant of God wrote him several times advising him to omit several points in his appeal, so as to get a prompt hearing and decision in his case. He said:

Would you dare to refuse this advice from so many persons trying to help you? I cannot believe it. Also, your age and circumstances will not allow you to support the long and costly trial of such a lengthy case. If you are building your hopes on my help, I must tell you that I can give none. I would rather contribute to your salvation in advising you to make some adjustments to better dispose yourself for death, than to see you squander all your resources in a long and dubious lawsuit. I hope you will think seriously of this.12

This man persisted in wanting to plead his case, but Monsieur Vincent continued to insist that he would not help him nor receive him into his house. He did nothing to relieve his poverty.

One of his nephews came to Paris in the hope of receiving some help to enable him to lead a life of greater ease. He was received cordially, but was given nothing when he was sent on his way, except ten ecus, for his trip on foot of about 180 leagues. Even then, Monsieur Vincent asked the Marquise de Maignelay for these ten ecus. It was the only help he gave to his relatives.

11. CED III:19.
12. CED V:433.
About 1650, the late Monsieur Du Fresne, a close friend of Monsieur Vincent of whom we spoke in Book One,\textsuperscript{13} gave him a thousand francs for his relatives. He did not refuse this gift, but instead of spending the money on temporal things, preferring to see them earn their bread, he thought of using the money to further their salvation and spiritual advancement by missions to be given to them and to others of the region. The benefactor agreed to this.

He kept this money for two or three years, awaiting an opportunity to send some missionaries to the region. The rebellion of the nobles in 1652 affected the whole area, and Guienne was overrun by armies. His relatives were stripped of all they owned, and some among them even died from the depredations of the soldiers. Afterward, he heard of his relatives reduced to begging, but did not know why. After hearing this distressing news he did not complain. On the contrary he entertained sentiments of admiration and thanks toward the goodness of God for having inspired him not to spend the sum of money he had received years before, so he could now aid these people in their extreme need. He continued this praise of God over several weeks, thanking God for this special Providence.

However, since he did not want to allocate this money by himself, he consulted some members of the Company. Afterward he sent it by stage to Monsieur de Saint Martin, canon of Dax, leaving it to him to distribute the money as he saw fit. His only recommendation to his friend was to try to use the alms to help the people earn their living. He could, for example, buy a pair of oxen for a farmer, rebuild the house of one, clear a plot of land for another, or give tools and clothes to a third. He could not do much with so little, because so many of the poor had been abused.

This is the sum of all the wealth Monsieur Vincent gave to his relatives, although it would have been easy for him in his position to contribute much to them, in a worldly sense, if he had wished to use the available opportunities. He spoke to the rich and charitable persons who could help, about the needs of various provinces and of many families, but of his own region, and his own relatives, he said not a word. Must he not have been dead to the demands of flesh and blood to have acted this way?

In this connection, when he was once urged by one of his confreres to help his relatives known to be in need, he said: “Do you think I do not love my relatives? I indeed have the same sentiments of affection for them that anyone would have. My natural instinct is to help them, but I must act according to the movements of grace, and not those of nature. I should think of those poor persons who are even worse off, rather than of my friends and relatives.”

\textsuperscript{13} Ch. 5.
Monsieur Vincent not only did not lift a finger to help any of his relatives out of their low status and poverty, but he also discouraged others from doing so. There were several well-placed people, even some bishops, who, out of consideration for him, wanted to help his nephews. They even wanted to have them raised to the clerical state or to some other honorable profession. He responded to these initiatives by saying, "We must be careful not to turn these children from the designs God has for them. It seems to me that it would be better to leave them in the condition of their fathers. Being a farmer is one of the most innocent and conducive to salvation."

He went further, for he often felt that he should establish the priests of his Congregation in his own native region to give the same services there as they gave in other parts of the kingdom. He feared, however, some trace of self-love in this, and some natural attraction toward his own. He examined himself then before God, and decided against it, saying to himself: "O miserable one, what are you thinking of? Should not all places be equally indifferent to you? Are not all souls equally worthy before God? Why then would you prefer one to another?"

Mortifying this desire, which he feared came more from a natural impulse than from an inspiration of grace, he resolved not to take a single step or say a single word in favor of such a foundation in his own region. We can judge from all we have said how much Monsieur Vincent mortified the natural love he had for his relatives and for his place of birth.

It is commonly said that from the movement of the hand of a clock it is easy to form an opinion about the mechanism of the timepiece. The control of the tongue equally gives a good indication of the condition of the soul. The passions and movements of the heart usually are the mainsprings of action, particularly of the words we use. Certainly, if we had no other proof of the interior mortification of Monsieur Vincent than this absolute control he had over his tongue, it would suffice to show us his having this virtue in a high degree. According to the word of the apostle James, "He who does not sin by his tongue may be called a perfect man."\(^{14}\)

He had such mastery over this organ, which the same apostle called "ungovernable," that he never or seldom employed useless or superfluous words.\(^ {15}\) He never used those expressing slander, boasting, vanity, flattery, contempt, mockery, impatience, or other similar expressions of ill-controlled passions. He was so self-possessed that even in the heat of public talks, or in speaking to his own Company when he might not have prepared his remarks, he never said anything inconsiderate. When he thought of some-

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thing unusual, he would often stop abruptly, as though recollecting himself, and considering before God if it would be expedient to say what he had in mind. He would then continue his talk, not according to the first inclination which came to him, but according to what he saw was most pleasing to God, and most conformable to the inspiration of his grace.

Sometimes a person would tell him something interesting or amusing but which he already knew. He would listen attentively, not giving any hint that he was already aware of what was being said. He did so as much to mortify that self-love that is quick to let others know we are already aware of what others have learned, as not to deprive the speaker of the satisfaction of relating something new.

On those occasions when he was blamed or even insulted, he restrained his tongue and imposed a rigorous silence upon himself. At those times nature moves us to justify ourselves to retaliate for an injury received. To imitate his divine Master he recollected himself, showing his strength in silence and patience, blessing in his heart him who cursed, and praying for the one who insulted him.

As head of his widespread congregation, he was responsible to see to all its needs. It often happened that he lacked what was necessary, to his constant concern. To add to his troubles, he would often receive news of serious losses to the property or farms of the Company. This would add to the burden he already carried, which normally would cause complaints and murmuring in the one responsible. In his case Monsieur Vincent would repress these first movements of impatience and so well mortify the feeling he may have had that he would remain admirably serene and in a spirit of thanksgiving for these serious and unforeseen accidents. He would say only, “God be blessed; God be blessed; we must submit to his good pleasure and accept what he is pleased to send us.”

He showed how much he mortified his tongue and how well he controlled this member in the almost countless occasions when he could have spoken of his experiences in Tunis, and did not do so. It is natural to recount perils and accidents which one has survived, especially when these reflect on our ability or strength and tend to our praise. The marvelous truth is that in any situation in which he was, he was never heard to say a single word of his own captivity, or what he did or said to convert the one who held him in bondage, and who delivered him from the hands of the infidels.

Although he was obliged to speak often to his confreres about the Christian slaves held captive by the Moslems in Barbary to urge them to volunteer to go there, or to persons of means to contribute toward the relief and deliverance of the poor slaves, he never spoke of his own experiences or of what had happened to him there. This seemed to be because to do so
would reflect favorably upon him and turn to his advantage. He willingly spoke of things humiliating to himself, but never of what directly or indirectly would tend to his own glorification. It is certain that he could not have achieved this mastery of his tongue if he had not first become the absolute master of his feelings and his interior movements by a constant practice of mortification. He regarded this virtue as being of such necessity, not only for perfection but for salvation itself, that he sometimes expressed it this way: “If a person already had one foot in heaven, but left off the practice of mortification for the time it takes to get the other foot there, he would be in danger of losing himself.”

This is why he tried to inspire his confreres of the Company with a spirit of interior mortification. This is a stripping of all things and a detachment, a complete death, to the senses and the movements of nature, to all self-interest, to all self-love and self-seeking, to live only the life of the Spirit. He used to say:

Hold firm, hold firm, against your own nature. If you give it an inch, it will take a mile. Hold it for certain that the measure of your advancement in the spiritual life depends on how much you progress in the virtue of mortification. It is particularly necessary for those who work for the salvation of souls. Preaching penance to others would be in vain, were we lacking in it ourselves, and did not let it appear in our actions and behavior. 16

SECTION ONE

Continuation of the Same Topic

Concerning the exterior mortification of Monsieur Vincent, we can say truly that it equaled the interior, for he practiced it perfectly and almost without letup. He treated his body with great rigor until his extreme old age, even when quite sick. Besides the ordinary penances and mortifications which we will speak of shortly, he sought out all occasions when he could cause his body to suffer. We gave several examples in Book One, especially of his way of conducting himself during the trip he took in 1649, when he was more than seventy years of age. 17 The abstinences and vigils, the extreme

16. CED XI:70.
17. By modern reckoning, the saint was sixty-eight or sixty-nine. See Book One, ch. 39.
cold, and all the other inconveniences he was exposed to, caused a serious illness which finally caught up with him in Richelieu. On this subject he used to say that we must practice mortification in every situation, even holding the body in a posture that would be uncomfortable, provided, of course, that modesty was observed. We should deprive our senses of what might give them satisfaction, and should accept willingly the weather and temperature, whatever they were. He practiced this himself, glad to find any occasion of mortification. It was often noticed that, during the coldest days of winter, his hands were exposed to the cold. In time they showed the effects of this, and the other parts of his body shared in this mortification, for he wore the same shoes and clothes in winter as he did in the warmer seasons.

During the trials and extreme misery in Lorraine brought about by the wars, he often said, “This is the time of penance, for God afflicts his people. Should not we priests be at the foot of the altar, weeping for their sins? This is our obligation, but beyond this, should we not deny ourselves something we are used to, to come to their aid?” During the three or four years of this conflict he had the community of Saint Lazare served only brown bread. This was just like the time of the siege of Corbie at the beginning of the war between the French and Spanish crowns. He cut out one of the courses that had been served, and never re-established it later. He said, “Is it not right that we should cut back in some way, to sympathize with and participate in the public sufferings?”

He rescued a young woman from the danger of losing her virtue, and he supported her for two years and was resolved to continue this help if necessary. He told her that he would do all he could to help, but she would have to be careful not to offend God. However, at the end of this time she was seduced by some evil-minded persons and left her asylum. When Monsieur Vincent was told that she had fallen miserably, he said, “It seems to me that we have done all we could to prevent this unhappy result. It remains only to pray to God, and to do penance for her. Her situation must exact its toll of me!”

The infirmarian of the house at Saint Lazare had said that Monsieur Vincent suffered frequent sicknesses from the very beginning of the Company, even after it was established at Saint Lazare. Twice a year he suffered from the quartan fever, but he asked for no remedies, nor did he leave off his usual work.\footnote{A quartan fever is one which reoccurs approximately every seventy-two hours; here probably caused by malaria.} Even though his legs were inflamed, he continued to take his trips on foot, until he had to travel on horseback because of his afflictions.

Either because of illness or some other cause, he often experienced extreme drowsiness, but rather than take a little rest he used the occasion to
mortify himself. He stood or took some other posture, or did other violence to himself, to prevent his falling asleep. It was remarked that he never shortened his vigils because of his advanced age. He always arose at the usual hour even though he may have been the last to get to bed. He was among the first at church in the mornings, and would remain kneeling on the bare ground during the time of mental prayer, not using a pad. Ordinarily he would spend more than three hours in the church each morning, for his mental prayer and for his mass, including the time for the preparation and thanksgiving after, even during the coldest part of the year.

Perhaps he did not have too much reason to love his bed, for he slept on a bare cot without mattress, without curtains, and in a room without a fire. He did so for almost his entire life, even in his more serious illnesses, except for the last three or four years when he had to move to a room with a fireplace because of his bad legs. He was unhappy at the curtain put around his bed, but continued as before to sleep on the cot.

He was such an enemy of his own body that the late Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld once asked him to moderate his penances and austerities, to preserve his life for the good of the Church.

He observed the mortification of his senses almost continually and on every occasion. When he went into town or took a trip, instead of distracting himself with the view of the countryside or other interesting sights, he would ordinarily keep his eyes fixed on a crucifix he carried. Sometimes he kept them closed, to focus on God alone.

Once, going from one part of the house at Saint Lazare to another, he noticed some fireworks in the air, part of a public celebration of the city of Paris. His only response was to turn away, saying, "God be blessed."

He was never known to pick a flower, nor to keep one near him for its odor. On the other hand, when he went some place where there were foul odors, as in the hospital or in homes of the sick poor, his spirit of mortification rejoiced at the opportunity for self-denial.

Just as he used his tongue only to praise God, recommend virtue, combat vice, instruct, edify, or console the neighbor, so too he used his hearing only to attend to what excited one to the good, turning away from all else. As much as he could, he avoided hearing useless things, or listening to whatever might delight the ear but contribute nothing to the nourishment of the soul.

He was so mortified in his sense of taste that he never let it be known what sort of food was most acceptable to him. He seemed almost to regret having to take his meals. He did so only out of necessity, politely eating what was set before him in view of God and with much modesty. His example so influenced his confreres that several visitors of various ranks, who had been invited to the refectory, were much edified at the spirit of recollection, the
great modesty and reserve, in what normally would be thought of as an 
occasion of dissipation.

He never left the table without having mortified himself in something, 
either in eating or drinking, just as he recommended to others. He was so 
little concerned at what he took for his nourishment that once, when he 
returned late from the city, and the cook had already retired, he was given 
by mistake two raw eggs with the mistaken notion that they had been cooked. 
He took them, seemingly not noticing their condition, and certainly did not 
complain or send them back to be cooked. This would never have been 
known if the following day the cook had not asked the brother who had 
remained to attend Monsieur Vincent if he had cooked the two eggs he had 
left for him. He responded that he had not, thinking they had already been 
prepared.

In his latter years he was urged to take some bouillon in the mornings. 
Once one of the priests was earnestly appealing to him to accept what he 
was presenting. “You tempt me, Monsieur. Is it not the demon who leads 
you to persuade me to feed this miserable body and this wretched carcass? 
Is it right to do so? May God pardon you for this.”

After this time, however, he agreed to take each morning a certain 
bouillon made especially for him, not made with meat but with a bitter wild 
chicory and some oats, but without fat, butter, or oil. In a word, he paid so 
little attention to what he ate that it happened several times during the 
evening that he fainted from lack of food. On these occasions he was brought 
a bit of hard bread, because he wanted nothing else but what would meet his 
immediate need.

He hid the other austerities of exterior mortification as much as he could, 
but it was known that he was rigorous in the treatment of his body. The 
brother who tended him in his sickness found in his room hairshirts, bracelets 
and belts studded with copper points. 19 He kept them all hidden, but used 
them often. Each day upon rising he used the discipline. One of the Company 
with the room next to his, separated by thin walls, reported that he had done 
this for twelve years or so.

Besides this routine discipline, he used others on special occasions, as for 
example, when some disorder was reported to him about one of the houses 
of the Congregation. Because of this he used the discipline twice each night 
over the space of eight days. Only then did he work to remedy the situation, 
which fortunately was successfully resolved. Later he told a friend in 
confidence that he did this penance because his sins were the cause of the 
evil that had arisen. Therefore it was only right that he should be the one to 
do the penance for it.

We shall finish this chapter with his thoughts on the cross and mortification, expressed in a talk to his community:

Our Lord so loved the state of affliction and of suffering that he wished to experience it. He became man to be able to suffer. All the saints embraced this same state, and those who had not received sicknesses from the Lord imposed afflictions upon themselves to punish themselves. As Saint Paul said of himself: *Castigo corpus meum, et in servitutem redigo*: I chastise my body and bring it into subjection.\(^{20}\) This too is what we must do, we who are in perfect health. We must chastise ourselves and afflict ourselves because of the sins we have committed and the sins of the whole world against his divine Majesty. But what do you think? Man is so wretched and miserable that not only does he not chastise himself, he even complains of the maladies and afflictions which it has pleased God to send him, although these are for his own good.\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\) 1 Cor 9:7.  
\(^{21}\) CED XII:30.
Monsieur Vincent submitted his body to the mortification of Jesus Christ, so that, in the words of the holy apostle, the life of Jesus Christ might be in him.\(^1\) He manifested this by a life of angelic purity and by his chastity, secure from all that might lead him astray, as was shown in his way of dealing with women of all ages. He conducted himself in a way that never gave the least cause for any calumny, but rather was always a matter of edification to all.

Since he was well aware of the necessity and the importance of this virtue especially for those who constantly worked for the spiritual good of their neighbors, as the missionaries of his Congregation did, he often gave advice about it.

It is not enough for Missionaries to excel in this virtue. They must act in such a way that no one may be able to have the least suspicion that they have fallen into the opposite vice. This suspicion, even if not well founded, will harm their reputation. It would prejudice their success as Missionaries more than any other crime of which they might be falsely accused. We therefore must not be satisfied to use ordinary means to prevent these suspicions, but we must use extraordinary means if the occasion demands it. We should, for example, sometimes abstain from actions otherwise licit, good, and even holy, such as visiting the sick poor, when in the judgment of those who direct us, we would provide an opportunity by doing so for these suspicions to arise.\(^2\)

A parish priest once asked Monsieur Vincent a question on this subject. It serves to show both his own naivete, and Monsieur Vincent's exactitude on this matter. The priest wanted to know if it was proper to feel the pulse of a sick girl or woman, to ascertain if she were on the point of dying, and thus ready to receive the last sacraments and the prayers for a departing soul. Monsieur Vincent replied:

You should be on your guard in this matter. The evil spirit might well use this pretext to tempt both the living and the dying. The devil uses any weapon available for this last opportunity to harm a soul. Resist him firmly, even though bodily strength is fading. We

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1. 2 Cor 4:10.
should recall the example of the saint who when dying would not allow his own wife to touch him. He had separated from her by mutual consent, but said with the strength left to him, “Alas, there was still fire under the ashes.” To ascertain if death is imminent, the surgeon or another person at the deathbed might be called upon, since they would be in less danger than yourself. The doctor might be asked what he thinks. Until his arrival on the scene, however, the priest should not touch the girl or woman for any reason whatsoever.

On this point he was a rigorist, even though he was understanding on all other matters.

He once wrote to a brother of the Congregation telling him to abstain from spending time with a female friend, even though his intentions were praiseworthy. “Even if these conversations are not bad in themselves, there will always be those who think they are. Besides, the way to preserve purity is to avoid any occasions which might stain it in any way.”

Another brother experienced temptations against chastity because of what he saw during his comings and goings while tending to the business of the house. He thought that he could remedy this problem by leaving the Congregation and becoming a hermit. He wrote of his intention to Monsieur Vincent, only to receive this reply:

On the one hand, your letter consoled me, seeing the candor with which you write. On the other hand, it caused me the same distress which Saint Bernard experienced when one of his religious, under the pretext of seeking greater discipline, wanted to leave his order to join another stricter one. The holy abbot pointed out to him that this desire was a temptation. The evil spirit wanted nothing better than this change to happen. He was well aware that if the monk could obtain this change, then a second change could be even easier, so that soon the person’s life would be totally unsettled. And that’s what happened.

What I wish to say, my dear brother, is that if you are not chaste in the Congregation of the Mission, I can assure you that you will not be so anywhere else in the world. Be on your guard against the flightiness expressed in your wish to change. In this matter, after praying, the one thing necessary in all our needs, the remedy is to consider that no place on earth is free from temptation and the accompanying temptation of remedying the situation simply by changing one’s location. After this consideration, reflect that God has called you to the Company where you now are. He has in all likelihood linked the grace of your salvation to it, and he may not
give it to you in some other place to which he has not called you. The second remedy against temptations of the flesh is to avoid meeting and even seeing the persons who disturb you. You should be open with your spiritual director, who will suggest other remedies. What I would advise, then, is to entrust yourself completely to the hands of our Lord, with the help of the immaculate virgin, his mother, to whom I often recommend your welfare. 3

A pious woman once wrote an affectionate and tender letter to a friend who happened to be under the spiritual direction of Monsieur Vincent. He in turn sent it to Monsieur Vincent for his comments, which he gave as follows:

I would like to believe that the person who wrote to you so feelingly meant no evil. It must be said, however, that her letter could harm a heart not properly disposed or less strong than your own. May the Lord help you avoid the company of someone capable of unsettling your peace of soul, even slightly! 4

In keeping with this opinion, Monsieur Vincent included in his rule that his confreres should avoid speaking and writing in too affectionate terms to women and girls, even when it was a question of giving spiritual advice. He himself was very reserved on this point. He wrote and spoke well and respectfully to everyone, but never too softly and endearingly to women. What is more, he avoided the use of terms which, though perfectly proper, might conceivably lead to the least unworthy thought in the minds of those to whom he spoke. The very word “chastity” itself was too strong for him. He rarely used it, for fear of bringing the opposite vice to mind. He preferred to use the term “purity,” which has a wider sense. If he was obliged to refer to or speak of a fallen woman or girl to bring about some improvement to an unhappy situation, he would ordinarily use another word than “woman” or “girl,” such as “this poor creature.” He would refer to her fall by more general expressions, like “her unhappiness” or “her weakness.” In a word it is impossible to exaggerate his care to avoiding anything having even a shadow of impropriety about it.

His countenance reflected the modesty of his heart, and it so ruled his tongue that his words made it evident to all that the virtue of chastity was precious to him. This is why, in his rule, he included every imaginable precaution to preserve it. We have already referred to his mastery of his body by his arduous work and constant penances, by his practice of humility, and by his temperance in eating and drinking. He watered his wine so much that a person of piety, and very trustworthy, remarked that he was often

3. CED IV:592.
4. CED VI:348.
astonished to see an old man drink so little, even at the age of eighty or more.\textsuperscript{5}

He was reserved in the use of all his senses, especially his sight, never looking around idly or curiously in an uncontrolled manner. He did not stare fixedly at women, or speak to them alone except within sight of others, with the door of the parlor open.

He would never visit the women of his assemblies [of the Ladies of Charity] in their homes without necessity, not even Mademoiselle Le Gras, superior of the Daughters of Charity which he had founded. This is what he wrote once on this matter when she lived in the village of La Chapelle, a quarter of a league from Paris:\textsuperscript{6} “Should the need arise, I may soon come to see you at La Chapelle. If such a visit is necessary I ask you to tell me, if you please. Otherwise, I would prefer not to come, as we had agreed from the beginning of our association.”\textsuperscript{7} In another letter written at a time Mademoiselle had fallen ill, he wrote, “If you wish me to come to see you in your illness, please let me know. I have taken it as a rule not to visit, unless it is really necessary or useful.”\textsuperscript{8}

Sometimes he found it necessary to meet with this virtuous lady and with her spiritual daughters in his role as founder and spiritual father, especially during their annual retreat. He had to be asked in advance and urged, and even then he accepted as seldom as he could, and only often after a long delay. He always brought a companion along, and never allowed him to leave the room he was using while he talked with these women. During his conversation his companion would remain some distance apart, to insure the privacy of the interview. He always wanted to have witnesses present on these occasions when he spoke to women. This would assure that there would be no possibility of sin, and would as well put him beyond the evil suspicions of even the most small-minded persons. Even the best of men may have their reputations ruined by calumny. Even our Lord, although falsely accused of so many other crimes, did not allow himself to be accused of anything relating to his virginal purity, which shone as bright as the sun.

Once, Monsieur Vincent was counseling a family from Paris, in which the husband and wife were being divorced. The young and attractive wife was in a dangerous situation, living apart from her former husband. While speaking with her in the parlor at Saint Lazare, the brother in the room felt he ought to leave, to give them greater privacy. He left and closed the door behind him, but no sooner had he done so than Monsieur Vincent called him to have the door left ajar, which he did. He acted this same way on all occasions when he was obliged to speak to women.

\textsuperscript{5} Brother Louis Robineau.
\textsuperscript{6} She began residing at La Chapelle in 1636.
\textsuperscript{7} CED I:582.
\textsuperscript{8} CED I:584.
Once, he went to the city to speak to a woman separated from her husband, about some important affair that needed detailed discussion. He was surprised to find that the woman was not yet out of bed. He finished his business with her in a few words. This astonished his companion, but he understood perfectly that Monsieur Vincent had cut the conversation so short because she was still in bed, even though at the time he was more than seventy years of age.9

The affection he had for the virtue of chastity motivated him to help many girls and women to leave their sinful profession. First, by giving missions, he sought to take them away from the company of those who had led them into evil.

Second, in provinces ruined by war, he attempted to supply food and clothing to those tempted to lose their virtue because of the lack of these necessities. This was particularly true in Lorraine. He was able to bring to Paris some of these young women who were most susceptible of being abused by the soldiers. With the help of the Daughters of Charity these women were cared for and placed in the homes of respectable people.

Third, Monsieur Vincent used the good offices of Mademoiselle Pallalion, a member of the Ladies of Charity and under his spiritual direction, to help these young women. By her advice, service, and support, she succeeded in helping a large number to keep from perishing, such that her name became known all over Paris. One day this zealous lady brought one of these young girls to Monsieur Vincent. She was about fourteen or fifteen years of age and very beautiful. He said he was most grateful to God for having permitted her to be placed in a pious family and under the care of a charitable person who looked after her honor and her salvation. He hoped that she would be grateful and appreciate having such a place of refuge, and would make good use of this favor from God. He felt sure that our Lord would do the same for others, for he had so loved virgins that he allowed them to accompany him in his travels. He hoped that she would be happy to remember this.

Fourth, he used the good offices of his spiritual daughter, Mademoiselle Le Gras, to receive into her home some of those who had been solicited to evil, or who were in danger of falling. By her advice and spiritual retreats, she helped them re-establish themselves until they could be placed in more suitable surroundings.

We have seen elsewhere what Monsieur Vincent had done for the Daughters of Saint Madeleine.10 A gentleman from Paris has reported that shortly before his death Monsieur Vincent had spoken of establishing a

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9. Brother Louis Robineau, then serving as his secretary.
hospital in Paris especially for abandoned women and girls, particularly for those who had corrupted others. These men had spoken together several times about this project. Although Monsieur Vincent anticipated great difficulties in carrying out the project, he had begun to work out the details with some other devoted people. If he had lived longer, he might have been able to make it succeed, as he did with so many other enterprises he had undertaken. Since his death, his collaborators on the project have advanced it to the point that it is about ready to begin.
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

His Even Disposition

A _n even_ disposition is one of the surest marks, or better, one of the excellent fruits of mortification. Through mortification, a person acquires a mastery not only over exterior deportment but also over the interior movements of the soul. No matter what happens outside him, or what he feels within, nothing is able to disturb the person with this virtue. In the superior part of his soul he enjoys peace, and remains always in a quiet possession of himself. Whatever occurs, whether it be important business, or something someone might do or say, proves powerless to disturb his equanimity. The same serenity appears in his countenance, the same reserve in his actions and words, and no change occurs in the voice except in its tone. His heart, undisturbed in its peace, maintains the whole of his interior in a constant uniformity that is reflected in the exterior as well.

This small sketch, imperfect as it is, shows the state to which Monsieur Vincent had arrived, or rather to which he had been raised by the practice of all the virtues we have spoken of in the preceding chapters, especially mortification. This virtue seems to have won him a perfect control over all his passions. They seemed to have no influence over him, since his disposition remained ever the same. This was shown even in his face and in all his mannerisms.

The constancy and equanimity of spirit of Monsieur Vincent was remarkable, first in his style of life, always humble and marked by piety and charity. It was without episodes of youthful indiscretions, or laxity in the practice of virtue, even in the frailty of old age. He kept to this path in spiritual affairs, and he walked in the path of perfection in the footsteps of our Lord. He urged his confreres to remain faithful to the practice of the maxims of the Gospel and to the rules of their state in life. He himself was an outstanding exemplar of this in all places and at all times, in tribulations and in consolations, in health and in sickness, in great cold and in oppressive heat. He regarded everything as being the same in the sight of God. The same could be said of everything else he encountered in his life.

It was often remarked of him that, no matter how important and pressing the affairs he might be considering, when someone would interrupt him to speak with him, he would listen and respond with complete attention and a tranquil spirit. It seemed as though he had nothing else on his mind at the time. This, surely, was a mark of the calm with which his soul was possessed.
This appeared also in the way in which he persevered in the various enterprises he took up, in service to the poor, the instruction of the people, or the reform of the clerical state. He never turned back from what he had begun. He never left off one project to begin another. Of all the works he undertook, he left none of them before the appropriate moment. Rather, he sustained and supported them to the end with an evenness of disposition and a marvelous constancy. He did so despite contradictions, reverses, and persecution, which seemed to have the result of steeling his courage rather than weakening his resolution.

Even more admirable and rarer among mortals is that Monsieur Vincent preserved this evenness of disposition in each of the different responsibilities he held. For example, in the pervasive atmosphere of the court, scarcely any strong person remains uninfluenced. Yet, during his time as a counselor to Their Majesties, we find that the court did not affect Monsieur Vincent's spirit. He was as calm and reserved in the presence of an army of courtiers as he was among his own missionaries. He was as humble in conversation with the great as he was in speaking with the lowliest. During the several years that he was on the council, he omitted none of his usual practices of piety nor did he diminish the respect and affability he showed to everyone. A well-respected prelate who would visit him at Saint Lazare admired especially such a great humility in someone occupying such exalted and important responsibilities, and who besides was the superior general of a congregation and founder of several other companies. This prelate was led to say, “Monsieur Vincent is always Monsieur Vincent; that is, he is as humble, affable, and prompt to serve everyone as he was before being called to the court. He has falsified the proverb that says honors destroy virtue.”

His composure was particularly apparent in the way he accepted the losses which he sometimes sustained of goods needed for the support of his Congregation and for the service of God. Several of his houses were supported by funds coming from royal enterprises, such as taxes, coach and carriage lines, and others as well. At times, news would reach him that these funds were being cut back by a quarter or a half, and sometimes even the whole yearly revenue would be stopped. During the wars, community farms were raided, horses and other animals stolen, and bad news would arrive of other losses or accidents. In all these situations his only words were: “God be blessed. We must submit to his will, and accept all it pleases him to send us.” The greatest complaint ever heard from his lips was: “If God does not show us his mercy, perhaps we will have to hire ourselves out as assistants in the village parishes.”

The loss of the farm spoken of in Chapter Eighteen gives us the opportunity to appreciate his evenness of disposition, for when the news was brought
to him of this, the first words he said were, "Blessed be God." He repeated them five or six times, then went to the church to pray before the blessed sacrament. What shows his composure even more in this same loss is that he made no effort to reclaim it, even after eight of the most distinguished lawyers of the Parlement of Paris, who had been consulted on the matter, all agreed that the house of Saint Lazare had every right to the property in question.

Another episode which shows his composure was the way he received news of the sinking of the vessel sent out to Madagascar by the late Marshal de la Meilleraye. It carried several missionaries, together with sufficient clothes, furniture, and books to support them for several years. The missionaries were saved by the grace of God, but everything else perished. Despite these losses, his spirit was not shaken, nor did he lessen his resolve to support this great and important enterprise. On the contrary, it seemed that his courage was strengthened, for he sent another group of missionaries to the island, even larger than the group which had been shipwrecked. ¹

He evidenced this same evenness of disposition on the occasion of the loss of some valued confreres of the Congregation who succumbed to their labors in the service of God. When he received news of their deaths, he at first was visibly affected. He soon regained his composure, however, and he turned his mind to God, accepting with his usual equanimity this expression of the good pleasure of the divine Majesty.

This is what he wrote on one occasion to one of his priests:

Are you aware of the heavy losses we have suffered? Oh, Monsieur, how great they are! Not only because of the number involved, ten or eleven, but because of the quality of those we have lost. They were all priests, and were among the best workers of our Company. They all died serving their neighbor in saintly and unusual circumstances. Of these, six fell victim to the plague in Genoa while serving those stricken, not to mention a brother who also died. The others gave up their earthly lives to bring eternal life to the inhabitants of the Hebrides and Madagascar. No doubt all these missionaries are now in heaven, since they were motivated by charity. Jesus Christ himself said no one has greater love than he who gives his life for the neighbor. May God be glorified, Monsieur, for the glory with which he has rewarded our brethren, as we believe, and may his holy will be the source of peace and calm for our saddened hearts. I do not speak of the sorrow with which we have received the sad reports which almost all came at the same

¹. The shipwreck of November 2, 1656, off the port city of Nantes.
time. I could not express the depths of my sorrow. You who love the Company so tenderly know for yourself that we could hardly receive any worse news without being overwhelmed.²

These were his sentiments of regret at the deaths of his dear sons. Those who noticed his tender and calm tranquility say that it was admirable, and the source of much edification.

The even disposition of this man of God was shown on another occasion when great sorrow and great joy followed one another in rapid succession, but only those he told through necessity were aware of anything unusual happening. Near the end of 1659 he sent four priests and a brother to the missions of Madagascar. Arriving at Nantes, these missionaries found that the ship would leave from La Rochelle. Some traveled there by sea, others by land. Monsieur [Nicolas] Etienne, the superior, wanted to go by sea, and took the brother with him to look after some baggage they were taking to Madagascar. The ship on which they were traveling was buffeted for twelve or fifteen days, constantly in danger of capsizing. As it was, it had lost its mast, sails, and provisions, until finally the report reached Monsieur Vincent that it had sunk between Nantes and La Rochelle. Shortly after, this sad news was confirmed by two young men who had survived the sinking by escaping in a small boat when the ship ran aground on a sandbar. When they reached La Rochelle they reported that they had seen the ship founder. One of the two wrote to his mother, Madame Sauve, at Paris, and she in turn sent the letter to Monsieur Vincent.³

He had good reason to regret more than any other thing that could have happened, this loss of the superior of the group going to Madagascar. It caused him great sorrow. Far from giving way to regrets over this bad fortune or showing any other signs of sorrow, he even concealed this accident from the community. He gave strict orders to the three persons aware of the tragedy not to speak to anyone else about it. He wanted time to prepare his community for this sad news, as he did in lesser matters. This would allow the spirit of resignation to gain ascendancy over the natural movements of disordered nature in face of the trials of this life. He hoped to inculcate the same evenness of disposition in his confreres as he himself had.

He immediately spoke to another priest in private, and asked him to take the place of the one presumably dead. While the priest was at table, and Monsieur Vincent was writing a letter to the other priests still at La Rochelle to inform them of their new superior, a packet of letters was brought in. It contained two that appeared to be in the hand of Monsieur Etienne whom he believed already dead. He opened the letters to confirm by the signatures

². CED VII:8-9.
that they were indeed from him, one sent from Bayonne and the other from Bordeaux. They told him that the ship in question had arrived at Saint Jean de Luz totally ruined, but that they had miraculously saved themselves. He and the brother with him were hastening to La Rochelle to arrive there before the ship sailed to Madagascar.4

Only God can know the consolation which this loving father received from these letters. He read them in the presence of his assistant and secretary, who were both aware of the matter. They now saw him pass suddenly from one extreme to the other, from a state of desolation to one of joy, yet with no external sign of any change either in his spirit or in his features. He simply thanked God, praised him and blessed him, in life as in death.

This is the way the will of God appealed to him, under whatever guise it assumed. He tried, in a multitude of ways, to teach his confreres, and in fact prescribed a rule on this point both for himself and for them, “Concerning all the things that befall us, such as afflictions or consolations, whether corporal or spiritual, we must receive them all equally as coming from the paternal hand of our Lord.”5

In this spirit, in 1660, seven months before his death, he accepted the separation by death of his close companion, Monsieur Portail. He expressed his feelings in a letter to one of his priests:

It has pleased God to call Monsieur Portail from us on the fourth of this month. He lived in fear of dying, but as death approached he accepted it with peace and resignation. He told me on several of my visits to him that he retained no trace of his previous fear. He died as he lived. He made good use of his sufferings in the practice of virtue, and had the desire of immolating himself in imitation of our Lord to accomplish the will of God. He was one of the two who first worked on the missions, and always contributed to the other undertakings of the Company to which he so generously gave of himself. We would have lost much in his passing were it not that God always works for the good, and we find our happiness even in what appears to be great evils. We must hope that this devoted servant of God will be more helpful to us in heaven than he was on earth. At the time of his death Mademoiselle Le Gras was also very ill. We were convinced she was going to die before him, but God preserved us from this double sorrow.6

We should remark that this double sorrow happened a month later, in the

4. Another departure of the missionaries was organized and took place January 25, 1660. This is the departure which Abelly places at the end of 1659. The ship on which these missionaries sailed was also wrecked off the Cape of Good Hope. See Book Two, ch. 1, sect. 9.
5. Common Rules 2,3.
deaths of Mademoiselle le Gras, and a friend whom he esteemed, honored and loved deeply, Father de Chandenier. We are well aware Monsieur Vincent felt these losses keenly, but even so he never lost his tranquility of spirit or allowed any change to appear on his countenance.

He was able to bear with composure the loss of material things, and of persons most helpful for his Congregation, and even his own honor, his health, and his very life.

He was so self-possessed that when sharp words, injuries or calumny were used against him, as sometimes happened, he showed no agitation, but replied in his customary way with no trace of bitterness. This reaction on his part was particularly appreciated by some of those present on these occasions, who found themselves angered even though these remarks were not addressed to them.

One day during the second battle for Paris, returning from the city to Saint Lazare, he was arrested by the townspeople at the gate of the city. He had to dismount, then was insulted, and even threatened with death. He answered with his usual courtesy and moderation, unswayed by their threats. He was allowed to pass, and subsequently he solicited a pass from the duke of Orleans, which was readily accorded, allowing him to come and go freely.

He was in serious physical danger several times, particularly during a visit to Brittany. Twice he was in danger of drowning, and once in danger of assassination, but no change was seen in his disposition or even in his features.

No matter what pains he endured in his sicknesses, or how long certain annoyances lasted, or what reverses his projects experienced, he was never seen to appear to be disturbed or worried. He remained in a profound sense of peace and in an undisturbed frame of mind. The mildness of his speech and the serenity of his features testified to this. Some mistakenly believed that he had personally never suffered much, or even that he was insensitive. Yet he had only to be seen shortly before his death, so afflicted with various ills that he was watching himself dying, as he expressed it, but still with no discernible change in his exterior demeanor except for weakness and a gradual wasting away. He remained as always, seated in his chair, fully clothed, tending to the affairs of the community as was his custom. His spirit changed even less than his body, and remained calm and tranquil until the last moment. We can even entertain the doubt whether anyone's composure was ever more entire, more complete, more tested, or more consistent than that of this great servant of God.
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

His Fortitude in Supporting Good and Opposing Evil, and His Patience in Bearing Afflictions and Pain

The great apostle Paul understood well the strength and courage needed to remain constant and faithful in the love of his divine Master. He showed this when he had defied all that was most terrible and fearsome in nature: "Who then will be able to separate us from the love of Jesus Christ? Will tribulation, suffering, hunger, nakedness, dangers, persecutions or the sword?" It is characteristic of this virtue to despise all that men fear the most. As Saint Ambrose says, "Fortitude joins in this irreconcilable war against all the vices. It makes us unbowed in our efforts, without fear in the midst of dangers. It rejects ease and comfort, and makes us unyielding in the face of all the world’s alluresments."

Vincent de Paul always walked in the footsteps of this great apostle, whose name he was proud to bear. He became the perfect imitator of his virtues, particularly of this one, in which he excelled. Those who knew him best were well aware that neither promises, menaces, hopes, threats, nor calumnies could ever influence his firm resolve in the pursuit of good. He highly regarded everyone in authority over him. He paid great respect to their opinions, and he followed their wishes when he could do so with no harm to his conscience. When he saw that the interests of God, his service or his glory, were in question, or if he were being turned away from what God was asking of him, or if he were asked to do something contrary to the will of God, no consideration or persuasion could move him.

A virtuous priest wrote of him: "What constancy and fortitude he showed when it was a question of receiving affronts and injuries rather than agreeing to the least thing opposed to justice or right. While he served on the Council, he firmly opposed the designs of even the most powerful when they sought to obtain the goods of the Church or benefices by improper means, or for persons he deemed unqualified."

A highly placed magistrate of a sovereign court once met him on the street. He attempted to persuade him to do something in his personal interest which Monsieur Vincent did not believe to be right in the sight of God. He therefore excused himself as politely as he could, and could not be swayed, no matter how much he was urged. The judge became angry and spoke most

1. Rom 8:35.
2. PL 16:74-75.
unbecomingly to him, but Monsieur Vincent remained serene. He showed no emotion except to say, "Monsieur, I am convinced you try to do your duty as worthily as you possibly can. I must try to do the same in my position."

A highly placed lady once asked him to expedite the awarding of a benefice she had asked of the king for one of her sons. Feeling he could not in justice do this, Monsieur Vincent begged to be excused. This woman fell into a fit of anger. She told him that she knew how to get what she wanted in another way, and that she had been mistaken in giving him the honor of even asking him to help, and besides, he had no idea of the proper way to deal with ladies of quality. Monsieur Vincent had no other reply but to remain silent, suffering these abusive remarks rather than do anything he felt to be against his better judgment.

He acted the same way toward another lady who wished to involve him in a matter that he felt was unjust. He said in his usual modest way: "Madame, our rules and my conscience do not allow me to obey you in this. I therefore beseech you most humbly to excuse me." This lady, too, would not accept his refusal, and angrily heaped insults upon him, which he suffered with his usual patience and serenity.

He showed this same strength and fortitude in not allowing lay women to visit convents of religious of which he was the superior, when no legitimate reason existed for giving this permission. He even refused some princesses who strongly pressed their requests. When they saw they were making no impression upon him, they were upset. They called him rude and uncivil, and made their feelings known publicly. Several retained their resentment against him up to the time of his death, but still he was not to be shaken, nor was he willing to do anything he thought of as unjust.

In these encounters and others, he was victorious over all considerations of human respect, which sometimes demanded the greatest courage of him. The following episode was one in which he surpassed himself. As was said in a previous chapter, he was always most grateful for everything done for him, and in appreciation he was disposed to do almost anything he could to express his grateful sentiments toward his benefactors. Among these, Monsieur Le Bon, prior of the priory of Saint Lazare, was in the first rank, and Monsieur Vincent always recognized his special obligation of gratitude to him. He had the kindest and most deferential attitude toward the prior, but a situation arose in which he was obliged to refuse something that the prior earnestly requested.

An abbess from a noble family had been imprisoned for some scandalous behavior by order of the queen regent, following the advice of Monsieur Vincent. The prior of Saint Lazare, who owed the abbess some favors, was

3. Ch. 17.
commissioned by her to secure her release. He set about doing this with all his power. This was ample since he held such influence over the mind of Monsieur Vincent in everything not contrary to the service of God. He asked and urged insistently that the abbess be released, pointing out that it could easily be done. Monsieur Vincent told him frankly that he could do this only by betraying his conscience, and therefore, begged most humbly to be excused.

The refusal greatly angered the prior, and he said, "Is this how you treat me, after I gave you this entire house? Is this how you thank me for all the good I have done for you, to help you and your Company?" Monsieur Vincent replied, "You have truly honored us and helped us greatly, and we certainly owe you the same duty as children do their father. Monsieur, please take all this back, since by your judgment we are so unworthy of your favors." At these words the prior fell silent and withdrew, greatly displeased. Nevertheless, several days later, he had become better informed than before about the scandalous conduct of this lady. He recognized the justice of the decision of Monsieur Vincent, and went to him. The prior fell to his knees before him, and Monsieur Vincent also knelt. The prior begged pardon for what he had said and asked him not to alter the penance prescribed for the abbess, seeing it was designed for her amendment, and said that he had been wrong in seeking to have her set at liberty. This is how the firmness of Monsieur Vincent was rewarded, and how God showed his approval of his stand.

We shall not repeat here what was said elsewhere about his fortitude and constancy in supporting the various works he began, notwithstanding the almost insurmountable obstacles standing in their way. These would have discouraged others whose zeal had urged them to begin these enterprises. We saw how he supported the project of the foundlings when the Ladies of Charity of Paris were on the verge of giving up on it because the expenses seemed beyond their means. Happily he succeeded in speaking in their assembly so effectively and so filled with the spirit of God that he rekindled their fervor. He made them hope against hope itself. They decided to continue this good work at whatever cost, and continue to support it up to now.

If this faithful servant of God showed such fortitude and constancy in supporting good and opposing evil, he also showed his patience when it pleased God to send him afflictions and crosses as assurances of his love. In the midst of the most violent tempests and severe storms of his times, this virtue of patience enabled him to preserve in his heart a calm and tranquility untroubled by any accident, however sad and discouraging. This same virtue

5. Book Two, ch. 10.
by which he possessed his soul also made him master his feelings in the face of the pains, contradictions, and the crudest persecutions imaginable. It let him say not a word nor show the least trace of impatience or sign of a troubled spirit.

Once when he was on a trip in Brittany, he stopped in a small village at a poor little inn. He had no sooner closed his eyes in sleep after a hard day’s travel than a group of peasants came to the inn to pass the night in revelry, in a place near his room. Several even came into his room, but he did not complain. On the contrary, the next day he expressed his satisfaction, thanking the innkeeper despite the noise of the previous evening, as if he had received the best treatment in the world. Besides, he distributed several beautiful Agnus Dei which he had been given a long time before. The missionaries who accompanied him on this occasion, and who had looked after these objects, were surprised at this. He had never given any of them away in other places where he had been courteously received, where the children were well behaved, the servants efficient, and where he had taught catechism, but he did so to these poor people on this occasion. This led to the thought that Monsieur Vincent had done so because these people were truly poor, and had given him an opportunity to practice his patience.

On another occasion, he was cited to appear before a councillor of the Grand’Chambre of the Parlement of Paris since the community of Saint Lazare was being sued because of the complaints of a certain person. This man had a violent temper, and acted on this occasion with no respect for the magistrate, nor did he respect the place where he was. He spoke insults and atrocious calumnies against the honor and reputation of Monsieur Vincent. For his part Monsieur Vincent showed no emotion except pity for the man for behaving this way in the presence of the judge. The attorney of the community was present for this hearing. He wanted to speak in defense of Monsieur Vincent, but he restrained the attorney and excused the actions of the man as best he could. This same lawyer, a good man, spoke admiringly of these events and of such patience, which to him seemed extraordinary, for he had seldom witnessed anything like it. Those who knew Monsieur Vincent better realized this was his usual way of acting. They had often seen him endure affronts, insults, and calumnies with much peace and humility.

Monsieur Vincent showed his great patience not only on these great occasions when the spirit is usually most in command of itself, but also in those more frequent encounters of everyday life, in the eager requests, the indiscreet demands, the impertinent replies, and the other failings against

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6. A devotional image of the Lamb of God, blessed by the pope, to which indulgences were attached.
him personally, either by inferiors or by others. In these situations he was never seen to give the least sign of impatience, nor even to raise his voice. In fact, on these occasions he acted and spoke with even more gentleness and serenity than usual.

When losses which were sometimes great occurred to the temporal goods of the Congregation, he accepted them not only patiently but even joyfully. It was once said to him that what was most serious about a large loss suffered by the community of Saint Lazare was the loss of reputation of the Company, and the opportunity it provided for some to speak ill of him. Monsieur Vincent replied that, on the contrary, this would be a good thing, for it would give him an opportunity to practice patience.

We should not be astonished if he was not filled with sadness at these unhappy events, for he spoke of being somewhat worried that God did not try the Company enough by afflictions. Once he spoke of this to the community:

Recently I have often paused to think that the Company is not suffering. Its works are succeeding, and we are enjoying a certain prosperity. Let us say it better, God is blessing it in every way, and it feels neither reverses nor disappointments. I began to wonder at all this, knowing well that God tries those who serve him and chastises those whom he loves: Quem enim diligit Dominus, casti­gat. 7 I remember it is reported that while Saint Ambrose was on a trip he went into a certain house where the owner told him he did not even know the meaning of the word affliction. At once this holy prelate, enlightened by heaven, understood that this house, untried by any adversity, was destined for ruin. “Let us leave,” he said, “for the anger of God will fall upon this house.” And so it happened. No sooner were they outside than a clap of thunder flattened it, and killed all who lived there.

On the other hand I see several congregations, particularly one of the greatest and holiest in the Church, being disturbed by trials. It is now very disturbed, and even at this moment is suffering a horrible persecution. I say to myself that this is how God deals with the saints, and how he would treat us if we ourselves were strong in virtue. Knowing our weaknesses, he supports us and feeds us on milk like little children. He makes everything we do succeed even if we have little to do with it. These considerations made me fear that we are not wholly agreeable to God nor worthy to suffer something for his love. He turns away any affliction from us which would test us as his true servants. Although we have had some

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shipwrecks when our missionaries set out for Madagascar, yet even
then God looked after us. During the war in 1649 the soldiers caused
us losses amounting to forty thousand livres, but this loss was not
particular to us, for everyone felt the troubles of the times. Difficult­
ties were everywhere, and we were treated just like everyone else.

Blessed be God, my brothers, for it has now pleased the adorable
Providence of God to take away some of our property.8 This is a
major loss for the Company, very great indeed. We must adopt the
sentiments of Job when he said: “God has given, and God has taken
away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”9 Do not look upon this as
caused by human intervention. Rather, God has judged us, hum­
bling us under the hand that strikes us, as David said, Obmutui, et
non aperui os meum, quoniam tu fecisti. “I shall keep silence, Lord,
for it is you who have done this.”10 Let us adore his justice, and
realize that he has done this in his mercy. He has done so for our
good: Bene omnia fecit, as Saint Mark says, “He has done all things
well.”11

In these perfect and elevated sentiments Monsieur Vincent endured not
only the loss of his temporal possessions, but also the death of persons dear
to him. He must have felt their loss keenly. In his soul, he persisted in this
attitude even when he lost one of the older priests of the Congregation. He
had had a special confidence in him, and considered him a pillar of the
Company. At the same time he was also in danger of losing another who
was ill. He wrote to one of his friends: “By the grace of God, my heart is at
peace in the thought that what happens is according to God’s good pleasure.
Sometimes I fear that my sins may have caused these losses, but even then
I recognize God’s holy will, which I accept with all my heart.”

One of the priests complained once of the difficulties he had in directing
a house of the Company. Monsieur Vincent said:

Alas, Monsieur, would you prefer to have nothing to suffer?
Would it not be better to be possessed by the devil than to have no
cross to bear? Yes, for then the devil could cause no harm to happen
to the soul. If you had nothing to suffer, neither your soul or body
would be conformed to Jesus Christ in his suffering. But this
conformity is a sign of our predestination. Do not be surprised at
your troubles, since the Son of God has chosen them for your
salvation.12

8. The farm at Orsigny.
12. CED V:196.
He said to another person suffering in the cause of justice: “Is not your heart consoled to see that you have been found worthy before God to suffer in his service? Certainly you owe him special thanks, and you must ask him for the grace to make good use of these trials.”

He once learned that an abbess was encountering many difficulties and opposition in her efforts to establish some sort of order in her abbey. He advised a priest to do what he could to encourage her in her efforts, and to tell her that the sufferings endured in creating any good work attract the graces needed to succeed in it.

Once, the devil raised up a storm against the missionaries to frustrate the success of a mission they were conducting. Monsieur Vincent wrote the superior:

Blessed be God for the troubles he has been pleased to send you. On this occasion we must honor those same experiences of the Son of God while he was on earth. Oh, Monsieur, how great these must have been! Hatred for him and his teachings was so great that he was forbidden to go to certain places, and finally was put to death. He warned his disciples of this when he said that they would be mocked, scorned, and maltreated, and that parents would be set against their children, and children would persecute their parents. We must profit from these situations and sufferings, Monsieur, as did the holy apostles, and from the opposition that we encounter in the service of God. Instead, we must rejoice when these things happen, and make the same good use of them as the apostles did of their sufferings, following the example of their leader, our Lord. If you do so, be assured that the very means which the devil uses to defeat you will turn to his destruction. You will cause heaven to rejoice, and all the good folk on earth who will see or hear of your way of acting. Even those who now oppose you will finally come to bless you, recognizing you as an assistant in their salvation.

How so? Hoc genus daemoniorum non eijcitur nisi in oratione et patientia ['This kind of demon you can drive out only by prayer and patience']. Holy modesty and interior recollection as practiced in the Company may also be of help. It would be good to find out if you can what causes this aversion the people have for the missionaries, so we may avoid it in the future. We will do the very opposite, should it be appropriate. When you find out something, please let me know.

He wrote to someone who complained about someone else:

I can well believe that the person you mentioned has given you trouble, and I am sorry he has acted the way he has. You must not take what he does as coming from him, but rather as a trial sent by God to try your patience. This virtue will grow in you in the measure that you are naturally sensitive, and you have given far less offense than you have received. Show yourself a true child of Jesus Christ, who did not meditate in vain on his sufferings. Show that you have learned to conquer yourself in putting up with those things that provoke you the most.

He wrote to another:

In short, Monsieur, we must go to God per infamiam et bonam famam ["spoken of well or ill"].16 His divine bounty is merciful to us when he allows us to be blamed and to suffer public disgrace. I do not doubt that you have patiently accepted what has happened. If the glory of the world is nothing but smoke, the opposite is also true when it is accepted. I hope you will draw much good from this humiliation. May God give us the grace to do so, and send us many others, for by these trials we merit to be most pleasing to him.17

What confirmed Monsieur Vincent so strongly in this virtue of patience was his firm faith in two truths. First, even the worst ills which can happen to us come from God, for the prophet says: Non est malum in civitate, quod non fecerit Dominus ["If evil befalls a city, has not the Lord caused it?"]18 And second, God will never permit us to afflicted or tried beyond our strength. He will help us by his grace to use our trials for our profit and advantage, as the apostle tells us: Fidelis Deus est, qui non patietur nos tentari supra id quod potestis, sed faciet etiam cum tentatione proventum, ut possitis sustinere ["Besides, God keeps his promise. He will not let you be tested beyond your strength. Along with the test he will give you a way out of it."]19 Convinced of these truths, he said:

The state of affliction and pain is not an evil state, but one in which God enables us to practice the virtue of patience and to learn compassion for others. Our Lord experienced these sufferings. He is a high priest who has compassion on our infirmities, and he wished to encourage us by his example to practice this virtue of patience. [He added that] one of the surest signs that God has great plans for a person is when he sends desolation upon desolation, pain upon pain. The best time for a soul to progress spiritually is the time

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15. CED IV:239-40.
16. 2 Cor 6:8.
17. CED V:229-30.
19. 1 Cor 10:13.
of temptation and tribulation, for the way in which he receives these trials shows clearly what he will become. A single day of temptation enables us to acquire more merit than years of tranquility.

He said that “stagnant water, which has become putrid and infected with disease, is the image of a soul ever at peace. Souls tried by temptation are like rushing streams flowing over boulders and rocks. Their water is pure and refreshing.”

The extent of his virtue of patience gave him a special gift of communicating it to others, and to have them make good use of their sufferings. He wrote to a friend to console and strengthen her in her afflictions:

I sympathize with you in your pains, which have lasted for such a long time. This is a cross which extends to your spirit and your body, but it raises you above the earth, which I rejoice in. You should be consoled to see yourself treated as our Lord was treated, and honored with the same marks by which he showed us his love. His sufferings were both interior and exterior, and beyond all comparison with those of others. But why do you think he tests you as he does? For the same reason that he himself willed to suffer, to cleanse you of your sins, and to communicate his virtue to you, so that the name of his Father should be sanctified in you.

Remain in peace, then, and have confidence in his goodness. Never think in any other way. Be wary of your own feelings, and believe in what I say and in my knowledge of you, rather than in what you may think and feel. You have reason to rejoice in God, and to hope for everything from him because of our Lord who dwells in you. After his leading you to renounce yourself, I see nothing which should disturb you, not even sin. This is the only evil we should fear, for in the religious state you have embraced you do penance for the past, and for the future you have a great horror of everything which might displease God."

20. Abelly added to the preceding paragraph this fragment borrowed from a repetition of prayer of 1645 on temptations; *CED XI*:150.

21. *CED* VIII:313-14. The original text reads: "... you do penance for the past, and you hate it too much for the future..." His correspondent was a Visitation nun.
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

His Patience in Sickness

THE EVIL spirit knows well how weak our flesh is, and how sensitive we are to what affects our bodies whether in sorrows or sicknesses. The demon rightly said that we would willingly endure anything to escape the pains and illnesses which are the forerunners of death itself. After he had unsuccessfully attacked the patience of the patriarch Job by the loss of his possessions and his children, he promised himself victory if only God would allow him to attack him bodily by sickness and suffering. In this last and furious test, this holy man displayed his virtue to the fullest. He mastered this severe test, not only with patience, but with a perfect submission to the good pleasure of God. He blessed and praised God with an affection as great as his sorrows had been grievous and his pains severe.

We could truly say that this same test of sorrow and sickness gave the final touch to the patience of Monsieur Vincent, and crowned all his other virtues. He was robust in body and of a sound temperament, and his manner of life was so well ordered we might have expected that he would have a long life of perfect health. Nevertheless, God willed that he be tried by various frequent illnesses. Perhaps this came from what he suffered during his captivity among the Moslems, or from the violence he did to himself. Perhaps it came from the work and fatigues of the missions which he endured for many years, or lastly, from his constant worry about the great enterprises of charity and piety which were so often trying and difficult. From whatever cause, it is certain that this holy man, by a singular disposition of divine Providence, was nearly always in poor health, either with running sores on various parts of his body, or by the fevers he often experienced, or by falls or painful accidents which he suffered. The swelling and inflammation of his legs troubled him almost continually. Despite these painful ailments, he preserved a peace and serenity of spirit so great that he would have been thought to be healthy, if the evidence of his body were not so clear.

Writing once to a friend about his sufferings, he expressed his thoughts in this way:

I hid my condition from you as best I could, and did not want you to know of my indisposition, for fear of saddening you. But, O Lord, how could we be more affectionate toward you than to share
with you the happiness of being visited in this way by God? May our Lord strengthen us to find our happiness in his good pleasure.\footnote{CED VIII:427.}

Various members of his household, and some from elsewhere, saw him in some of his sicknesses. They were astonished at his patience and tranquility, especially in the face of the violent pains he suffered in his legs. His discharges which were so abundant that, despite his legs being bandaged, the floor was moistened by them. In this condition he could no longer rise from his chair or scarcely move. Though he was in constant pain and could not sleep day or night, not a single word of complaint passed his lips. His features retained the same gentleness and affability as he always showed in health, and he continually practiced a near heroic patience.

A virtuous priest who knew him well testified:

The more he advanced in age, the more his body weakened. His afflictions increased so that he was no longer able to celebrate mass. Before this, it had been his joy and consolation. Because of his feebleness and sufferings, he had to remain in his chair, and even then he continued to receive a stream of visitors, both from within and from outside the house. He continued to direct the affairs of Saint Lazare and his entire Congregation. He responded to all his visitors with grace and a serenity of speech as if he were in good health and felt no pain. This affability and gentleness remained reflected in his features up to the time of his death.

One day one of his priests met him in his room when his inflamed and ulcerated legs were being treated. Seeing how painful they were, and moved with compassion, he said, “Oh, Monsieur, how terrible your sufferings are!” To this Monsieur Vincent replied, “What? You call terrible what comes from God, and what he sends to make a miserable sinner, such as I am, suffer? May God pardon you, Monsieur, for what you have just said, for this is not the language of Jesus Christ. Is it not just that the guilty should suffer, and are we not more guilty in the sight of God than we think?”

Another time this same priest remarked that it seemed that these painful conditions worsened each day. Monsieur Vincent replied: “It is true, from the soles of my feet to the top of my head I feel them getting worse. But alas, what account would I have to render before the tribunal of God I am soon to appear before, if I did not make good use of them?”

We must not be surprised if this great servant of God had such sentiments and spoke as he did of his grievous sufferings. He had long worked at acquiring the virtue of patience, and had filled his heart and mind with the perfect maxims of this virtue. He was disposed to practice it on all occasions,
but especially in his illnesses. In this connection, he wrote the following to one of his confreres who was ill:

Sickness truly reveals who we are much better than health does. In the midst of sufferings, impatience and melancholy tempt even the most resolute. But since only the weak fail, you need have no fear, for you have profited by these attacks. Our Lord has strengthened you in the practice of accepting his good pleasure, and this appears in your resolution so courageously to resist impatience and discouragement. I hope it will be seen even more clearly in your accepting your sufferings for the love of God, not simply with patience, but with joy and gaiety.²

He spoke once to the community on this same subject:

It must be said that sickness is a grievous trial, almost insupportable to human nature. It is, however, one of the most powerful means God uses to recall us to our duty. It detaches us from our affection for sin, and fills us with his gifts and graces. O Savior, you suffered so much and died to redeem us. You showed us in this that sufferings can be used to glorify God and to sanctify us. Please grant us a knowledge of the great good and treasure hidden in sickness. It is in this, gentlemen, that souls are purified, and those who are weak in virtue have an opportunity to acquire it. It is not possible to find any situation so suited for practicing virtue. In sickness, faith is marvelously exercised, hope is enkindled, resignation, love of God, and all the virtues are encouraged. In sickness we discover who and what we are. Sickness is the measuring rod to tell each of us most assuredly what our virtues are, whether we have many, few, or none at all. We can never come to know just what is in a man any better than by sickness. This is the test to find out who is the most virtuous, and those who are not.

All this shows us how important it is to understand fully how we must act in sickness. If we accept it as a true servant of God, our sickbed becomes a throne of mercy and of glory. A true Christian surrounds himself with the mysteries of our holy religion. Above the bed is the symbol of the most blessed Trinity; at the head, the incarnation; on one side the circumcision of our Lord; on the other, the blessed sacrament; at the foot, the crucifixion. No matter which way he turns, to the right or to the left, or raises his eyes or lowers them, he sees himself surrounded by these divine mysteries, and finds God everywhere he turns. What a beautiful picture, gentle-

² CED II:571.
men, what a beautiful picture! If God gives us the grace to act so, how happy we will be!

We have reason to praise God for his goodness and mercy if we have infirm and sick members in the Company. In their weakness and sufferings they have the opportunity to exercise patience and all the virtues. I have said it many times before, and will say it again: we should regard those in the Company who are sick as those who bring down the blessings of God upon it.

We must think of our illnesses and afflictions as coming from God. Death, life, health, all these come by order of his Providence. Whatever they may seem to be, they are always for the good and for the salvation of a person. However, some bear their sufferings with much impatience, and this is a great fault. Others want to move about, to go here or there, to this house or to that province, back to their native place, all under the pretext that there the air would suit them better. What do you think of that? These are people attached to themselves, effeminate souls, persons who want to suffer nothing as though bodily ills were evils they must flee at all costs. Yet to run from the state God wills for us to is to run from one’s happiness. Yes, suffering is a state of happiness and of the sanctification of souls.

I know a man named Brother Antoine. His portrait hangs in our hall. He could neither read nor write, yet he had the spirit of God in its fullness. He called everyone his brother, or a woman, his sister. Even when he spoke to the queen, he spoke to her as to his sister. Everyone wanted to see him. Once he was asked, “My brother, how do you accept the illnesses that happen? How do you manage? How do you make good use of them?” He replied that he received them as sent by God to test him: “For example, if a fever occurs, I say, My sister the fever, or my sister the sickness, you come from the hands of God. Welcome! And then I strive to fulfill God’s will in myself.”

There, gentlemen and my brothers, is how he used them. This is the way the servants of Jesus Christ use these things, those who are true lovers of his cross. This does not prevent them from using the medicines we have to cure each sickness, for this, too, honors God. He has, after all, given each plant its properties to bring about healing. All the same, to be too solicitous for oneself, to be too sensitive to the least suffering that comes our way, this we must avoid. Yes, we must avoid this delicate care of ourselves.

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4. Antoine Flandin Maillet, 1590-1629, was widely known for his sanctity.
5. CED XII:32-33.
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The Leadership Style of Monsieur Vincent

The leadership style of Monsieur Vincent has become evident in this book on his life and virtues, and his words and writings show with what rectitude and sanctity he directed all his steps. Nevertheless these items have been spread throughout this work. We have thought it best, for the edification and satisfaction of the Christian reader, to gather together what would be most appropriate in a single chapter.

In the first place, if we consider the end he proposed either for himself or others, it was always to act for the greater glory of God, and to accomplish his most holy will. This was the sole end this good servant of God proposed to himself in all his plans and enterprises. This goal dominated his thoughts, his desires, and his intentions. He strove to bring others to this same view, by his advice, counsel, exhortations, and by every spiritual and temporal help he could manage. He strove for nothing but that God's name be blessed, his kingdom advanced, and his will accomplished on earth as it is in heaven. This is the way he looked at things, and the way he strove to act throughout his life.

To achieve this, his main and nearly universal method was to conform himself entirely to the example of Jesus Christ. He knew very well that he could not walk nor lead others on a surer path than that traveled by the Word and Wisdom of God. He had engraved his words and actions upon his own mind, modeling himself in all he did and said upon the prototype of all virtue and sanctity. His holy Gospel was etched in his heart. He carried it in his hand like a great light, so he could say with the prophet: "Your word, O Lord, is like a lamp unto my feet, to enlighten my path which leads to you."1

Walking then in this clear divine light, he strove with the help of grace primarily for his own salvation and perfection, in imitating the virtues of his divine Master. He had learned from the Gospel that it profits us nothing if we gain the whole world but lose our own soul. He knew the truth that the proper measure for the love we must have for our neighbor is the love we have for ourselves.

After this fundamental concern for his own salvation and perfection, he next thought that he could best conform himself to his divine Savior by devoting himself entirely to the service of others. He wished to help them

1. Ps 119:105.
attain salvation and the sanctification of their souls, redeemed by the Savior's blood and death. He spared neither time nor effort, nor his very life, in the various works of charity of which we have spoken at length in the three parts of this work. He gave himself in such a holy and perfect manner that it was evident that this came from God, with the Holy Spirit as the true source and director of his soul. This will appear more clearly when we examine the excellent qualities and properties of his leadership.

In the first place, his leadership was always marked by a great humility, Monsieur Vincent's first and most faithful adviser. Although he had a clear and capable mind, he always mistrusted his own thoughts. He turned to God in every situation to ask for his light and help. Then he would seek the advice of others, even of his inferiors, and he advised his confreres to act in the same way.

One day he wrote to the superior of one of the houses of the Congregation on this topic:

It is not a fault to seek the advice of others. On the contrary, it is helpful, and sometimes even necessary to do so when the matter is important, or when we are not well informed about it. In temporal affairs, we take the advice of lawyers or other knowledgeable persons. In matters concerning the house, the appointed officers are consulted, or even other members of the community, when this is judged useful. As for myself, I often ask the brothers, and take their advice in matters pertaining to their work. When this is done with the necessary precautions, the authority of God which resides in the superior is not compromised. Because of the good order that results, his authority is even more respected and loved. Please act accordingly, but remember that when it is a question of changes of personnel or of other major matters, the superior general should be consulted.²

He wrote in another letter to urge a superior to act similarly:

Live together cordially and simply, in such a way that in seeing you together, it could not be guessed who the superior was. Do not take any action, in anything important, without taking their advice, especially that of your assistant. As for myself, when I have to make some difficult decision affecting spiritual things or on matters having to do with priests, I gather the community to ask their advice. If it is a case of temporal affairs, I consult with those in charge of the department concerned. I ask the advice of the brothers in charge of various parts of the house because they know their business. This helps the superior decide, and God will bless the steps he takes after

². CED IV:35-36.
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

this consultation. This is why I beg of you to act this way yourself, to be more successful in your office.3

After consulting and carefully weighing what had been said, he was firm and consistent in carrying out the decisions which had been reached. He would not listen to any contrary thoughts which might come to his mind. He wrote to one of the superiors, in a letter on this topic:

Once we have commended something to God, and taken counsel, we should remain firm in what we have decided, rejecting as a temptation all thought to the contrary. We must have confidence that God will not blame us, for we have a ready-made excuse: “Lord, I have referred the matter to you, and have taken counsel. This is all I could possibly do to determine your will.”

The example of Pope Clement VIII illustrates this point. A matter of great importance had been brought to him, dealing with an entire kingdom.4 An entire year passed before he was ready to give an answer to the delegates sent to him. He prayed to God about the matter, and consulted with learned men in whom he had much confidence. At length, he decided in favor of the Church. However, he later had a dream in which our Lord appeared with a severe countenance, reproaching him for what he had done, and threatening to punish him. When he awoke, shaken by this sight, he mentioned the dream to Cardinal de Toledo.5 He prayerfully considered it, and finally told the pope that he felt he should not pay any attention to it, for it was an illusion of the devil. He had no reason to fear, for he had prayed and taken counsel. That is all anyone could do. This good pope accepted this advice, and no longer worried about it.6

Although Monsieur Vincent sought insight and advice from others, he did not then consider himself dispensed from using all possible attention and vigilance to work against the evil and obtain the good of those under his direction. He was ever alert to what was going on among his confreres, to be aware of what was likely to be asked of them. He acted with much prudence and circumspection, a characteristic of leadership in which he excelled. All who knew him realized how careful and considerate he was in what he said and did, especially when it had to do with directing others, or when it was a question of being obliged to give his advice on some matter. He was so reserved and circumspect in his words that he almost never gave an absolute opinion. He would state his thoughts simply, as though in some

3. CED VI:66.
4. The issue was the abjuration of Henry IV and his accession to the French throne.
5. Francisco de Toledo, created cardinal by Clement VIII in 1593; he died in 1596.
6. CED V:318.
way accepting the judgment of those who sought his advice. He would say, “It seems to me that this might be looked at in this way,” or, “Perhaps it would be well to do this or that,” or, “If you decide to do so, perhaps God will bless it,” or other similar ways of speaking. He used these expressions, avoiding more forceful or categorical ways of speaking, and a manner of expressing himself that would convey his wisdom or the prudence of having sought his advice. He said nothing absolutely, “I advise you to do so and so,” or rarely, “It is my advice that . . .”; he would prefer to say, simply, “There is my thought,” or, “That’s the way it seems to me.” However, when it was a matter clearly contained in the Gospels, he did not hesitate. He took his stand absolutely with this oracle of truth.

He held it as a principle that any advice given too quickly was an expression of one’s own personal judgment rather than the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, whom he preferred to consult before responding. Occasionally he was pressed to give his opinion in certain important matters which did not allow any delay. Rarely would he do so in some important cases, but even then he would not answer until he had raised his mind to God and asked his light and help. Otherwise, he would base his answer on some passage of holy Scripture, or on some action of the Son of God that had a bearing on the matter under discussion.

Once, needing to make a recommendation on a capable candidate to become consul in Tunis in Barbary, he thought of Monsieur Husson, a lawyer of the Parlement of Paris, who then lived in Montmirail, a town in Brie. He had all the qualities necessary for the post. He wrote to the lawyer, expressing his thoughts for and against the appointment, but left him at liberty to accept the appointment or not.

The lawyer wrote a letter which spoke of his uncertainty.

To come to know what God wished of me, I went to see Monsieur Vincent. My concern was that I might be leaving Montmirail too readily, or perhaps staying out of stubbornness. To avoid either of these pitfalls, I felt I must ascertain just what God wanted of me. I saw Monsieur Vincent to clear up the uncertainty, but he at first strongly urged me to seek advice elsewhere. I insisted that I would speak only with him. Finally, on Easter Sunday, 1653, he said, “In the mass I have just said, I have offered to the Lord your doubts, pains, and tears. Immediately after the consecration I threw myself at his feet, asking him to inspire me. Then I thought about what at the hour of my death would I have wished I had done. It seemed to me that if I were to have died at that very moment I would have been happy to see you go to Tunis, because of all the good you can do there. On the other hand, I felt that I would have been very sorry
if I had dissuaded you from going. That's what I think. You can go or not go, just as you think best.”

I must say this advice showed me things as clearly as if God spoke to me as I believe he did through Monsieur Vincent. He showed himself to be little attached to his own opinion and to the advice he had given, and gave it only at my strong insistence.

He did not want to choose the missionaries to work in foreign lands by himself. He considered only those who had some time before, by an interior disposition and movement from God, told him of their desire to serve on foreign shores, and who had even asked him more than once for this assignment. He felt that a man called by God was likely to be more successful than many others who did not have a true calling to this work.

To the prudence and circumspection he exercised in his leadership, he joined strength and firmness to maintain regularity and punctuality. He used to say that those in charge of others ought to be firm in maintaining the observances, and be on their guard lest they be the cause of the laxity of the community by their own lack of firmness or exactitude. Among all the things that might hurt a community, nothing is more dangerous than that a community be governed by a superior who is too soft, who wants to please others, and who seeks to be loved. He added the thought that just as a poor showing in a war is ordinarily laid at the feet of the general of the army, so the failings of a religious community can usually be attributed to the superior. By contrast, a happy community is largely the result of a good leader. He referred to the example of a very regular community which, in the space of four years, fell into disarray because of the lack of concern and laziness of the superior. He ended by these words: “Since so much depends on them, we certainly should pray for them often. They are charged with and responsible for all those under their care.”

On one occasion there was a community house composed of people of different dispositions. One group was composed of those less observant of the regulations, and the other was more exact and virtuous. Monsieur Vincent wrote to the superior, who had complained of the matter:

I am upset, and with good reason, at the conduct of the priest and brother of whom you wrote. May God give them the grace to see the dangerous position they are in by following the impulses of rebellious human nature. This is not at all in accord with the spirit of Jesus Christ. How difficult it is for those who fall, (as Scripture tells us) after they have once been enlightened, to be saved! Certainly they have reason to fear an unhappy end if they leave the path God has traced out for them. How can they hope to succeed in the world if they are not called to live there, if they are not helped by
the grace of God and by all the spiritual and temporal helps they will lack, if they are not in their proper calling? We should never be surprised at seeing people changing and leaving, for it happens even in the holiest of companies. God permits it to show us the misery of the human condition, and to warn even the firmest and most resolute. God tries the good and gives them the opportunity to practice the various virtues.

You spoke to me of the two discontented confreres who are disturbed by the observances of Fathers N. [Toussaint Lebas] and N. [Julien Dolivet], which weigh on the others. I can easily believe it about those who are less regular and less interested in their own personal advancement and in that of the community. Yes, Monsieur, zeal and exactitude are troublesome for those lacking these qualities, for the virtue of the one group condemns the laxity of the other. I admit that virtue has two closely associated vices, defect and excess. Of the two, excess is more praiseworthy than defect and should be the more encouraged. These two good Missionaries practice virtue to a degree the others cannot attain, and so the others imagine it is an excess, but it is not so before God. They blame their way of acting because they lack the courage to imitate them. May God give us the grace to see good, in our Lord, in all that is not really evil.7

Again, he wrote to one of his priests on a mission:

You are in charge of your companions. I pray that our Lord will give you some share of his spirit and his guidance. Undertake this obligation in this spirit. Honor the prudence, the foresight, the meekness, and the exactitude of our Lord. You will be doing much if you succeed in having the regulations well observed, for this will attract the blessings of God upon all the rest. Begin by keeping to the exact times of retiring and rising, to mental prayer, to the divine office, and to the other exercises. Oh, Monsieur, how rich a treasure is this habitual observance, while the opposite causes no end of trouble! Why is it such a hardship to fulfill your duty in this, when we see people of the world generally keeping such a tight schedule? We rarely see the court officials late in rising or failing to show up when expected. Much less the shopkeepers, who are so regular in opening and closing their businesses. It seems that only we clergy, such lovers of our ease, do things guided solely by our personal inclinations.

Monsieur Vincent extended his concern that the rules be observed beyond

7. CED VIII:28-29.
the houses of the Congregation and the missions where they worked. As many of the priests can testify, he wanted them to observe the rule as much as possible even while traveling. We will give here but one example, from a priest who wrote as follows:

After I received an appointment from Monsieur Vincent to go to a remote province in the company of another priest of the Congregation, he received the two of us in his room on the eve of our departure. He told us what he expected of us during our trip, which would take eleven or twelve days. We were to travel with the stage to Toulouse, together with many different kinds of people. Among many other things, he had four main recommendations: (1) never to omit making our mental prayer, even if we had to make it on horseback; (2) to celebrate mass every day, if possible; (3) to mortify our eyes, especially in the towns, and practice sobriety in eating and drinking among lay people; (4) to present catechism lessons to the servants in the inns, and especially to the poor.⁸

Although he was exact even in the smallest details of the rule, and firm in maintaining this among his confreres, this was always accompanied with a mild grace. In this he imitated God himself, for as the wise man of Scripture says, “Indeed she reaches from end to end mightily and governs all things well.”⁹ The superior of one of the houses of the Congregation spoke of this in the following testimonial:

Monsieur Vincent was exact and severe on himself, but was full of meekness and charity toward others. He did everything for them that could be expected. Once he reluctantly refused permission for me to go to the city. Although I sought no reason for this refusal but accepted his decision as my guide, he explained that since several others had already gone, he wanted me to be on hand in the house for whatever might turn up. The next day he called me, thinking that he may have hurt my feelings by his refusal, telling me to go wherever I wished in the city. This was the way he usually acted. He did not give orders to impress you with his position or authority. He would say something like, “Monsieur, or brother, would you please do this or that.”

His custom was to invite to his room on the eve of their departure those setting out for a mission. He would speak to them as a true father, and upon their return he would receive them with open arms and with warm affection. This is what one said, and it surely could be echoed by all the others:

I cannot admire enough the charity and goodness of his great

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⁸. CED XI:95.
⁹. Wis 8:1.
When I was leaving or returning from a trip, the cordial reception he gave me overwhelmed me. His words were so filled with spiritual grace, so gracious and yet so efficacious that they accomplished what he had in mind, with no sense of pressure or constraint.

When he was obliged to refuse something, he preferred that his confreres would surmise as much, without obliging him to refuse outright for fear of giving pain. When someone pressed him to agree to something he did not think proper, he replied, "Would you be good enough to remind me of this some other time?"

Once he wrote to someone who felt the loss of a person working with him: "I have no doubt that the loss of this dear companion and friend is most painful. But remember, Monsieur, that our Lord left his mother. Also, the disciples who had been so united by the gift of the Holy Spirit, separated from one another to serve their divine Master." 10

Another superior complained to him of the vexations he experienced in his position, from people within and outside the community. He wrote to him, as follows:

I sympathize with you in your troubles, but you should not be surprised by them, or much less let them discourage you. We meet troubles everywhere. Two people living together will find enough to bother them. Were you to live alone, you would find difficulties with yourself, enough to try your patience. So it is that our miserable life is filled with crosses. I bless God for the good use you make of yours, as I am sure you do. I have too long recognized the wisdom and meekness of your disposition for me to doubt that you will fail in these unhappy situations. If you cannot please everyone, you should not let that bother you, for even our Lord could not please everybody. How many there were then, and still are today, who have found his words and actions difficult to accept! 11

He was aware of the feelings of those he was assigning to difficult tasks or to foreign places in the service of God. Once he wrote to one of his priests:

I am writing to ask you about your health, and what you think of a proposal I have in mind for you. We have been called to send four or five missionaries to N. We have thought of you to lead this group. I would ask you, Monsieur, to pray to God, to listen to what he has to say to you about this. Please write me soon about your health and your attitude toward accepting this assignment. I beg the Lord to give you the grace to respond always and everywhere to his holy will.

10. CED V:566.
11. CED VIII:100.
He acted in somewhat the same manner toward those at home, but differently according to each one's temperament. Ordinarily, he was lighthearted and cordial, as the following example will illustrate. Once he wanted to send one of his missionaries to Rome. He asked the designated confrere if he was ready to take a pleasant trip in the service of God, without mentioning where. When the priest said that he was ready, Monsieur Vincent said yes, but the trip extends beyond the kingdom. When the priest replied to this that it was all the same to him, Monsieur Vincent then said that it would also involve a sea voyage. The priest replied that to go by land or sea was immaterial to him, for he was ready to go. Monsieur Vincent smilingly said that it was a little matter of twenty-five hundred miles, thus preparing him for the assignment he was to receive. He did the same for others, as the case warranted, to prepare them gently to accept what God asked of them in his service.

SECTION ONE

Continuation of the Same Topic

The leadership of Monsieur Vincent being what it was, as we have seen in this chapter, he followed a definite priority in his concerns. First, he sought to destroy sin and the faults and failings in those under his care. He asked those who wished to be admitted to the Congregation to enter the internal seminary, established as a school of virtue, to root out their vices and evil inclinations by the practice of humility, mortification, obedience, meditation, and the other exercises of the spiritual life. After spending enough time there, if there were some who needed to study theology or philosophy he sent them on for these studies. He feared that these studies would diminish their first fervor, or possibly lead to too great a desire for knowledge, or even to curiosity. Because of this unease, he gave the following advice:

The step from the seminary to studies is dangerous, and has caused the ruin of many persons. If there is any time we must be on our guard about our faith, it is surely when we go on for our studies. Going from one extreme to the other is dangerous. A glass that comes from the furnace into the cold runs the risk of cracking. In the same way it is most important to maintain one's first fervor, to preserve the grace received, and to prevent human nature from surprising us. If each time we enlighten our understanding we strive
to move our will, our studies will serve to bring us closer to God. We can be sure of the maxim that the more we perfect our own interior, the greater will be our capacity for serving our neighbor. This is why, in studying to be better equipped to serve souls we must be careful to nourish our own soul with both piety and knowledge. We must read good books, and avoid those which simply satisfy our curiosity. Curiosity is the pest of the spiritual life. The curse of our first parents brought death, disease, famine, war, and all the other miseries of our world. Therefore we too must be on our guard for curiosity is the root of all sorts of trouble.  

Not only must we banish such curiosity from our Company, but sensuality must go, too. Unhappy is he who seeks his own satisfaction. Unhappy is he who avoids the cross, for he will find it so heavy he will not carry it. Anyone who minimizes the practice of external mortification, saying interior mortification is much more perfect, makes it clear that he is not mortified at all, either outwardly or inwardly. 

On another occasion he said, “I have noticed that most of those who have lost their vocation have failed in two things. The first is the morning rising, which they have not faithfully observed, and the second is the appearance of their hair, which they allowed to grow too long, and which seems to lead to other similar vanities.”

In this connection he wanted all the priests of his Congregation to wear their hair short. When he encountered someone whose hair came down over his collar, he would reach for a strand, and pull it a bit, smiling all the while, but letting it be understood that he preferred it to be cut. Sometimes he would say a word or two publicly, since the failing was public and for all to see.

He was aware that among religious persons, and especially those living in community, some vices were to be feared more than others, particularly rivalry and slander. To counteract any tendency toward these faults among his confreres, he used to say that “the traits of envy and detraction pierce first the heart of Jesus Christ before reaching those against whom they are aimed.”

He used another device to counteract vice and the failings in the houses under his control. This was fraternal correction. But since this is something not too easy for nature to accept, he used it with such mildness and courtesy that the words of the wise man were verified in him: “The wounds of him who loves me were sweeter than the deceitful kisses of my enemy.”

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Ordinarily he did not use corrections on the spur of the moment, and never in anger. He acted in a spirit of charity, after reflecting before God, and taking into account the dispositions of the one to be corrected and how to make the admonition useful and salutary. Once he had to correct a difficult character, someone not at all disposed to receive such advice. He made his mental prayer for three days on the issue to ask God's light on the best way to handle it.

When he did make some observations to someone, it was always with such grace mixed with firmness that it was like the oil and wine of the Good Samaritan. Usually the results were good.

In the first place, he would show his regard for the person involved, and even praise him for the good qualities he recognized in him. Next he would show him his fault in all its ramifications, as it affected others, and its circumstances of time, place, and other elements. Lastly, he would suggest the proper remedy. To help in having his suggestions better received, he would then include himself into the criticism, according to the nature of the fault being discussed. He would say, for example, Monsieur, or brother, you and I both need to work at acquiring humility, or to acquire patience, to be punctual, or whatever virtue was under consideration.

He tried to make his corrections not only useful, but even agreeable to those he was admonishing. He took care never to hint at who might have complained about the fault. He preferred not to blame the offender if by doing so he would introduce some division into the community as a result. He considered that peace and unity in a community are preferable to all other benefits.

Once he spoke to the community about members not seeking any positions of responsibility:

He who is in charge of others is responsible for their failings if he does not prevent them with humility, with meekness, and with charity. The first time you have to admonish someone you should do so mildly and graciously, and even then, only after waiting a long time. On the second occasion, you should speak a bit more severely and gravely, but still courteously, using prayers and charitable remonstrances. The third time, you must speak firmly and earnestly, telling the offender what he must do to correct himself.¹⁵

One day when he was about to correct one of his confreres, he first asked him if he were willing to hear something that had to be said, to which he answered that he was. This way of acting so impressed him and remained in his memory that he has assured us himself that it had a great effect upon him. He has rarely been tempted to commit this same fault again without recalling the kindness with which this wise superior had dealt with him.

¹⁵. *CED* XI:140.
A certain Missionary was assigned to a position of some danger, and he proved to be difficult with those for whom he worked. Monsieur Vincent prudently gave him a series of directives about what he should and should not do, but on several occasions he went beyond what he had been told. To his chagrin, God permitted him to experience some of the consequences of his fault. Monsieur Vincent sent him a paternal correction, helping him profit from his mistakes by learning from experience the consequences of disobeying the orders of his superiors. He ended his letter to him with these words:

Monsieur, please accept simply what I am saying, and please do not be overly sad. Be like the pilots of ships. When they are caught in a storm, they redouble their courage, and steer their vessels right into the heart of the largest waves, which seem ready to swamp them. ¹⁶

A superior of a house did not carry out an order to send a certain priest to another house. Monsieur Vincent had repeated it several times. He then felt obliged to follow up on this matter and to point out his fault to him. He did so, but in the mildest way imaginable. Instead of pointing out how this superior had failed in the obedience he owed to his superior, Monsieur Vincent simply used these words: “It seems to me, Monsieur, I see in your hesitation a shadow of disobedience.”

If he surprised someone in a failing he corrected him with a mild firmness. If the guilty party was humiliated, he took this humiliation as a good sign. He neither reproached him further nor reminded him of it again, seeing that he had already been embarrassed enough by his failing.

The superior of a house of the Congregation was under the impression that someone had written to Monsieur Vincent complaining of his faults, and asking Monsieur Vincent that the superior’s faults should be pointed out to him. Seeing that the superior of the house had unfounded suspicions, Monsieur Vincent wrote to him most kindly:

You must be persuaded, Monsieur, that if I have any correction to suggest to you, I will do so directly and simply. Thanks be to God, you are doing well, and your conduct seems to me without reproach. In this regard, I do not recall that anyone has complained against you. Should they do so, I know you too well to think I would give it any credence. As much as you can, you should be on your guard about harboring suspicions, but refer everything to God.

A superior complained to him of the conduct of one of his subjects who had spoken to him disrespectfully, and had shocked him by some of his activities. Monsieur Vincent wrote the following letter in his own hand.

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¹⁶. *CED* V:211.
Besides addressing the immediate problem at hand, this letter gives some good advice on the question of leadership.

I share the pain you experienced concerning the matter you wrote to me about. I prefer to believe that he did this without any malice, and when he thinks a little about all the circumstances of this encounter he will see that this must not be repeated. For yourself, Monsieur, you must see this as a small trial which our Lord sends you to help you learn how to lead those confided to your care. It will help you see how great is the goodness of our Lord. He bore with the weaknesses of his apostles and disciples when he was on the earth, and suffered much from both good people and bad. You will see how superiors have their thorns to bear from time to time, and how those superiors who do their duty by word and example have much to put up with from their inferiors, not only from the lax but even from the best of them.

Because of this, Monsieur, give yourself to God to serve him in this way, with no thought of seeking your satisfaction from men. Our Lord will console you if you work at having our rules more perfectly followed, and at acquiring the virtues proper to a true missionary, especially humility and mortification. It seems to me, Monsieur, you would do well to say to this good priest when he comes to see you, or in some other chance meeting with him, that you would be glad if he would tell you of any failings which he sees in you. In your position as superior you undoubtedly have a number, not to mention those you have as a missionary or as a Christian. There is no doubt that a word of impatience escapes you when the first movement of human nature overtakes you, before reason can control your animal appetites. This happened even to the greatest of the saints, but, aided by grace, they gained great benefit when they were told about their failings.

It seems to me, Monsieur, that you would do well to act in the same way. Tell your community from time to time that you would be glad to hear from the confreres in the house named to do this act of charity, but you would truly be disappointed if others did not do so too. They should feel free also to write to the superior general, if they care to do so, as is done in all well-regulated communities. Tell them that you will not read either their letters nor the replies from the superior general. Oh, Monsieur, how great is the misery of human nature, and how necessary it is for superiors to have patience.

I end by recommending myself to your prayers. Please offer them to God, that he would pardon the faults I have committed every
day in the office I now hold. I am the most unworthy of all men,
and worse than Judas in his betrayal of our Lord.\textsuperscript{17}

Another superior was annoyed with some confreres under his care. He
wrote to Monsieur Vincent that he would prefer to take care of a flock of
animals rather than these men. This holy man replied in a letter as judicious
as the superior’s letter was indiscreet:

\begin{quote}
What you told me can be explained. What you say is true for
those who want everyone to bow before them. They want no one to
resist them, and want everyone to act according to their own
viewpoints. They want to be obeyed without hesitation, and in a
certain way, want to be adored by them. This is not so for those who
seek contradictions and contempt. They look upon themselves as
the servants of their brethren. They seek to walk in our Lord’s steps.
He endured from his own followers crudeness, rivalry, lack of faith,
and so on. He even said that he had come to serve and not to be
served. I am aware, Monsieur, that you, with the grace of God and
the help of our Lord, act with humility, modesty, meekness, and
patience. I am sure you used the term you did only to express your
vexation, and to persuade me to replace you. And so, we will try to
send someone to take your place.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

This superior, a good man in his own right, found this reply of Monsieur
Vincent so to the point that he responded as follows: “I admired, and admire
still, your letter to me, which was both beautiful and powerful. I appreciate
it, respect it, and will apply it to myself.”\textsuperscript{19} In sending another priest to replace
him, Monsieur Vincent included these remarks: “We are sending N. to
replace you, as you requested us to do. I trust that all will see in you an
eexample of the submission and confidence each of us owes to his superior.”\textsuperscript{20}

He phrased it this way because he was to remain living in the same house as
before. We should remark that the superior would often remain in the same
house after being replaced by another. This gave him an opportunity to
practice a perfect humility and obedience.

A priest of the Mission, a seminary professor, was most pious and zealous,
but of a naturally sour disposition. This caused him to treat the seminarians
with less than the desirable courtesy. Monsieur Vincent had occasion to write
the following letter to him:

\begin{quote}
I believe what you write even more than what I see. I have too
many proofs of your love for the seminary to have any doubts. For
this reason I reserve judgment on the complaints I have received
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17. CED VII:594-96.}
\textsuperscript{18. CED IV:174-75.}
\textsuperscript{19. CED IV:194.}
\textsuperscript{20. CED IV:204.}
about your black disposition until I have heard from you. All the
same, I would ask you to reflect on your way of acting, and give
yourself to God to correct, with his grace, anything discourteous
that you discover. Besides the offense to his divine Majesty, despite
your own good intentions, several consequences follow from this.
The first is, those who are unhappy and who leave the seminary
may depart from virtue and fall into vice. They may be lost for
having left this holy school too soon, all because they were not
treated with proper courtesy. The second is, they may well speak
against the seminary and dissuade from coming those who might
otherwise have come and received the instruction and graces suited
to their vocation. The third is, the bad reputation of a single house
reflects on the entire Company. If it loses its good reputation, it may
be hindered in its services and may be unable to do all the good it
pleases God to effect through it.

If you say that you have never realized these faults in yourself,
it shows you have little humility. If you had the humility which our
Lord asks of a priest of the Mission, you would consider yourself
to be the most imperfect of all, capable of these failings. You would
attribute to a secret blindness that you do not see what is clear to
others, especially after being warned of it. About the warning, I am
told that you resent being told your failings. If that is so, Monsieur,
you are in a sorry state, far from the way of the saints. They humbled
themselves before everyone, and rejoiced when shown their faults.
To act in this way is to imitate poorly the saint of saints, Jesus Christ.
He allowed himself to be publicly accused although he had done no
wrong, and then said not a word in his own defense.

Learn from him, Monsieur, to be meek and humble of heart. These
are the virtues you and I should unceasingly ask of him. We should
pay special attention to them, and not allow ourselves to be carried
away by the opposite passions. They will destroy the edifice built by
the virtues. May it please this same Lord to enlighten us with his Spirit.
This will enable us to see the darkness in our own soul, to submit to
those he has placed over us, and to animate us with his infinite
graciousness that will flow out in our words and actions. This will
make them acceptable and useful to our neighbor.21

Speaking one day to his community on the same subject, he gave an
important warning in his usual humble way:

I must state that those who see the faults that would lead to the ruin
or weakening of the Company and do nothing about it, are guilty of

what then happens to the Congregation. In this same spirit, I would be most grateful to be warned of any faults I have that I may correct myself. These faults would otherwise bring disorder and destruction to the Congregation. If you see that I teach or support anything contrary to the doctrine of the Church, the assembled Congregation ought to depose me, and put me out of the Company.

Another time, he replied to the superior of one of the houses regarding the admonitions the superior believed he was obliged to give publicly before the entire community:

In only two or three cases should the warning be given to a single person before the whole community. First, do so when the evil is so ingrained in the guilty party that you judge a private admonition would be useless. For this reason, our Lord warned Judas in the presence of the other apostles, in obscure language, when he said he who puts his hand in the dish with me will betray me. Second, do so when it is a question of those weak spirits who cannot bear a correction, no matter how mild, although they are good enough people. This goodness of not publicly naming them enables them to respond to a general recommendation, enough for them to correct themselves. In the third place, do it if there is danger that others will fall into the same defects if something were not said. Outside of these cases, I would think it more appropriate to give such admonitions in private.

Inferiors surely ought to be warned about faults committed against the superior himself, but two or three cautions should first be observed. First, it should never be given on the spur of the moment unless there is some pressing need. Second, it should be done mildly and be to the point. Third, it should be done with some consideration, explaining the bad consequences of the fault, and done in such a way that the superior is evidently not being moved by caprice nor because it affects him personally, but because it is for the good of the individual and for the community.22

Monsieur Vincent did not confine himself to remedying vice and rooting out the faults of the houses and of those under his care. He did what he could to lead them to the perfection of their state and to a most exact regularity. His chief weapon in this was the example he himself gave in imitation of our divine master, who, the Gospel tells us, began to do and to teach. This wise and zealous superior was exact in the exercises of the community, particularly to the practice of mental prayer in the morning. He rose like the others at four o'clock, even if he had slept little because of a fever or some

22. CED IV:50-51.
other reason. What is more, on the days he was bled or forced to take medicine, and on the following days, even in his later years, he did not fail to join the others at their prayer.

It is hard to believe how much the example of fervor and exactitude of this holy priest led his confreres to imitate him. It might be said that his example was one of the chief causes of the good order so much admired in the house of Saint Lazare, where the priests of the Mission had been established, and which gave such edification to those who observed it. He always wished the superiors to be the most exact in their observance of the regulations. He wanted them to be the first at all the exercises of the community, as much as their health and other duties allowed.

He spoke on this topic to the priests of his community:

Those who are not exact in their observance, particularly to rising in the morning and making their mental prayer with the others, no matter how many talents and how bright they may be, are not suitable to be superiors of the houses or directors of the seminaries.

He added that when it was a question of choosing superiors, a consideration of great importance was their example and regularity. Otherwise they would lack one of the main qualities required in those who had charge of others.23

This is what he wrote one day to a superior of a seminary on the way he should act toward the clerics under his care:

I praise God for the number of seminarians N., the bishop of N., has sent to you. You will not lack for applicants as long as you take care to raise them up in the true spirit of their vocation. This consists chiefly in the spiritual life, the practice of mental prayer, and the virtues. It is not enough to teach the chant, the rites and a bit of moral theology. The main thing is to form them in a solid piety and devotion. For this, Monsieur, you ought to be filled with these qualities yourself, for giving instruction without example is useless. We ought to be the cisterns flowing with never-failing water, and we should have the spirit we hope to engender in them. No one can give what he does not have.

Ask this grace of our Lord, and let us give ourselves to him, to conform our thoughts and actions to his. Then your seminary will spread its repute inside and outside the diocese, and your seminarians will be increased in numbers and in blessings. If, on the contrary, we act simply as professors toward those in our care, it would be a great hindrance to the welfare of the seminary. This could happen if we strive to be too polished, too worldly, too well

23. CED XI:83.
treated, too anxious to be honored and well thought of, too dis­
tracted, too sparing of ourselves, and too much taken up with the
outside world. We must be firm, but not crude, in our behavior, and
avoid too soft a manner which serves no good end. We must learn
from our Lord that our lives ought always be lived in humility and
graciousness to attract hearts to him, and to repel no one.24

Writing to another superior, he said:

My great hope is that you would contribute much, by God’s
grace, to the salvation of these people. Your good example will help
your conferees love this work and apply themselves to it in the place,
time, and manner you shall prescribe. You should consult God, like
another Moses, and receive the law from him to be given to those
you direct. Remember, the direction of this holy patriarch was
gentle, patient, supportive, humble, and charitable. In our Lord
these same virtues appeared in their perfections to serve as a model
for us.25

A superior of a house wrote to ask that he be replaced in his position.

Monsieur Vincent wrote to him as follows:

With respect to the change you requested, please do not think
more about it. I hope that under the ashes of humility that led you
to request a replacement is hidden the spirit of our Lord. He himself
will inspire your actions, strengthen your weakness, enlighten your
doubts, and empower you in your needs. On your part, Monsieur,
give yourself to him, so as not to burden anyone. Treat each person
with courtesy and respect, using requests and pleasant words, but
never hard and commanding expressions. Nothing is so likely to
gain hearts as the habit of acting humbly and courteously, and so to
attain the goal you have in mind, that God be served and souls
sanctified.26

Writing to another confere on the same subject, he said:

The reasons you give why you should not be made superior and
that another be appointed in your place, have served rather to
confirm us in our choice. Your awareness of your own failings and
insufficiency should be used to humble yourself, not to discourage
you. Our Lord had enough strength for himself and for us too. Let
him act in you. Have no doubt that if you continue in the humble
sentiments you now have and if you continue in humble confidence
in him, his guidance will sanctify your own service. I trust so much

25. CED V:421.
26. CED VIII:176-77.
in his goodness, and in the good use you will make of his graces, that he will accomplish this in you. In this hope I enclose your appointment as superior of your community. Please have it read, that they may see you in our Lord, and our Lord in you, as I trust they will.27

Before closing this chapter we will insert here a letter of Monsieur Vincent to a Daughter of Charity. In it he gave some advice regarding those either to be received into her Congregation, or to be sent away.

The reply you should give to the good woman before she enters your Congregation is to tell her that she cannot be assured that her place is guaranteed for life. No one receives this, because there is always the possibility that someone will become negligent toward the exercises of community life, becoming a scandal to the community, and so become unworthy of her calling. If such a thing should happen, would it not be reasonable to cut off a gangrenous member so as not to infect the others? You are aware, my sister, that people are only rarely dismissed, and then only for serious faults. They are never dismissed for common or even extraordinary failings if they are not habitual. This remedy is always put off as long as possible, after long enduring such a person, and using without success the remedies appropriate to her state.

This patience and charity is shown to the newcomers of the community, and even more so to the old. If some do leave, it is usually they themselves who decide to go, either through a flightiness of character, or by having become lax in the service of God. God rejects them long before the superiors have thought of dismissing them.

To say that those who are faithful to God and faithful to holy obedience leave the community, is simply not so, thanks be to God, whether for those who are in good health or for those who are sick. Everything possible is done to save everyone, both the well and the sick, up to the time of death. If the good woman wishes to enter your community, and is resolved to die in it, she will be treated just like all the others. But tell her, please, this will be by assuring her vocation by good works, according to the counsel of the apostle Paul. She ought to rely on God alone, and hope in him for her perseverance. If she still seeks this assurance from human sources, it would seem she is seeking something other than God himself. She should then be left in peace where she is now.28

SECTION TWO

How He Handled the Temporal Affairs of the Congregation

We have seen in several of the preceding chapters how great a reliance Monsieur Vincent had on the Providence of God in regard to what was required for the subsistence of the houses of his Congregation. He held it as an axiom that if the members of his Company were faithful to the rules and fulfilled the duties of their calling, this divine Providence would never fail to provide what was required for their life. In this he relied on the promise of the Son of God, "Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides."29

This did not prevent him from being careful to preserve and manage the temporal goods of the Congregation. This he did because of the command that we earn our bread in the sweat of our brows, and the plan of God to use secondary causes in carrying out his designs. Just as the father of the family has the responsibility to feed his children, generals of armies to supply arms and equipment for their troops, and the heads of organizations to influence the spirit and life of their members, Monsieur Vincent saw himself as obliged to look after the needs of his community. He worked at this because God willed it, and required it for the good of souls. He had a double care, first, to make the most of what little he had, and second, to use his resources sparingly.

To make the most of the temporal goods of the community he appointed procurators and other knowledgeable people to handle these affairs, but these remained under his close scrutiny. They did nothing without his advice. He often pointed out what they were to do and say, and afterward he would require a report of what had been done. He would often ask them in the evening what they had done during the day, and then give them the next day’s assignment.

So as not to neglect anything, he would often say that once something had been started it ought to be pursued to its conclusion. No matter how careful or accomplished those were who attended to these matters, he did not want them to do anything in the house or outside of it without informing him, though many things were being done. If these procurators were too inclined to go off on their own, he would replace them with others. He would do this even to superiors of the houses if they undertook some major projects,

such as building or tearing down a structure, without informing him and obtaining his authorization. He used to say that if everyone did whatever came into their heads, the dependence ordained by God would be weakened, and the house would be marked by constant changes and disorder.

He employed the brothers of the Company to work the farms at Saint Lazare, so that it would be said that the Missionaries worked with their hands, as the apostle said, for the sake of the Gospel. 30 He employed laymen to help in the domestic work, the farm, and the animals, to provide food for the house at Saint Lazare. This was demanding work, and called on all his ingenuity to meet these needs. He took an interest in both the least and the most important things, occasionally checking the reports in the farmyard at Saint Lazare. He looked after all, cared for all, and used everything, even the trees and fruits of the garden, so that nothing would be lost or wasted for want of foresight and good management. In a word, he considered nothing beneath his dignity or unworthy of his attention.

The missions were given without charge, and he instructed his confreres to take neither money nor gifts from those they evangelized. Nevertheless, he did allow his Missionaries to receive gifts or alms, provided they were truly given out of charity, and not by way of salary or recompense. In this, they imitated our Lord’s practice of receiving alms. This is what he wrote to one of his priests on this subject: “There is no problem in receiving the gift of Monsieur N. [Father de Gondi] If you have already turned him down, you may make your excuses. We have no right to refuse what is given us for the sake of the love of God.” 31

Second, to save what he could, he wanted the provisions of food and clothing to be appropriate to the times and to the places where the community was situated. He recommended to those in charge to see that nothing be lost, and that frugality be the general rule. He urged everyone to be satisfied with the clothes and food given them, even though these were of poor quality. 32 In bad years, when prices were high, he tried to see if some cutting back of the usual portion of meat or wine served at meals could be made. He sought to share in the common suffering of the people by cutting back on the expenses of the house.

Once when frost had ruined the grain and the vines, he spoke to the community to urge them to have compassion for the suffering people. His talk ended with these words:

We must bear the burden of the poor, and suffer with those who suffer, otherwise we are not disciples of Jesus Christ. But what can

30. 1 Cor 4:12.
31. CED I:137.
we do? Think of the people in a besieged city checking on the food they have left. How many loaves do we have? So many. And how many people are to be fed? So many. And so they decide how much bread each one may have for each day. They figure that at two livres a day they can hold out for such and such a time. If they see the siege is going to last beyond that time, they reduce the ration to one livre of bread, then ten ounces, six, or even four, to prolong the time that they can hold out. This will prevent their being overcome by famine.

And as for the sea, what happens there? Should a ship be driven off course by a storm, the food and water are examined to see if there is enough to last them to the port. The longer they are delayed the smaller the rations become, to stretch them out as long as necessary. The governors of towns and the captains of ships act in this way. Prudence suggests they do so, since otherwise all would be lost. Should we not also do the same? Are you not aware that the tradespeople are cutting back this year? Even the best households, in view of the poor vintage of this season, are cutting back their use of wine, lest they run short next year.

Yesterday, some upper class people who were here told me that some of the houses had completely stopped serving wine to the servants. They were told that there was enough to serve only the master of the house. All this, my brothers, makes us think of what we must do. Yesterday, I brought together the older priests of the community for their advice. It finally was decided to serve only a half-setier of wine at each meal for the rest of the year. This will cause some hardship to those who feel they need a bit more. Yet those used to submitting themselves to Providence and to overcoming their own appetites will make good use of this privation, just as they make good use of other mortifications without complaint.

Perhaps some will complain because they are so tied to their own satisfaction. They are children of the flesh, sensual, pleasure seekers who are never satisfied. They murmur at everything not in keeping with their taste. O Savior, save us from this spirit of sensuality.33

He avoided all superfluous expenses, spending only the least amount possible for necessities. Yet he spared nothing when it came to charity, as we have said before. He gave everything to God and to souls, but to the flesh and sensuality, to pleasure and conveniences, he gave the least he possibly could. He built no building unless it was absolutely necessary. He spent nothing on embellishments, paintings, ornaments, furniture, or niceties.

33. CED XII:286-88.
which were not strictly necessary. When pressed to make so-called improve-
ments, he always resisted these changes. He said that God’s Providence was
obliged to give us what was necessary, but not anything superfluous.

A superior of one of his houses requested permission to build. He even
suggested that Saint Lazare should help pay for it, although it was in no
position to do so. Further, he suggested that much good would fail to be done
unless the building were constructed, since his community found living in
the older building most disagreeable and almost impossible. The request to
Monsieur Vincent brought the following prudent reply:

You speak to me of beginning a new building. O Jesus, Mon-
sieur, you must not even think of it. It is a great mercy of our Lord
to our Company to have given us the building we now have, such
as it is. We must await his divine goodness before we do anything
different. We could not avoid the inconveniences you point out to
me, for they did not come from us. It seems to me your condition
resembles in some way God’s dealings with his people. He permit-
ted them to live in disarray for several centuries, and at the cost of
an infinite number of souls. Their experiences put them in a dispo-
sition to receive the Son of God, and profit by his life, passion and
death, after being prepared by so many warnings, prophecies and
yearnings for his coming. If this view is not correct, I shall gladly
retract it. If you have a better one, please let me know.34

Monsieur Vincent avoided another source of expenses, into which too
obliging superiors often fall. This comes from the natural human desire for
change, a desire for a change of location, for better climate or occupation,
or because of the people who might be there. Some imagine that everything
will be better elsewhere. Sometimes the superior becomes dissatisfied with
one of his inferiors, thinking that another would surely be an improvement.
According to these people, men have to be changed often, or sent on long
trips at great expense. This view comes from a lack of mortification or of
mutual support in bearing the defects of others.

There were few houses where these situations did not come up, but
Monsieur Vincent would not agree to these transfers. He counseled those
concerned to wait a while and be patient, or he excused himself on the
grounds of the difficulty of finding a suitable replacement. He would say
that in due time he would look into the matter, but with the hope that time
would help them lose the desire for a change. He did, from time to time,
change certain confreres, but only for good reasons, and never to favor their
inconstancy or their personal satisfaction, against which he showed an
extraordinary resolve.

34. CED V:441.
He gave this answer to a priest requesting a transfer. It may serve as an example of many others written by Monsieur Vincent in similar circumstances:

It has pleased God to give me an understanding of the Congregation, the state and the needs of each house, and the disposition of each of its members. At present I do not see how you could be more useful to the Congregation than where you now are. In the name of God, Monsieur, hold firm, and be convinced that you will not lack God's blessings. One of the greatest consolations I have is to see you where you now are, and one day I hope to see you in heaven.\textsuperscript{35}

He did all he could to avoid useless expenses, and in a holy fashion purchased only what was necessary for the service of God. In addition, he was most careful in his use of time. This was precious to him, because of the number of projects he was involved with both in the temporal and in the spiritual spheres. Besides his own Congregation, he directed other groups, so he strove to lose not a single moment in doing anything useless.

First, he was always taken up with praying, speaking, writing, taking or giving advice, solving difficulties and following up on agreed-upon solutions. Second, he robbed himself of sleep to devote more time to his various responsibilities. Besides retiring an hour or two later than the others, to give him time to speak to someone, to finish reading letters sent to him, or for other duties, he continually had to have his charges in mind, like a true shepherd watching over his flock. Third, the other priests of the Congregation enjoyed two hours of recreation each day, an hour after each meal, but Monsieur Vincent used this time for other duties. Fourth, although he gave full liberty for those who spoke to him to say all they wanted, especially those from outside the community, he never engaged in useless chatter or gossip. Even in pious assemblies which met to help the poor or for some other charitable purpose, he would call the discussion back to the point if the speaker digressed. He would often say, "Let us return to the question, wrap it up, and see what remains to be done. Monsieur, or Madame, do you agree we should end this?" Fifth, he paid few visits, unless they were required by some business, or an expression of gratitude or charity.

This has been a short sketch of his leadership. It is summarized in the next section in a conversation he had with one of his priests, and written down immediately after by the person concerned.

\textsuperscript{35} CED IV:380-81.
Advice Given by Monsieur Vincent to a Priest of the Congregation
Before Sending Him to Assume the Direction of One of the Houses

Oh, Monsieur, how great it is to be called by God to the task of directing souls. What other vocation can compare with that of a priest of the Mission, to direct and lead others, whose interior movements are known to God alone? *Ars artium, regimen animarum* ["The art of arts is the direction of souls"].

This was the task of the Son of God on earth. This is why he descended from heaven, was born of a virgin, gave all his attention during life, and finally suffered a most painful death. This is why you must have a high regard for the work you are about to take up.

What means should you use to fulfill this task of leading souls to God? This, in the face of the torrent of vices among the people, or in meeting the challenge of poor seminary training. You must inspire those confided to you with Christian and priestly sentiments, to ensure their salvation and their perfection. Certainly, Monsieur, there is nothing human in this. This is not man’s work, but God’s. *Grande opus* ["A great work"].

It is a continuation of the work of Jesus Christ, which human effort can only destroy, if God does not have his place in it. No, Monsieur, neither philosophy nor theology, nor learned talks influence souls. Jesus Christ must be united with us and we with him. We must work in him, and he in us, to speak as he did and with his spirit, just as he was in the Father. We must teach the doctrine he taught, as the Scriptures constantly tell us.

You must strip yourself, Monsieur, to be clothed with Jesus Christ. You are aware that things ordinarily reproduce their own kind: a sheep creates a sheep, and a human another human. In the same way, he who would lead others, form them, and speak to them with mere human ideas and ideals, will give birth merely to the purely human in those who hear him. Despite all appearances to the contrary, he will engender merely the show of virtue, and not the reality. He will create in them the same spirit that moves him, as we see in the teachers in the schools who bequeath their maxims and mannerisms to their disciples.

37. Neh 6:3.
On the other hand, if a superior is filled with God and with the maxims of our Lord, all that he says will be fruitful. A power will go forth from him that will build up, and all his actions will serve as incentives for creating good in those who become aware of them.

To achieve this, Monsieur, our Lord himself must mark you with his own character. It is the same as we see when a cultivated stock is grafted on to a wild stock, and the wild then carries on the natural results of the cultivated. We too, miserable creatures, who are but flesh, thorns, and briars, are sealed by our Lord with his own seal. We receive, so to speak, his own spirit and grace, so that united to him as the vine is to the branch, we accomplish through him what he himself did upon earth. I mean to say we perform divine actions, engendering children to our Lord, as Saint Paul said, filled as he was with this same holy spirit.

An important task is that you should apply yourself carefully to is to remain in close touch with our Lord by mental prayer. This is the storehouse where you will find all you need, to accomplish the task you are about to assume. When you have a doubt, have recourse to God, and say to him: “Lord, the Father of Lights, reveal to me what I must do in this case.”

I not only give you this advice for the difficulties you may experience, but to teach you what you are to say to those under your care. In imitation of Moses, you must hear from God what is to be communicated to his people. *Haec dicit Dominus.* [“Thus says the Lord.”]

Monsieur, you should have recourse to God in mental prayer to preserve your soul in his holy fear, and in his love. Alas, Monsieur, I must tell you and you should know that often those who work for the salvation of others are in the end lost themselves. This could happen to anyone who is so taken up with others that he forgets himself. Saul was worthy of being appointed king because of his life in his father’s house. Yet after being raised to the throne he fell miserably from God’s grace. Saint Paul chastised his body, lest after preaching to others and showing them the way of salvation, he himself should become a castaway.

To keep from falling into the unhappy state of Saul or Judas, we must commit ourselves inseparably to Jesus Christ our Lord. We should lift our minds and heart to him and say: “O Lord, do not allow me, after preaching to others, to be lost myself. Be my shepherd, and do not withhold from me the graces you bestow on others through my intercession and my ministry.”
You ought to be devoted to mental prayer to beseech from the
Lord the graces needed by those you direct. You will achieve more
lasting good this way than by any other practice. Jesus Christ, who
ought to be your model in everything, was not satisfied by his
preachings, his works, his fasts, his blood, and even his death. To
all these he added his prayer. He had no need of prayer for himself.
It was strictly for us, for whom he prayed so often. It was to teach
us to do the same for our own needs and for those we seek to save,
with his help.

Another thing I recommend to you is our Lord's humility. Say
to him often, "Lord, what have I done to merit such a vocation?
What works of mine have merited the task you assign to me? Ah,
my God, I shall spoil everything if you do not direct my words and
all my actions." Just recall all that remains in us of what is human
and imperfect, and we will find enough there to humble ourselves.
This will be not only before God but before others as well, and in
the presence of those whom we call our inferiors.

Above all, do not take any pains to appear as being the superior
and master. I do not agree with the opinion of someone who recently
said that to lead others and maintain one's authority you must make
it clear that you alone are the superior. O my God, our Lord Jesus
Christ did not speak in this way. He taught us exactly the opposite,
both in word and example. He told us that he had come not to be
served, but to serve, and that he who would be the master must first
become the servant of all.

Accept this holy maxim that you should live among your con-
freres quasi unus ex illis ["like one of them"]. Let them know that
you did not come to rule over them but to serve them. If you act this
way both within the community and outside of it, you will find that
all will go well.

What is more, we should always credit to God any good that we
do. On the other hand, we should attribute to ourselves all the ills
which the community may suffer. Yes, remember that the disorders
which arise in communities come mainly from the superior, who
by his negligence or bad example allows laxity to creep in, so that
in the end all the members suffer because the head is not in good
order.

Humility ought to lead you to avoid the complacency that slips
in, chiefly in works that have a certain glamour to them. Oh,
Monsieur, realize how vanity is the dangerous poison even of good

38. 1 Sam 17:36.
works. It is an evil that ruins even the holiest of actions, and causes people to forget God. In the name of God, be on your guard against this fault, one of the greatest dangers I know of to the spiritual life and to advancement in perfection.

To avoid this vice, give yourself to God to speak in the humble spirit of Jesus Christ. Make it known that your teaching does not come from yourself but from the Gospel. Use the simple words and comparisons our Lord used in the sacred Scriptures when you speak to the people. What marvels he could have revealed! What secrets of the divinity he could have made known, of the admirable perfections of God, since he was the Eternal Wisdom of his Father! Yet, notice how he spoke in an understandable language, using the simple comparisons of a farmer, a field, a vine, a grain of mustard seed. This is how you must speak if you want to be understood by the people to whom you announce the word of God.

Another thing you should pay particular attention to is to allow yourself to be guided by the Son of God. When you must act, you should ask yourself, “Does this conform to the teachings of the Son of God?” If you find that it does, fine, then do it. If it does not, then have nothing to do with it.

Besides, when there is question of doing some good work, say to the Son of God: “Lord, if you were in my place, what would you do on this occasion? How would you teach the people? How would you deal with this sickness of mind or of body?”

This dependence should extend to those who represent our Lord for you, your superiors. Believe me, their experience and the grace given them by Jesus Christ because of their office has given them much insight for leadership. I tell you this to alert you to do nothing of importance, nor undertake anything extraordinary without alerting us. If you are pressed for time, and cannot await our reply, seek the advice of the nearest superior, asking him, “Monsieur, what would you suggest in this situation?” We know from experience that God blesses those who act in this way. On the other hand, those who act independently not only have fallen into difficulties, but have embarrassed us greatly.

I would ask you to be careful not to introduce anything singular in your direction. Nothing should be peculiar to yourself, but you should walk the viam regiam [“royal road”], the main highway, so as to proceed surely and without reproach. What I mean by this is that you should follow the rules and customs of the Congregation. Do not introduce anything new, but follow the suggestions drawn
up for those in charge of one of our houses. Do not omit anything of what we do in our Company.

Be careful in the observance of the rules, but also, see that the others follow them, for otherwise all will go badly. Since you hold the place of our Lord, you should be, in imitation of him, a source of light and warmth. “Jesus Christ,” says Saint Paul, “is the splendor of the Father,”39 and Saint John says, “he is the light which enlightens all those who come into the world.”40

We notice that higher causes influence the lower, as for example, the angels who are in a superior hierarchy brighten, illumine, and perfect the intelligences of the lower hierarchy. The same thing applies to a superior. The pastor and director ought to cleanse, enlighten, and unite to God the souls who have been confided to his care by God himself.

Just as the heavens shed their blessings upon the earth, those placed over others should extend to those others the same spirit which moves them. For this to happen you must be full of grace, light, and good deeds, just as you see the sun giving its full light to the other stars.

Finally, you must be the salt of the earth, Vos estis sal terrae, preventing corruption from creeping into the flock you shepherd.41

After Monsieur Vincent had spoken in this way, with a zeal and charity that I cannot express, a brother of the Company interrupted him. He came to discuss some matters about the house of Saint Lazare. After the brother left, he took the opportunity to give me the following advice:

You see, Monsieur, how we have to go from considering the things of God to temporal matters. You must understand that a superior must be concerned not only with spiritual matters but with the temporal as well. Since those he has charge of are creatures both of body and soul, he must look after the needs of both. In this, he follows the example of God himself. From all eternity he engenders the Son, and the Father and the Son give rise through their mutual love to the Holy Spirit, but besides these operations ad intra [“internally”], I say, he created the world ad extra [“externally”]. He is continually concerned for his creation. Every year he provides new crops from the fields, and new fruit from the trees. His adorable Providence extends to the least things, so that not a leaf falls from a tree without his consent. He counts the hairs of our head, and feeds

39. Based on Heb 1:3.
the insects, even to the smallest mite. This thought seems strong to me. It makes us realize that he must be concerned not only with spiritual things, but also since he in some way represents the power of God, he must attend to temporal things too. Nothing should be too small to be unworthy of his attention. Give yourself to God to obtain the temporal good of the house where you are going.

The Son of God when he first sent his apostles out on mission, told them to carry no money. Later, however, when the number of disciples increased, he willed that there would be one of his band, qui loculos haberet ["who would have the purse"]. He would not only give to the poor, but would look after the needs of the group. Besides that, he allowed some women to accompany him, quae ministrabant ei ["who used to minister to him"]. He told us in the Gospel that we should not be concerned with tomorrow. By this we understand that we should not be too worried or solicitous about the goods of the earth. He did not absolutely counsel us to neglect the means of life and care for our clothing, otherwise, we would never sow any seed.

I have finished what I wanted to say. That is enough for today. I repeat what I already said, that what you are about to undertake is a great work, grande opus. I pray that our Lord will bless your leadership. Please join me in praying he will forgive me all the faults which I have committed in the position I now hold.

42. Based on John 13:29.
43. Based on Mark 15:41.
44. CED XI:342-51; the recipient of the advice was Antoine Durand, named superior of the seminary of Agde.
LAST CHAPTER

Conclusion of This Work, in Which We Answer Why We Did Not Include Any Miracles in the Book to Prove the Sanctity of Monsieur Vincent

THOSE WHO write a life of a saintly person normally conclude their work by an account of the miracles God had allowed to happen, as a testimony to the sanctity of their subject. Just as we should not lightly accept accounts of extraordinary and miraculous events, so too we should not reject them outright. The hand of God cannot be stayed, and his power is no less today than it was in preceding ages. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe, who does what he wills in heaven and on earth. Since miracles are one of the chief means he used in establishing the Church and in planting the faith in human hearts, there is no doubt he can, and does, use miracles to strengthen this same Church and reawaken the faith of Christians, which sometimes seems so lethargic.

This being so, we might well be asked why, in this life of Monsieur Vincent, no miracles have been reported. If his life was so virtuous and so holy, how could God not allow miracles in his favor? And if there were some, why were they not mentioned? According to the word of the angel in the book of Tobit, "It is an honorable and glorious thing to declare and make known the works of his power." 1

We may respond, first, that this is not a necessary consequence that a person who had led a holy life will have this confirmed by the gift of miracles. We know of several great saints, recognized throughout the Church, who never performed a miracle. The Gospel expressly tells us that John the Baptist, declared by Jesus Christ to be the greatest of men, never performed any. Ecclesiastical history tells us of many saints, of all ages and condition, who likewise never performed any, and yet their sanctity has been confirmed. All this shows that although God never performed a miracle through Monsieur Vincent, it in no way diminishes our appreciation of his virtue or the veneration due the memory of his holy life.

We might further reply that if there has been no account of any miracles in his life, we do have the testimony from most credible witnesses of different things which happened during his life and after his death that are truly remarkable. He had, for example, predicted several events before they

happened. He had spoken of other interior occurrences which would have been known to God alone. He eased the interior pains of many people who had for a long time suffered greatly with no relief. He obtained bodily cures from serious sickness which seemed hopeless and beyond all human remedy when these persons had recourse to his intercession.

Although we could have given many examples of such events, well founded as they are, and which deserve to be believed because of the trustworthiness of those who report them, we have preferred to hide them under the veil of silence. In this way we are exactly obedient to the wishes of the Church. It has directed that nothing be declared a miracle unless it has been recognized and approved as such by the authority of the bishops. Besides, we are thus more in keeping with the spirit of this father of missionaries, whose humility dictated that he keep secret the extraordinary graces and gifts he had received from God’s Providence, until this same Providence itself would be pleased to bring them to the light of day.

If we have cited no miracle to show the sanctity of Monsieur Vincent it is only because there are other proofs so compelling that any reasonable Christian person would have no difficulty in agreeing. In this connection, there is a story of a cardinal of advanced years who attended the consistory for the reading of the life of a person who had died in the odor of sanctity. When a lengthy list of miraculous cures was read, the cardinal appeared to doze off. Later, the account was read of her being attacked on the street and badly injured, and still she treated her assailant with great patience and love. At this the cardinal opened his eyes as though awakening from sleep and said in a loud voice: “Now, that is a true miracle.” He wished to show by these words that virtuous acts, heroic acts of virtue above the normal human powers, constantly practiced during life, are true and convincing proofs of sanctity.

In keeping with this maxim, anyone who reflects on all that has been said of Monsieur Vincent will find enough to convince him. If we care to call miraculous what is far beyond the ordinary human ways, which surpasses its usual strength, and exceeds the deeds of most Christians, we can say that the long life of Monsieur Vincent was almost a continuous miracle. It was a constant display of the most excellent virtues, in which he persevered for his entire life.

To clarify our point to the reader, let us consider, if we will, that God uses other means besides miracles to justify the truths and mysteries of our holy religion. God in his Providence does not always use miracles for this purpose, but uses other no less efficacious means. So it is that we see in ecclesiastical history some called to a most extraordinary holiness, or a way of living quite out of the ordinary, more angelic than human. They were
venerated and admired by all the faithful. God has ordained that the sole fact of martyrdom can lead to canonization, while the learning and teaching of others have made them illustrious in the Church and respected as saints.

As to his servant, Vincent de Paul (if it be permitted to speculate on the mysteries of his Providence), it seems that God by his special and no less marvelous grace, wished to use his lowliness to exalt him, and his profound humility to render him more worthy of honor and veneration in his Church. This happened in such a way that this humble priest verified within himself what Jesus Christ had said: "Those who humble themselves shall be exalted." 2

Certainly, if we consider on the one hand Monsieur Vincent’s opinion of himself, and his constant effort to present himself as a nobody, a poor useless servant, an outcast, a miserable sinner, and then on the other hand if we look at the extraordinary and almost incredible things it pleased God to bring about by his ministry and have them blessed with such success, we can realize this could never have come from human strength. It was the direct result of the wisdom and power of God. This divine intervention was a sort of miracle of the goodness of God, a testimony to the approval of what was undertaken in his service.

Is it not a type of miracle to see the son of a simple peasant, born humbly in the lowest possible class, raised as a tender of animals, and then reduced to serve as an unhappy slave, and who always sought to remain hidden in the shadows of an abject and obscure life, and then, despite all this, suddenly appear as a new sun in the Church? As a sun he shone on an innumerable multitude of poor souls, “who languished in darkness and in the shadow of death,” as the prophet put it. 3 These people spent their lives in a dreadful ignorance of God and of the things needed for salvation. Monsieur Vincent not only taught but vivified them in the fire of his zeal. He brought them from death to life, and kindled in them the fire of divine love.

What must we think of a simple priest, without a benefice, and with no material support, or with no position or authority in the Church, who was able to bring an effective remedy to the disorders among the clergy? What was he able to accomplish, for the benefit of priests, both in and outside the kingdom of France, which even the greatest and most zealous prelates with all their authority and their great resources, hardly dared undertake, even in their own dioceses or in territories depending upon them?

That a poor man, with no resources, was able to help the destitute, not of a single town, but of entire provinces, and not during a single bad year, but extending over many years, being able to provide food, clothing, and other

necessities, what can we say? He repaired churches ruined by war, and refurnished many of them. He provided for pastors and other priests. He took pains to supply food and medicine for a huge number of the sick poor in villages all over France, Savoy, Italy, and other remote provinces for more than thirty years. He continued to support all these enterprises, as well as the Confraternities of Charity which he had established.

Lastly, that a man who never hid his lowly birth, who announced himself an ignoramus, who never showed any notable talent, who composed no books, preached in no famous pulpit, but who did all he could to remain in the background, and sought only to be forgotten, what must be the fate of such a man? How can we explain that with all we have said, this forgotten man acquired a reputation that spread through almost the entire world? That he was honored and sought after by the powerful, and even called to share in the council of the nation?

Certainly, anyone who would carefully consider these circumstances must recognize the hand of God in the affairs of his faithful servant to work these wonderful deeds. The life, the manner of living, the works, and the success of the enterprises of Monsieur Vincent were the effects of the wisdom and power of God. God is able at any time to bring light from darkness, or to bring to nothing all that is greatest and most astounding in all the world.

After all, the reader will find here ample reason to glorify and bless God for the example of virtue he has revealed in the person of his faithful servant. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, speaking of Saint Ephrem, said “God had put him on the earth as a great light to shine upon the world. He was like a living guidepost, pointing to men the way of virtue and sanctity, after the manner of the signposts erected along major roads.” We may say the same of Monsieur Vincent. God raised him up and gave him to the Church for many marvelous enterprises. Even more God sent him to give us the example of his holy life as a sure guide to a life of great perfection. By his example may we be moved to follow his path, walk in his footsteps, accept his direction, embrace his teachings, and above all else seek to imitate him in seeking the kingdom of God, the accomplishment of the divine will, all to the greater honor and glory of God.

The End

4. PG 46.3:819.
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Translated from the 1891 Pémartin edition, edited, with additional annotations by Edward R. Udovic, C.M.

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**Charity (towards ecclesiastics and religious),** 3:139 ff. See, *Ecclesiastics*, *Religious*.


**Charity (towards his enemies).** The excellence of this virtue. Feelings and conduct of Vincent, 3:156 ff. Several examples, 3:157.

**Charity (towards the slaves).** Throughout his life Vincent has a great compassion for them based on his own experiences, 1:47. See, *Slaves*.

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Charity (Daughters of).

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How the Company of the Daughters of Charity is excellent in God's eyes, 1:137. The poor that they serve are their friends in heaven and will one day welcome them there, 2:295. They find a true contentment in their vocation which they could not have found in the world, Ibid. The empires and kingdoms of the world are only dust when compared to the glory with which they will one day be crowned, 2:297. Although they are only poor women on the earth they will become great queens in heaven, Ibid.

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**Chateau l’Eveque** (summer residence of the bishop of Perigueux). Vincent is ordained to the priesthood here (1600), *1:39*. See, *Bourdeilles (Francois de)*.

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**Chatel sur Moselle** (town in the diocese of Toul). Helped by Vincent, *2:329*.

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**Chrysostom** (John), saint. Cited on the virtue of humility, *3:203*.

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Clichy (parish near Paris). Vincent is named pastor of Clichy. His conduct among his parishioners and his associates (1612), 1:52. Favorable testimony of a theologian about the faith and conduct of the people of this parish, 1:54.

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Codoing (Bernard), priest of the Mission. His works and success at Genoa (1645), 2:66.

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Coelmez (Monsieur de), chancellor of the University of Toulouse, 1:40.


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Comet (Monsieur de) the elder, lawyer and judge from Dax. He entrusts Vincent with the education of his children, 1:38. He procures for him the parish of Thil, 1:40.

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Communion. Vincent's personal reflections on the reception of the eucharist, 3:79. His sentiments of fervor: "Do you not feel, my brothers, divine fire burning in your hearts when you receive the adorable body of Jesus Christ in communion?" Ibid. He tells a scrupulous woman that she had done wrong to omit receiving communion because of some interior pain, 3:79-80. He deplores the Jansenist opinions which oppose


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Conde (Louis II de Bourbon, prince of), son of the above. His politics, 1:211,216. His gracious response to the humble words of Vincent, 3:190.

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Examples and advice of the saint, 3:293 ff. His goals and his means, Ibid. The characteristics of his conduct; humility, 3:294, prudence, 3:295, exactness, 3:297, meekness and gentleness, 3:299. The rules which he gives for the formation of Missionaries for his Company, 3:301; by correction, 3:302; and edification, 3:309. Temporal affairs of the houses of the Congregation, 3:312 ff. Advice of Vincent to one of his Missionaries whom he had made superior of a house, 3:317. See, Affairs, Counsel, Constancy, Equality of spirit, etc.


Conferences (given to the priests of the Mission). From the beginning Vincent gives conferences to the Missionaries. Excellence of this practice, 1:144. He reminds the Missionaries that he is sending to be chaplains to the army to be faithful to their vocations, and he indicates to them the best way to undertake their work, 1:175-77. The reasons that the Missionaries have to esteem the value of these conferences, 2:216-17.

Conferences (given to the Daughters of Charity). Vincent gives the Daughters of Charity a great number of spiritual conferences, 2:302.

Conferences (given to the Ladies of Charity). Conferences of the saint, 2:304 ff. Edification of these ladies in listening to the words of Vincent; various accounts, 3:38.

Conferences (of the Ecclesiastics at Saint Lazare, or the Tuesday Conferences). Origin of this group (1633). The first members. Subjects and methods of the conferences, 1:144
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Confession. Vincent as spiritual director of Madame de Gondi obliges her occasionally to consult another confessor, 1:64. Children are to receive the sacrament at the end of a mission, 2:23.


Confidence (in God). During his captivity Vincent never stops hoping that God will rescue him, 1:46. Examples and teaching of Vincent on this virtue, 3:21 ff. Three people are more than ten when our Savior lends his assistance; and he always helps when he asks us to do something which is not humanly possible, 3:21. We have a great reason to distrust our own efforts, but we have an even greater reason to trust in God, 3:22. Do not be frightened by a year of scarcity, nor by several; but trust in God who is always abundant in his blessings, 3:23. Our lack of confidence dishonors God, Ibid. What should we do when faced with unfortunate events? 3:24. The abandonment of the saint with respect to his Congregation, 3:25 ff. He resigns himself to the deaths of his best Missionaries and expresses his reliance on God, 3:29 ff. Example of Abraham, Ibid., of the Rechabites, 3:30. The throne of mercies of God is established on the foundation of our own unworthiness, 3:32. He who relies on God will accomplish what his heart desires, Ibid. Those who live with confidence in God will be favored by a special protection on God's part, 3:35. Providence watches over the Daughters of Charity because they serve the poor. Signs of this protection, 3:35-36.

Confraternities. Vincent cites the advice of Francis de Sales who counseled everyone to join these, 2:312.
Confraternities of Charity. See, Charity, Confraternities of.

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Consolation. Vincent had a special grace for consoling the afflicted, 1:98.

Constancy. Example of Vincent on the occasion of the deaths of the Missionaries sent to Madagascar, 2:158-59. He picks himself up again like a palm tree battered by a storm, 2:159. Teaching and conduct of Vincent, 3:280 ff. He says that one must reject as a temptation the thought of abandoning what has been decided upon after discernment, 3:295. Once an affair has begun it has to be pursued until it is finished, 3:312.

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Constitutions. See, Rules.

Consul. French consuls in Tunis and Algiers. The Missionaries are often required to hold these positions, 2:87 ff.

Contempt. On how to personally profit from the contempt of the world; like the bee who is able to make honey just as well from bitter absinthe as it can from roses, 1:130.

Conti (Armand de Bourbon, prince of), assists at the funeral of Vincent, 1:262. His assistance in a lawsuit involving the seminary at Cahors, 3:111.

Contradiction. Because of his humility Vincent tries never to contradict anyone, 3:231.

Controversies. Vincent desires that theological polemics and any other controversies be avoided, 2:25. He recommends, to this end, that the abridged version of Becanus be studied, Ibid. It is necessary to avoid engaging in controversy in order to promote conversions, Ibid.

Conversations. Affability must be the soul of conversation, 3:165-66. Vincent would stop and reproach himself whenever he realized that he was speaking about himself, 3:188-89. Example of our Savior, 3:227. Example of Vincent, 3:261-62. He never spends time in idle conversation when the time could be better spent elsewhere, 3:316. See, Affability, Cordiality.

Coqueret (Jean), a doctor of theology of the college of Navarre. Vincent consults him, 1:73; 3:43.


Cordiality. Vincent had a tender but strong and noble heart which easily conceived an affection for all that he saw was truly good and from God, 1:101. The saint asks pardon of a lay brother who had come to take care of him and who the saint felt he had not received with enough cordiality, 3:189. He always receives others with affection, 3:300. See, Affability, Union.


Cornet (Nicolas). A doctor of theology of the College of Navarre. He extracts from the book of Jansenius the Five Propositions which sum up the errors which were later condemned by the pope, 2:362.

Correction (fraternal). See, Admonitions.

Corrections. These must always be given with a spirit of mildness. Example and recommendation of Vincent, 3:166 ff. Without excusing the actions of the guilty, as
much as possible they should be given the benefit of the doubt, 3:169-70. While it is not necessary to be too tolerant with those in need of correction it is necessary to treat them with mildness, 3:171. Corrections will be well received if they are reasonable and not dictated capriciously, 3:176. If the superior admonishes someone vigorously he should not do it in an outburst of temper, 3:176-77. It is generally agreed that no one can be effectively corrected if they are corrected in anger, 3:176. Vincent uses correction to ensure the proper running of the houses of the community, 3:302-03. Human nature does not like to receive corrections, but receives them more easily when they are done with mildness as exemplified by Vincent, Ibid.

Correspondence. Vincent is very attentive to his correspondence and never writes anything hard to understand, or anything which testifies to any bitterness or a lack of respect or of charity towards those he is writing to, 1:101. He withholds a letter of a Missionary written to a secular priest encouraging him to enter the company, 1:181. His reaction in reading a letter which inadvertently contained the news of his impending death, 1:235. On avoiding expressions in one's correspondence which are too tender or too affectionate, 3:269-70.

Corsica (island of). In 1652 the Senate of Genoa asks Vincent to give missions on this island. Extraordinary results of these missions, 2:69 ff. Concerning the Corsican slaves who were freed from Algiers by the Missionaries, 2:123. See, Aleria, Campo Lauro, Corte, Cotone, Niolo.

Corte (in Corsica). Mission held there, 2:70.


Cotone (in Corsica). Mission held in this area, 2:70.


Council of Trent. See, Trent, Council of.

Counsel. How Vincent gives advice to others, 1:100. How he gives counsel and offers his advice, Ibid; 2:274-75. On never making a decision in important matters without first seeking advice. On deciding whom to consult, 3:43,293-94. The saint voluntarily defers to the counsel of others, 3:232. God blesses personal resolutions taken with the advice of others, 3:295,320. Once a judgment has been reached it should be adhered to firmly especially with regard to any temptation to abandon it, 3:295. Prudent conduct of Vincent when he is asked to give counsel, 3:295-96.
Courombaille (location in Barbary). Christian slaves held here are visited by the Missionaries, 2:115.

Crecy (city in the diocese of Meaux). Establishment there of a community house (1641), 1:231.


Cross. If we love others and have confidence in God it is necessary to carry the cross, 2:101. There must be power in the cross since God ordinarily gives success to the services which are given to him in persecutions and martyrdom, 2:180. Vincent says that it would be better to be possessed by the devil than not to have a cross to carry in life, 3:285. Our sufferings are a cross which elevate us above the life of earth, 3:288. Unhappiness of those who flee from the cross; because only in feeling its weight can one overcome it, 3:302. See, Trials, Sicknesses, Patience, Suffering.

Cross (Daughters of the). Abelly serves as their ecclesiastical superior, 1:10. Origins and purpose of this community. Services which Vincent gives to them, 1:195 ff. At the death of their foundress, Madame de Villeneuve, Vincent helps in the preservation of this community, 1:196. See, Villeneuve (Madame de).

Cupid (Robert), bishop of Saint Pol de Leon, and then of Dol. Lawsuit over his first diocese, 2:382.


Cyprian (Saint), bishop of Carthage. The chapel at the consulate in Algiers is placed under his patronage, 2:107. His views on the care to be taken of religious women, 2:391.

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Daughters (of Charity). See, Charity, Daughters of.

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David (Jean), priest of the Mission. His death in the service of the poor at Etampes during the wars of the Fronde, 1:209.


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Duchesne (Bernard), a doctor of theology of the Sorbonne. He gives a mission with Vincent at Montmirail (1622), 1:81.

Duchesne (Jerome), a doctor of theology of the Sorbonne, archdeacon of Beauvais. He preaches the ordination retreats at Beauvais with Vincent (1628). He makes a general confession of his life to Vincent, 1:139-40.

Du Coudray (Francois), priest of the Mission. One of the first companions of Vincent, 1:110. The saint dissuades him from working on a new Syriac translation of the Bible, 2:35. He evangelizes the army in Picardy (1636), 1:175; 2:318.

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E

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Feron (Monsieur), a doctor of theology of the Sorbonne, and archdeacon of Chartres. He gives a mission with Vincent at Montmirail (1622), 1:81.


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Feydeau (Mathieu). Author of the condemned Jansenist work, *Catechisme de la grace*, 2:356.

Feydin (Francois), priest of the Mission. At Richelieu. The saint announces to him that he has been chosen for the Madagascar mission, and gives him useful advice. His departure, 2:160.

Firmness (in the conduct of Vincent), 1:108; 3:165,280,297. Inconstancy ruins the holiest and most solid resolutions, 3:232. Among those things which can cause the decay of a community nothing is more dangerous than to be governed by superiors who are too mild. Examples. 3:297. A superior must be firm but never rude in his conduct, 3:310. See, Strength.

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Fontaine (parish in the diocese of Reims). Missions held there, 2:43.

Fontainebleau (city and royal residence). The Missionaries give a mission in this city on the order of the queen, 3:212.

Fort Dauphin (in Madagascar), 2:142.

Fortitude (virtue of). Madame de Gondi observed that Monsieur Vincent was not the type of man to do something halfway, 1:67. He had an absolute control over his natural tendencies. Reason so controlled his passions that it was hard to know that he had any, 1:101. Jesus Christ was the source of his firmness in doing good and of his being able to stand unmoved by any consideration of human respect, or of his own personal interests, 1:103. From the moment that he recognized something as being the will of God he would be thoroughly committed to it, 2:275. *Conduct and examples of Vincent*, 3:280 ff. His conduct in supporting the good and in the repression of evil, 3:280-81. In the support of those suffering from afflictions and trials, 3:282. See, Firmness, Patience.

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Foundlings. Origin of the work of the foundlings and the devotion of Vincent to this work, 1:160 ff. Frightful state of the abandoned infants placed at the house of “La Couche” in Paris, 1bid. Vincent recommends to the Ladies of Charity that they work with these little infants, 1:161. The Missionaries must support this work of charity, 3:122. The saint criticizes a Missionary who wants to limit this work. He cites the example of our Lord, 3:123. New establishment near the gate of Saint Victor in Paris under the direction of Louise de Marillac and the Daughters of Charity in 1638, 1:161. General Assembly of the Ladies of Charity of Hotel Dieu in 1640. At this meeting it is decided to take care of all the foundlings. 1bid. Anne of Austria obtains alms from the king to support the work with the foundlings (1644), 1bid. Ten or
twelve Daughters of Charity are employed to take care of them (1646). They take care of three or four hundred children each year, 2:296.

General Assembly of the Ladies of Charity in 1648. Impassioned words of Vincent asking them not to abandon the care of these little children, 1:162. Louis XIV gives the Ladies of Charity the Chateau of Bicetre as a home for the infants, Ibid. It is necessary to move them from the Bicetre to a house in the area near Saint Lazare (1649), Ibid. Vincent arranges that the children and their nurses be assisted by the Daughters of Charity, and by a laybrother, 3:122.

How they are to be educated. The Christian education which they subsequently receives under the care of the Daughters of Charity, 1:162.

Fouquet (Francois), bishop of Bayonne, then of Agde, finally archbishop of Narbonne. He establishes the Missionaries at Agde (1654), 1:234.

Fouquet (Marie), one of the first Ladies of Charity of Hotel Dieu, 1:153.

Fourche (Monsieur), Jesuit. Assists in hearing confessions at the first mission at Folleville, 1:61.

Fournier (Pierre), Jesuit, rector of the College at Nancy. He recommends the needs of the poor of Lorraine to Vincent, 2:328.

France. State of the Church at the time of the birth of Vincent, 1:31-32. All of the Christian slaves in Barbary, except the English, are under the protection of France, 2:90. All the slaves, even the foreigners, ask the king to be their benefactor. For the most part they were recognized to be French subjects, 2:108.

Francillon (Francois), laybrother of the Mission. He is sent to Tunis, 2:86. Then to Algiers, Ibid. He is attached to the mouth of a canon by the Algerians and is thus executed (1688), Ibid.

Franciscans. Vincent’s early studies in their school in Dax, 1:38.

Fremont (Charles), reformer of the religious of the Order of Grandmont. Vincent praises him, 2:385,387.

Freneville (area near Paris). Location of a small farm belonging to the Congregation of the Mission. Vincent stays there for a month during the troubles of the Fronde. He gives a mission to the inhabitants of the area (1649), 1:199-200.

Fresque (Monsieur de), pastor of the Church of Saint Sulpice in Paris, 1:168.

Friendship. Christian love is superior to the merely sympathetic love that exists between friends; which even though is the most prevalent can also be the most harmful, 3:149. Detachment from loved ones; the example of Jesus and his apostles. See, Detachment.


Frugality. This virtue is universally admired in the first Daughters of Charity, 1:136. Vincent recommends the observance of this virtue to his Missionaries. Exhortation to practice an even greater degree of frugality during the times of the public misery, 3:313.

Funeral (of Vincent de Paul), 1:262.


Vincent gives a mission to the galley slaves of Paris held at the Tower of Saint Bernard (La Tournelle) in the parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet (1632), 1:85, 1:48. Vincent arranges for their care by the priests of the Congregation from the College des Bons Enfants, 1:148. Louise de Marillac also assists them. He recommends them to the care of the Confraternity of Charity of Saint Nicholas du Chardonnet. The Ladies of Charity at the court will also help them (1635), Ibid. Definitive establishment of the works with the convicts (1639), 1:149. Mission given at Marseilles for the galleys in 1643, 2:39-40. The priests of the Conference of Saint Lazare give many missions at La Tournelle, 2:219. Daughters of Charity begin serving the convicts, 2:296.

Vincent obtains for the galley slaves at Marseilles the creation of a hospital and a group of chaplains (1642-1649), 1:150. A house of Missionaries is established at Marseilles for the care of the galley slaves (1643), Ibid. Louis XIV gives, in perpetuity, the title of Chaplain General of the Galleys to the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission (1644). Royal appointment as Chaplain General by Louis XIV is given to Vincent, Ibid. The galleys are transferred from Marseilles to Toulon. Vincent establishes one of his priests in this city to care for the needs of the convicts (1649-1655), 1:151.

Gallus (Andre), rector of the University of Toulouse, 1:40.

Gamaches (parish in the archdiocese of Rouen). Vincent is named pastor there, 1:55.

Gambart (Adrien), priest associated with Vincent, 1:109.

Gannes (village near Folleville). Vincent hears there a general confession of a dying peasant which is the occasion for beginning the work of the missions (1617), 1:59.

Garron (Jean), Protestant at Chatillon les Dombes. Vincent brings him back from heresy to the Catholic faith. His letter to Vincent forty years later, 1:75.

Gatinais (province of). Assistance sent there by Vincent, 1:212.

Gaudiene (location in Tunis). Christian slaves there are visited by the Missionaries, 2:115.

Gault (Jean Baptiste), bishop of Marseilles. He helps Vincent obtain the foundation of a hospital for the convicts at Marseilles, 1:150. His zeal for the missions to the galleys, 2:39-40.

Gemozac (parish in the diocese of Saintes). Letter from a Missionary giving an account of a mission given at the parish there in 1647, 2:33.

General Hospital. See, Salpêtrière.

Geneva (diocese of). Results of the missions held in this diocese, 2:38 ff. See, Annecy, Guerin (Juste).

Geneviève (Saint), patroness of Paris. Solemn procession of the reliquary of the saint, and general processions throughout Paris to obtain the end of the public sufferings in 1652, 1:211.

Gennevilliers (village near Paris). Vincent sends aid there during a flood of the Seine, 3:120.


Genuflections. Vincent teaches that these should always be made with great care, 3:74. He gives examples of this, despite his infirmities, 3:82.

Germany. Fallen into heresy and lost to the Church, 1:212; 2:170,190.


Gibeonites (figures in the Old Testament), 2:158.


Glengarry (Lord), Scottish noble. He and his father are converted by the Missionaries, 2:174-75.


Glory of God See, God, (Glory of).

God.

Conduct of God. God for good reasons hides from his servants the fruit of their labor. Nevertheless, he causes them to be effective, 3:100.

Fear of God. It is the grille that shelters the Daughters of Charity; like religious behind their cloister, 2:293.

Glory of God. Seeking it always is the first maxim of the Gospel, 1:104. 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? 2:92. When presented with a choice always prefer what is for God’s greater glory, and not your own personal interest, 2:426. The greatest joy of his heart was to ponder the incomprehensible glory of God, 3:37. To attribute to oneself the glory which comes from the sanctification of souls would be a great sacrilege, 3:73. When the glory of God is in question Vincent pays no attention to any temporal interests or concerns, 3:219. It is his goal in all that he does to seek this, 3:293.

Goodness of God. “Once God has begun to do good to a creature he will continue to do so to the end unless it makes itself unworthy of his help,” 3:28.

Kingdom of God. The work of understanding and propagating it, 3:39. To bring the reign of God to souls is to act like the angels who labor for this end without ceasing, Ibid.

Love of God. It must be not only affective but effective; different reasons, 1:106. “Let us love God, but let it be in the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows,” Ibid. Outreach of the charity of Vincent, 1:127 ff. Examples and teaching of Vincent. Ardent charity in his works; in his words. Various testimonies of his pure intentions of pleasing God, 3:37 ff.
Perfections of God. The devotion which they inspire in Vincent, 3:72. The reverential knowledge that we have of these fills us with reverence and love of the Divine Majesty, 3:72-73. They must inspire humility in us, 3:196.

Presence of God. The presence of God ought to have a greater influence over our minds than the presence of every living creature of the world, 2:277. Practice and teaching of Vincent on the sentiment of the presence of God, 3:56 ff. How Vincent was himself elevated to this view by natural and sensible things, 3:57. Comparison of the mirrors, Ibid. Example of a person who was made conscious of having been distracted from his contemplation of this only three times in one day, 3:58.

Providence of God. Vincent did not want to anticipate providence. This was his usual way of acting in his affairs, 1:102. He says that he clings to the providence of God in all things, 2:274. Providence will never fail in those things that we undertake by his direction, 3:22. It is in times of scarcity that our true confidence in God must appear, 3:23. There are great treasures hidden in providence, 3:32. We honor the sovereignty of our Lord when we do not anticipate or presume on his providence, Ibid. Vincent undertakes nothing on his own initiative; trusting that divine providence would reveal all the works that were to be done, 3:181. If providence finds us ready and responsive to its directions what we undertake will succeed to the greater glory of God, 3:249.

Will of God. How excellent is the practice of conformity to the divine will. To apply oneself to this must be the aim of the Congregation, 1:105. Practice and teaching of Vincent on this virtue, 3:40 ff. Our Lord unites himself continually with those who are united to his will and not to their own, 3:40. Whoever conforms himself in everything to the will of God and takes his pleasure in it leads a truly angelic life upon earth. This person can even be said to be living the very life of Jesus Christ, Ibid. Four things to be observed in order for this to be accomplished, 3:41. "The perfection of love does not consist in ecstasies, but in fulfilling the will of God," 3:41. Among the many benefits of conformity to the divine will, surely peace of soul will not be the least, 3:42. The devotion of Vincent is to follow the will of God, and never to precede it, 3:43. He has as a maxim that no effort should be spared when it is a question of accomplishing God's will, Ibid. The highest and almost unique means for a soul to be totally holy is to habitually do the will of God in all things, 3:44. It is an anticipated paradise, Ibid. God is highly glorified by our abandonment to his will without seeking to know his reasons, 3:45. Ways of knowing this holy will: by events, or by commandments and precepts, Ibid. Vincent calls this practice of conformity the "treasure of the Christian," 3:45. An act of resignation and acquiescence to the good pleasure of God is worth more than one hundred thousand temporal successes, 3:48. To conform oneself to this is the best preparation for death, 3:89. Vincent is always prepared to see his own Congregation destroyed if it is the good pleasure and will of the divine Majesty, Ibid. Accepted in all adversities this will is one the greatest goods; greater than any temporal advantages, 3:162. Vincent is always ready to do God's will. God found in him a man after his own heart, 3:207. By obedience to God's will we can be seen as true disciples of Jesus Christ, 3:255.

Godeau (Antoine), bishop of Grasse, then of Vence. Member of the Tuesday Conferences. His letter to the members of this group, 2:227.

Gondi (Francoise Marguerite de Silly), baroness of Montmirail, dame de, wife of the general of the galleys. Her virtues. She places herself under the spiritual direction of Vincent de Paul (1613), 1:56; 3:207. Her personal esteem for the saint, 1:59. She asks Vincent to give a sermon at Folleville on general confession, and to give periodic missions throughout her lands (1617). She provides a donation for this purpose to
Vincent in her will, 1:62. Her desolation at the departure of Vincent for Chatillon. Letter which she writes on this subject to a trusted friend, 1:65-66. Letter to Vincent, 1:67-68. At the return of the saint, whom she receives as an angel from heaven, 1:71. She erects in her lands numerous Confraternities of Charity, 1:73. She cooperates in the fruits of the missions by her zeal in visiting the poor (1620), 1:80. She procures the College des Bons Enfants for Vincent (1624), and together with her husband draws up a contract of foundation for the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission (1625), 1:93 ff. Her death (June 23, 1625), 1:109. Vincent’s praise of her virtue. She never spoke badly of any person, 3:169.

Gondi (Henri de), bishop of Paris (1598-1622) and the first Cardinal de Retz, brother of the Jean Francois, and of the general of the galleys. 1:69,91. See, Retz.

Gondi (Henri de), youngest son of Emmanuel de Gondi. His premature death, 1:55.

Gondi (Hippolyte de), sister of the general of the galleys, marquise of Ragny, 1:66.

Gondi (Jean Francois de), archbishop of Paris (1622-54), brother of Henri, and of the general of the galleys. Louis Abelly in his service, 1:9. He confers the College des Bons Enfants on Vincent (1624), 1:69,93. He approves the deed of foundation, and the first rules of the Congregation of the Mission (1626), 1:110. He issues the necessary letters confirming the union of Saint Lazare to the Congregation of the Mission, 1:124. He authorizes Vincent to establish the Confraternities of Charity in the parishes of Paris, 1:131. He orders that all the ordinands of the diocese take part in the ordination retreats at Saint Lazare before each ordination, 1:140; 2:185. He approves of the establishment of the ecclesiastical conferences, (the Tuesday Conferences) by Vincent (1633), 1:144. He encourages Vincent to establish the Company of the Ladies of Charity of Hotel Dieu (1634), 1:153. He approves the establishment of a seminary at Bons Enfants (1642), 1:165. Vincent has a vision relative to Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal and consults with him as to judging its authenticity, 2:284. He approves the rules of the Daughters of Charity. He erects them as a congregation under the direction of the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission (1646), 1:136; 2:291. Together with the queen he commands that the infirm Vincent use a carriage (1649), 1:202.

Gondi, (Jean Francois Paul de), another son of Emmanuel de Gondi, coadjutor to his uncle, and then archbishop of Paris, second Cardinal de Retz. See, Retz, (Cardinal de).

Gondi (Philippe Emmanuel de), count of Joigny, general of the galleys. Biographical notice. Vincent becomes the tutor of his children (1613), 1:55. The saint dissuades him from a duel, 1:57. His sadness at the sudden departure of Vincent. The letter that he writes on this subject to Madame de Gondi (September 1617), 1:65-66. Additional letter written to say that he hoped he would have the joy of once again seeing the saint, 1:70. Vincent establishes numerous Confraternities of Charity throughout his lands, 1:73. He has Vincent named as Chaplain General of the galleys (1619), 1:84 ff. Together with Madame de Gondi and his brother the archbishop of Paris, he procures the College des Bons Enfants for Vincent in order that he may found a society of priests (1624), 1:93 ff. Contract of foundation for the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission (1625), 1:94-96. Vincent travels to Provence to tell him of the death of Madame de Gondi (1625), 1:97-98. He retires from the world to the Oratory and is ordained. His death, (1662), 1:98-99.

Gondi (Pierre de), bishop of Paris and cardinal, uncle of the general of the galleys, 1:69.

Gondi (Pierre de), duke of Retz, son of Emmanuel de Gondi. See, Retz, (duke of).
Gondree (Nicolas), priest of the Mission. At Saintes, 2:137. He is designated to accompany Monsieur Nacquart to the Madagascar mission. His apostolic work at La Rochelle before departing, and on the vessel during the voyage, 2:138. His arrival and work in Madagascar, 2:142 ff. His death; the sorrow of Nacquart and Vincent, 2:144, 149-50. Praise of his virtues, 2:137.


Gonzague (Marie Louise de), queen of Poland. Lady of Charity. Her esteem for Vincent, 2:163; 3:38. She brings the Daughters of Charity to Poland, 1:136. She asks Vincent for Missionaries to found a house of the Congregation in Warsaw (1650), 1:233-34; 2:163 ff. Her wise conduct during the plague in Poland. She praises the Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity, 2:164-66; 3:138. Letter of the queen to Vincent. She asks for his prayers. Her courage during the war facing the Swedish army, 2:169-70.

Good (The). One rarely does what is good without experiencing some difficulty and pain: “The devil is too subtle and the world too corrupt not to attempt to stamp out a good work at its very beginning,” 2:92. See, Temporal Goods.

Gorin (Louis), Abbe of Saint Amour. See, Saint Amour.

Gospel. For Vincent it is etched in his heart and he uses it as the guide for all of his conduct, 3:293. He held absolutely to this oracle of truth, 3:296.

Gournay (Charles Chretien de), bishop of Scythia, administrator and later bishop of the diocese of Toul. At his request a house of the Congregation is established at Toul (1635), 1:230.

Goussault (Genevieve Fayet), Madame de, the president. Aunt of Rene Almeras, 1:122. Biographical notice, 1:152. She suggests to Vincent the establishment of the company of the Ladies of Charity for the service of the poor of Hotel Dieu in Paris (1634). She makes her retreat with Louise de Marillac at the suggestion of the saint, 1:142, 152. She is named as the superior of the Ladies of Charity, 1:153.

Grace. Vincent reproaches himself for abusing the graces given him by God, 1:257.

Grace (Notre Dame de), pilgrimage chapel in the diocese of Albi. Vincent says one of his first masses at this church, 1:39-40.

Granada (Luis de). Vincent recommends the reading of his spiritual works, 1:143. These are read during some missions, 2:64.

Grandmont (Order of). Vincent assists in the reform of this order, 2:385. The saint sends a letter from the king to the superior general inviting him to take certain appropriate measures to reestablish the primitive observance in his order, 2:386-87.

Grand Turk (the sultan of the Ottoman Empire), 1:43; 2:86,94.

Gratitude. Vincent has a heart that is always grateful, 1:64. He is full of gratitude for the gifts of God, 1:102. Sentiments and examples of Vincent on this virtue, 3:236 ff. His gratitude towards God, 3:236. He said, “we must always give as much time to thanking God for his favors as we have used in asking him for them,” Ibid. His gratitude towards others; some traits, Ibid. He is characterized by his gratitude, and his inability to keep from praising the good, 3:240-41. How this virtue is pleasing to God, 3:241.


Gregory the Great (Saint), pope. Cited in Abelly. He says that works are the proof of one’s love of God, 1:106. On dealing with the faults of our neighbor, 3:169. Value of simplicity, 3:214. The art of spiritual direction, 3:317.
Grenu (Daniel), priest of the Mission. Evangelizes the soldiers of the army in Picardy (1636), 1:175.

Grimaldi (Jerome), cardinal, archbishop of Aix. Vincent sends him a book written by a theologian against the heresy promoted by Martin Barcos, 2:351.

Grumbling. One of the greatest evils which can exist in a community is when there are those who grumble and criticize everything, 3:150. See, Union.


Guerin (Juste), bishop of Geneva. He obtains Missionaries from Vincent to preach (1640), and to begin a seminary (1641) in his diocese, 1:231. He praises the success of the Missionaries who preached in his diocese to Vincent (1640-1644), 2:38-39.

Guerin (Mathurine), Daughter of Charity. She testifies to the care taken by Louise de Marillac to record the words of Vincent, 1:24.

Guibourgere (Jacques Raoul de la), bishop of Saintes, then of Maillezais, finally of La Rochelle. He establishes the Missionaries at Saintes, 1:217,232. Vincent writes him to dissuade him from returning to the court. He congratulates him for having maintained the loyalty of his people to the king during the troubles of the Fronde, 1:217. He obtains a promise from Vincent to give missions in the diocese of Saintes (1640), 2:32. He writes from Saintes to Vincent on the success of the missions, 2:35. The success of the ordination retreats, 2:203. Vincent works to have him named as the bishop of Saintes, and then of La Rochelle, 2:382-83.

Guienne (the province of). During the Fronde, 1:217. Heretics there, 2:25.

Guilbert (Monsieur), a priest of the Mission, 3:17.

Guillerval (village near Etampes). Helped by the Missionaries (1652), 1:208.

Guillot (Nicolas), priest of the Mission. Sent to Poland, 2:164.

Guingamp (village in Brittany). Mission held there in 1648, 2:47.


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Habakkuk (Old Testament prophet), 1:175,239.

Habert (Isaac), bishop of Vabres. His letter, written in the name of the bishops gathered in Paris, asking the pope to condemn Jansenism, 2:353-54.


Hallier (Francois), doctor and professor of theology of the Sorbonne, later bishop of Cavaillon. He is sent to Rome in order to fight the Jansenists, 2:361. Vincent congratulates him and encourages him in accomplishing his mission, 2:361-62.
Letter to Vincent announcing the condemnation of the Jansenists and letting him know of their continued activities at Rome, 2:362-63.


Hamphya (location in Tunisia). Christian slaves here are visited by the Missionaries, 2:115.

Health. Proper care should be taken to preserve one's health. The body is an instrument to be used for the welfare of many; it should therefore be preserved according to this purpose, 3:153. Although an excessive concern is a great obstacle to the service of God, 3:255.

Heart. God does not want to be offered a divided heart, 2:311. Response of the saint to a priest who had written to him pledging his heart's devotion, 3:218-19.

Heart (of Jesus). The source of humility and mildness. This noble source must bring us to embrace its virtues, 1:105-06. It is a furnace of love that affects us all, Ibid. Vincent encourages Louise de Marillac to imitate in her own heart the tranquility of the heart of the Savior, 1:135. "If you had but a spark of that sacred fire which consumed the heart of Jesus Christ could you spend your life with folded arms, and abandon those who call for your help?" 3:107. "The traits of envy and detraction pierce first the heart of Jesus Christ before reaching those against whom they are aimed," 3:302.

Heart (of Vincent), after his death it is deposited in a valuable reliquary, 1:262.

Hebrew. The study of this language. Advice of Vincent to Monsieur Du Coudray, 2:35.


Hebrides (Islands). Located off the western coast of Scotland. Vincent sends Missionaries to these islands (1651), 1:234. Ideas about this country, 2:173 ff. Departure of Messieurs Le Blanc, Duggan, and Lumsden (1651); their voyage, 2:174. It is a beautiful field that God opened to the zeal of the Missionaries, 3:100. The devotion of the Missionaries, 3:276. Sufferings of the Missionaries, and the fruits of their work in these islands. Three letters from one of them, 2:174 ff. Death of Monsieur Duggan. Praise of his virtues. He is buried in the island of Ouist (Vista), 2:178.

Hell. "Only those who reflect on the pains of hell or on the price of the blood of Jesus Christ for even one soul can appreciate the value of what you have done," 1:177.

Hennebont (city of). Site of a hospital served by the Daughters of Charity, 2:296.

Henry IV (king of France), 1:32,42,44. Alleged secret mission of Vincent to this prince, 1:48-49. His treaty with the sultan (1604), 2:94.

Herbron (Francois), priest of the Mission. He leaves from Nantes for Madagascar. Escape from a shipwreck, 2:161.

Heresy. Horror of Vincent for any heresy. Why God willed that he lived in the time of Jansenism, 2:346. Rules of conduct of the saint relative to the heretics. He spoke of the danger that in wanting to do something to bring heretics back to the faith that their would-be rescuers would instead be carried away with them, 2:369. He opposes any compromise with them, expecting that they should submit themselves to the definitive judgment rendered by the Church, 2:371. A new heresy is an evil that can never be accepted in whatever person it is found, Ibid. While it is not necessary to recklessly judge a person it is a more dangerous evil by a sense of a false charity to
want to excuse those who obstinately support the heretics or who themselves are suspected of heresy, Ibid.

Heretics. Converted by Vincent at Chatillon (1617), 1:74 ff. At Montmirail (1620), 1:81. Objections raised by one of them in pointing to the religious abandonment of the peoples of the country, and of the seeming worship given to the Blessed Virgin. Responses of the saint, 1:81-82. A large number are converted at Hotel Dieu of Paris after the reforms introduced there by Vincent, 1:159. At Beauvais; advice of the saint on the mild and charitable manner that one must have in dealing with them 2:25. Vincent declares that he never knew of a heretic being convinced by the subtlety of an argument, but rather only by being treated with mildness and humility, Ibid. If we would like them to come to belief it is necessary to love them. Recommendations to various Missionaries, 2:26. Abjurations during the missions, 2:41 ff. Practice of the Missionaries, 2:54. Conversions increase among the heretic slaves in Barbary, 2:116 ff. Vincent often claimed the authority of the king to repress their activities, 2:383. He often must write on behalf of the king to support the right of Catholics in their lawsuits and disputes against the heretics, Ibid. It is by mildness that Vincent wins and converts heretics, 3:166-68. See, Jansenism.

Herod (allusion to the massacre of the Innocents), 1:161.

Herse (Charlotte de Ligny), Madame de. She gives the Congregation of the Mission the farm at Freneville, 1:199. By her gifts she contributes to the growth and support of the ministry to the ordinands, 2:186. Assistance which she gives destined for Picardy, 2:332.


Hilary (Saint). His writings against the Arian heresy, 1:31.

Histolangar (Today Tolagnaro), a town in the south of Madagascar, 2:142,151.

Holland. Lost to heresy, 1:192.

Holiness (of the conduct of Vincent), 1:108.

Holmoru (in the diocese of Chalons sur Marne). Mission given there, 2:50.


Honors (their dangers). Constant humility of Vincent, 3:275.

Hope. Teachings and example of Vincent on this virtue, 3:21 ff. “Just as we cannot have too much faith in the truths of the faith, so too we cannot trust in God too much.”
Explanation of this maxim, 3:33. "We have the seed of the all-powerful God within us. This should be the source of our hope, encouraging us to place all our confidence in him despite our own poverty," Ibid. Consolation given to a person tempted to despair, 1:34. Although it is necessary that God sometimes rejects a good man, he also will never forsake a sinner who hopes in his mercy, 1:35.


Hotel Dieu (Hospital in Paris). Establishment of a Company of the Ladies of Charity to help the sick poor (1634). First assembly, 1:153. Second assembly. Nomination of officers. Services given to the sick, Ibid. The Daughters of Charity begin their work there under the direction of Louise de Marillac (1636). Services that they provide there, 1:155; 2:296. Organization of the spiritual service. Six priests are established to help the ordinary chaplains in the care of the sick, 1:158. Priests from the Tuesday Conferences teach catechism. They also give a mission to the patients (1639), 2:219-20. Detailed account of these works given in the presence of the Ladies of Charity in 1657, 2:305 ff.

Huguiier (Benjamin), priest of the Mission. His eulogy. He is appointed to the post of French consul at Tunis, 2:89. He is called back to France and sent to Toulon, Ibid. Vincent gives him the mission of going to Algiers to work for the release of the consul unjustly held responsible for the debts of a French merchant, and exposed to the affronts of the Moslems, Ibid. His death in the service of the slaves at Algiers (1663), Ibid.

Humiliations. Example of our Lord, 3:196,202. Teaching and practice of Vincent. He feels that in these he has found his treasure and has profited from every opportunity of practicing them, 3:184. Affection of Vincent for receiving them and accepting them obediently, 3:187. It is a honor to be treated in the same manner as our Lord had been, 3:190. When prudence permits, it is a good practice for one to speak highly of them. Examples of Saint Paul and of Saint Augustine, 3:200. The divine will is merciful when it is pleased to permit us to take the blame and contempt in public, 3:287.

Humility (example of our Savior Jesus Christ). It is the model that Missionaries must follow. What is the life of the divine Savior but a continual humiliation, both active and passive? 1:102; 3:196,202.

Humility (example of Saint Francis de Sales and of many other saintly persons), 2:19; 3:201-02.

Humility (of Vincent de Paul), 1:22. I. General teachings of Vincent.

a. Some characteristics:
He speaks of his humble origins, 1:36; 2:271. He does not speak of his studies or the degrees that he received, 1:40-41; 3:182. He wishes to destroy the letter which contained the account of his Tunisian captivity. He keeps silent about this event throughout his life, 1:46. Was Vincent excessively humble? Answer, 1:101-02. How he followed the examples of humility of our Savior. How he had taken this virtue to heart, 1:102. Humble conduct of Vincent, 1:108; 3:294. He responded when someone spoke to him of his works that he was only "the vile and contemptible mud that God formed into the mortar used in cementing the stones of his structures," 1:244. In the delirium of a fever he prays for humility, 1:251. Some humble words spoken at the end of his life, 1:257. He speaks with humility of his failings and his infidelities, 1:102; 2:193; 3:132,185-
88. He speaks of his incapacity, in saying that he was only a poor scholar of the fourth form, etc., 3:182,186. He speaks of his humble origins, 3:135,186,257. Gracious response of the prince of Conde and another noble to the humble words of Vincent, 3:187,190.

2. Excellence and nature of this virtue.

Vincent says that humility and meekness are two close sisters who go well together, 1:105. Humility alone is capable of carrying the great graces of God, 2:135. First of all a heart must be empty of itself, then God fills it, 2:193-94. The knowledge of our faults must be used to humble but not to discourage us, 3:310.

3. Examples and teaching of Vincent de Paul, 3:14,180 ff. It is to his humility more often than his zeal or his prudence that it is necessary to attribute the fruitfulness of all his works, 3:180. It is said that he refused the highest ecclesiastical dignities, 3:183. With this he came to possess all the other virtues. Humility is not contrary to magnanimity, Ibid. Some particularly humble actions of Vincent, 3:184 ff. Remarkable act of humility of the saint in receiving his nephew, 3:189. Vincent desires that this virtue be taken as a subject of prayer every month, 3:190.

Sentiments of Vincent on humility, 3:195 ff. Two principal motives for humility, Ibid. Various exhortations on the practice of this virtue, 3:196 ff. Explanation of the parable of the pharisee and the publican, 3:199. Prayer to obtain humility, 3:199. It is the virtue for which religious souls have the most attraction, 3:200. It is one source of peace, Ibid. It is the source of charity, 3:204. It is the only weapon that Vincent uses to oppose contradictions, 3:231. It is the first and the most faithful guide for all his conduct, 3:294. II. Particular teachings for the Congregation of the Mission.

Humility is one of the foundations on which the Congregation is established: if we do not have this virtue we have nothing, 1:113-14. With what humility Vincent spoke of his community, Ibid; 117; 3:182,187-88. It is most needed by the Missionaries, because of the praise that the people sometimes give them for their work, 1:113. God has chosen the members of the Company as he chose at another time his humble disciples, 1:118. The Missionary must not only accept the humiliations which are his personally, but also those that God sends to the Company in general, 3:182. God gives to other companies whatever virtues that it pleases him to give; but for the Congregation of the Mission this virtue is humility, 3:183. "If you have ever heard outsiders say that something good has been done by the Company you will find that it was because they found some small bit of humility in it," 3:198. "The more one is humble the greater shall be his love for his neighbor," Ibid.

"Congregations which are humble are like valleys which attract all of the life-giving waters flowing down from the mountain," 1:117. Humility in the manner of preaching, 2:18-19,190. See, Preaching. At the moment that we abandon the simplicity and the humility that is fitting to our institute we will lose the graces that are attached to it, 3:203. It is God who accomplishes the good that we do. We are only the distributors of his gifts, 3:204. We are like the fragile rod which God himself used to work miracles in the hand of Moses, Ibid. It is the example of the humble and simple manner with which one acts towards them which edifies the ordinands, 3:198. In the seminaries wanting to be effective by merely teaching those who are under our charge will be a great obstacle to the accomplishment of the end of this work, 3:309-10. See, Humiliations, Blindness, Vanity.

Husson (Martin), lawyer of the parlement of Paris. Vincent obtains a position for him as a steward in the house of the duke of Retz. Wise advice that he gives him, 1:57; 3:226. Vincent advises him to quit this position to accept the post of consul at Tunis

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Idleness. The idle soul becomes an infertile land which produces only useless thorns. Terrible example of an ecclesiastic, 3:113. Example of a laybrother, 3:152. See, Time (Good Use of), Work, Zeal.

Images. In the presence of a heretic Vincent asks a child what the teaching of the Church is concerning the use to be made of the images of the saints, 1:82. The saint counsels the Missionaries of Madagascar to use images to teach the mysteries of the faith. He sends one himself for the instruction of a young Malgache, 2:137. Pagan images used by the natives in Madagascar. The Missionaries of Madagascar use Christian images effectively in the instruction of the people, 2:147.

Imitation (of Our Lord, Jesus Christ). See, Jesus Christ, (Imitation of Our Lord).

The Imitation of Christ (Classic spiritual work). Recommended by Vincent, 1:143. Quotations cited by the saint, 1:183.

Imitation (of the saints). It is one of the principal purposes and one of the most salutary fruits of devotion to them, 3:9.

Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Vincent mentions this privilege of the Blessed Virgin, 3:270.

Imours (village in Madagascar), 2:154.

Incarnation (Mystery of the). The manner of teaching it to the ignorant, 2:136. The devotion professed and recommended by Vincent to this mystery, 3:74.

Indies. Vincent cites to the Missionaries the example of a merchant who returned there, despite many dangers, for simple temporal gain, 1:183. He is pleased that some of the aged confreres ask to be sent there, 3:50. Foreign missions here, 2:15.

Indifference. Definition. This state of virtue is active leading the heart to be detached from all that would hold it captive. Its necessity, 3:49. In what sense it is the origin of all the virtues and the death of all vices, Ibid. Example of Jesus Christ and of his apostles, 3:49-50.

A characteristic of Monsieur de Rougement, 1:78. Beg God for the grace that we might abandon ourselves entirely to his adorable direction, 3:51. Example of the saint in his sicknesses, and in his death, 3:52. As a virtue for the Congregation, 3:52-53.


Insane. Loving devotion of Vincent for those whom he finds committed in the house of Saint Lazare when he first takes possession of it. He continues to receive them there, 1:126; 2:259 ff. Reasons for having a devotion to their service, 2:261. Consoling fruits which resulted from this work, 2:264.

Inspirations. They are a means of knowing the will of God, but they must be carefully examined, 3:46.

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1618: The saint gives missions aided by various virtuous ecclesiastics from Paris, 1:73. He holds that it is a great honor for the Missionaries to be able to imitate the conduct of God towards his Church in evangelizing the poor, 1:83.

1624: The College des Bons Enfants, the birthplace of the Congregation. The saint is named as principal of the college by the archbishop of Paris, 1:94.


1627: Letters patent of Louis XIII confirming the contract of foundation of the Mission and approving its establishment everywhere in the kingdom, Ibid. The first seven Missionaries who join with Vincent are compared to the seven priests placed under the direction of Joshua after Jericho, 1:111.

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Saint Germain l'Auxerrois (parish in the city of Paris). Confraternity of Charity established there, 1:131. At the death of Vincent the members of the Tuesday Conferences celebrate a requiem service here, 1:262.


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Saint Maur (Congregation of the Benedictines of). Vincent helps in the reform of this congregation, 2:385.

Saint Meen (city in the diocese of Saint Malo). Ceding of the abbey of Saint Meen to the Missionaries by the religious. In 1645, the Congregation is established there by the bishop in order to direct a seminary. Union of the conventual resources to the Congregation of the Mission by Pope Alexander VII in 1658, 1:232-33. Vincent visits this house in 1649, 1:201. Missions given from this house in the diocese of Saint Malo (1657), 2:45.

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Saint Nicolas de Gross Sauve (priory in the diocese of Langres). One of Vincent’s benefices, 1:94.

Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet (parish in the city of Paris). Vincent transfers the convicts from the faubourg Saint Honore to this parish, 1:86. Louise de Marillac comes to live in the same parish, near the College des Bons Enfants, 1:129. Establishment of a Confraternity of Charity, 1:131, 148. Louise de Marillac serves a girl who is sick with the plague there. Vincent congratulates her, 1:131. Daughters of Charity work here, 1:134. The saint recommends the convicts to the care of the Confraternity of Charity of this parish, 1:148. He procures a yearly revenue from the clergy of this parish in order to provide for the spiritual assistance to the convicts, 1:149. Establishment of a seminary in the parish through the zeal of Monsieur Bourdoise, 1:165; 3:141.


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Sainte Genevieve (abbey of). Vincent is employed there to assist in its reform, 2:385.

Sainte Marie (island near Madagascar). Evangelized by the Missionaries, 2:151.

Sainte Menehould (town near Chalons). Vincent sends Missionaries and assistance there, 1:205.

Sainte Reine (in the diocese of Dijon). Hospital founded in this city with the assistance of Vincent, 2:303.

Saintes (city and diocese of). The Congregation of the Mission is established there in 1644, through the zeal of the bishop and by a contribution of his clergy. Diocesan seminary. Vincent proposes to visit this house in 1649, 1:166,202,232. Success of the missions given in this diocese in 1634, 2:32. Missions in 1640 and 1642; gratitude of the bishop for the Missionaries who work in this diocese, 2:35. Good example given by a Missionary from Saintes; Monsieur Julien Guerin, 2:86. Letter of the bishop to Vincent on the success of the ordination retreats (1645), 2:203. Vincent supports the choice of Jacques Raoul de la Guibourgere, bishop of Saintes, for the newly established see of La Rochelle, 2:382.

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Salpetriere (general hospital of the). Origin and necessity of this establishment (1653), 1:226. The enclosure of the Salpetriere is given by Louis XIV in order to serve as a general hospital (1653), 1:227. Vincent did not want the poor to be sent there forcibly, 1:228.

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Salve Regina. This antiphon to the Virgin is chanted by Vincent during his captivity, 1:45.


Sancy (Achille de Harlay de), bishop of Saint Malo. He brings the priests of the Mission to his diocese and establishes them at Saint Meen (1645), 1:232.
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Savigliano (city in Piedmont, Italy). Mission given in this area, 2:78.

Savoy (duchy of). Confraternities of Charity in this duchy, 1:73.

Scalenghe (town in Piedmont). Mission given there, 2:76.

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Seguier (Dominique), bishop of Meaux. He authorizes the establishment of a house of the Mission at Crecy (1641), 1:231.
Seguier (Pierre), chancellor of France. He transmits to Vincent the order of the king to send twenty Missionaries to the army to give a mission, (1636), 1:175. Member of the Council of Conscience (1643), 1:192.

Seminaries. Vincent regards them as necessary for applying and realizing the intentions of the Council of Trent on the reform of the priesthood. Previous unsuccessful attempts to establish them; the cause of this lack of success, 1:164 ff; 2:249-50. The saint establishes a seminary at the College des Bons Enfants; later called the Saint Firmin seminary (1634), 1:164; 2:249-50. He regards as very useful the creation of major seminaries distinct from schools for younger students. He petitions Cardinal Richelieu, 1:164; 2:250. He establishes one at Annecy (1641), 1:166, 231. The work of the company in seminaries is imitated by others and they multiply in France and in Italy, 1:166. Beneficial results of their establishment in France: at Cahors, Paris, etc., Ibid; 2:255 ff. One must spend a sufficient amount of time there in order to be fully formed in the ecclesiastical virtues, 2:254.

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Senlis (city and diocese of). Louise de Marillac visits the Confraternities of Charity of this diocese, 1:130. Vincent goes to this city to meet with Louis XIII who asked for Missionaries for the spiritual assistance of the army, 1:175.

Sens (diocese of). Results of the missions given in this diocese, 2:47. See, Joigny, Longron, Moutier Saint Jean.

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Serre (Louis), priest of the Mission. His vocation to the Congregation, 1:81. Letter to Vincent on the missions in Brittany, 2:45.

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Virtue is found between two opposing vices which are the absence and the excess, 2:313. The devil tempts virtuous persons to try to do too much in their good works in order that they will be overworked and succumb, Ibid. An excess of virtues is praiseworthy in comparison with the lack of virtue and must be supported, 3:297.

Visitation (Order of the), Vincent is chosen by Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Jane de Chantal to be superior of the monasteries of the Visitation at Paris, 1:90; 2:266; 3:208.

The first monastery established in Paris (1619). Construction of the church in the rue Saint Antoine. Mission given to the workers (1633), 1:90; 2:211,266. Three other monasteries are founded. Vincent takes great care of them for thirty-eight years, 1:242; 2:267. How he was charged by Saint Francis de Sales with the direction of the house in Paris, 2:266. Confidence of Saint Jane de Chantal in Vincent for her personal direction and that of her Congregation. Letters to the saint, 2:267 ff. Vincent visits the monasteries of Paris and of Saint Denis. His conduct in these circumstances, 2:269,280-82. His rules of direction with religious women, 2:270. His devotion for sick religious, or those afflicted with interior spiritual pains, 2:270,281-82. The saint refuses permission for visits to the Monasteries of the Visitation by princesses and ladies of high social position. Reasons for this refusal, 2:273-275. He watches attentively to preserve them from the opinions of Jansenism, 2:271,280. Vincent advises them to accept the direction of the work of the Madeleine for repentant women, 2:278-79. Miraculous healing of a religious witnessed by Vincent, and obtained through the intercession of Francis de Sales, 2:280. The part that was attributed to Vincent in this miracle, 2:282. Testimony given by Vincent to the virtues of Madame de Chantal, 2:282-83. He recommends unity to the religious and indicates two means to accomplish this, 3:110. Testimony of a religious as to the merciful charity of Vincent, Ibid. He unsuccessfully tries to resign the direction of the Visitations. He takes it back under obedience, 3:208.

Visits. Example of Vincent on the manner of making and receiving them, 1:243. They are to be made only out of necessity, 3:316.

Visits (To the blessed sacrament). Vincent makes a visit before the blessed sacrament each day after rising, 3:75. He spent his spare moments there, and always goes there before leaving and after returning from a trip. He promotes this practice, 3:79. Vincent reads the important letters that he receives while kneeling before the blessed sacrament, 3:78.

Viterbo (diocese in Italy). Missions held there, 2:59.
Vocation. Prudent conduct of Vincent when he is consulted about vocations, 1:182. How he would resolve these questions during the retreat exercises, 2:231. Perseverance. None of the apostles walked away from their responsibilities except when finally called to receive their crowns in heaven, 3:132. How he imparted and followed wise advice on vocations. Examples, 3:225.

Vocation (of the Missionaries). The evangelization of the poor proves the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church, 1:83. The devil alone could find something to complain of in such a life, 1:117. Vincent holds as an inviolable law never to say anything to attract anyone to his Institute. His particular teaching and his recommendations on this subject, 1:180-82; 3:181. We must pray that God will send good laborers for the harvest, and then live ourselves so that our good example will attract many others, if God so wills, 1:181. Charity of Vincent for those whose conduct in community was culpable, in order to give them the necessary time to correct themselves, 3:172-73. Only self-love and pride will be able to destroy the vocation of a Missionary, 3:204,302,319. Vincent suffers whenever someone left the company, 3:150-51. Infidelity of a young Missionary who left the Congregation and joined the army. He was not there long before he was condemned to death for desertion, 3:161. His discretion and his charitable silence towards those who had left the Congregation, 3:169,227. He readmits a Missionary who had left the community, 3:237.

Vocation (to the ecclesiastical state). The loss of vocation is inevitable for those who dare to enter there without being called, 3:194.

Vocation (to the religious life). It is necessary in discerning a vocation to follow the maxims of the Gospel and not those of mere human prudence. One must prefer the communities that are best ruled, 2:230-31. Vincent deters a religious tempted to transfer to a less rigorous order, 2:388. He deters another celebrated religious from seeking a bishopric, 2:389. He gives a religious motives for persevering in his vocation, 3:146. He dissuades a discontented religious from taking his complaints to Rome. God will see to it that the order in which he has placed you will bring you happily to port, Ibid. The cross is everywhere. Trying to avoid those that one has found in one state by changing to another, 3:146.


W

Wars (of the Fronde), 1:198 ff. Second Fronde (1651), 1:208 ff. In Guinne, 1:216. In Paris, 1:219. The war is the cause of the damnation of a large number of persons. God is also using these events to procure the glorification of many others, 3:121. See, Public Miseries.


White (Francis). See, Le Blanc, (Francois).
Will of God. See, God, (Will of).

Will (Self). To renounce it is one of the principal acts of mortification, 3:254-55.

Wine (sobriety in the usage of). Example of Vincent, 3:270.

Wisdom “Those walk most securely who travel the same path as the wise,” 1:101.


Work. Many are inclined to an easy and soft life rather than to a solid and laborious one, 1:107. We must serve those whose labor feeds us, 1:214; 3:240. How Vincent was devoted to his work until the last moments of his life, 1:254-55.
Their dedication to work is a virtue noted in the first Daughters of Charity, 1:136.
The Daughters of Charity are often overwhelmed with work. Letter of one of them to Vincent, 2:297. See, Idleness, Time, Zeal.

Workers. Vincent arranges for missions given by the ecclesiastics of the conference of Saint Lazare to many of the workshops of Paris, 2:218-19. He makes it possible for the workers to come to make their retreat at Saint Lazare by indemnifying their employers, 2:232.

Works (of Vincent). Extent and diversity of those that he realized, 1:127 ff, 242. He knew that in order to accomplish them the hand of God had to be with him, 1:244. He once said that he was only the “vile and contemptible mud that God formed into the mortar used in cementing the stones of his structure,” 1:244. The works of Vincent, They are almost miraculous which testifies that God approved the works of his servant, 3:325.

X

Xavier (Francis), saint. Veneration of Vincent for this saint, 2:84. He proposes that the Missionaries imitate the example of his zeal, 2:135;137; 3:100. His words of apostolic zeal, 2:148.

Z


Zeal.

1. Zeal in general.
The lack of zeal of priests for the country poor is one of the objections raised by a heretic before his conversion. The response of Vincent, 1:81. The Church is compared to a great harvest that needs workers, but workers who will actually labor, 1:107. Good example given by the first Missionaries, 1:117. Only those who reflect on the pains of hell or on the price of the blood of Jesus Christ for even one soul can appreciate the value of conversions, 1:177. “If you had but a spark of that sacred fire which consumed the heart of Jesus Christ, could you spend your life with folded arms, and abandon those who call for your help?” 3:107.
Monsieur Nacquart, a Missionary to Madagascar, writes to Vincent in the words of Saint Francis Xavier, “Where and who are the doctors and learned persons who waste their time in the academies and universities while so many poor unbelievers cry for food, but there is no one to give it to them,” 2:148. Monsieur Bourdaise, another Missionary in Madagascar, expresses the wish that the many capable ecclesiastics who were idle in France would reflect on the account they will have to render for all
the souls lost for lack of their help, 2:158. Words of zeal of Jean Jacques Olier while
giving a mission: "O Paris! You distract many who could with the grace of God
convert a multitude of souls," 2:37.

2. Discretion of Zeal.
In Vincent zeal is moderated by prudence. Example, 1:57. Zeal is not effective if it
is not also discrete. Vincent tells a Missionary in Algiers not to try to effect the
conversion of Moslems and renegades because of the great dangers involved, 2:106.
It is a tactic of the devil to urge good souls to do more than they are capable of so
that in the end they accomplish nothing, 2:313. God only asks for our good will and
a true and sincere readiness to seize every opportunity to serve him, 3:98. Vincent
was more anxious to do good than to receive any favors, 3:109. Look upon your
body as an instrument of God for the salvation of many, and care for it for this reason,
3:154. A virtue is accompanied side by side by its vices; but the excess of a virtues
is more acceptable than the lack of the virtue, 3:298.

3. Zeal of Vincent de Paul.
Once when returning from the missions he dreamt that the gates of the city would
fall down upon him because of the souls that still remained to be evangelized in the
countryside, 1:116-17. Vincent is consumed by that heavenly fire which Jesus Christ
came to bring upon the earth; to respond to everything having to do with the glory
of God, and the salvation of souls, 1:224. Vincent expresses the desire to go to
evangelize in the mountains of Cevennes even if it meant dying in this effort, 2:36.
He also wants to serve God in the foreign missions, 2:85. He wants to accompany
his confrères to the missions of Madagascar, 2:138. His zeal for evangelization, 3:16.
His most ardent desire is that God would become better and better known, adored,
served, obeyed, and glorified in all places and by all creatures, 3:37. It is one of the
characteristics of the conduct of Vincent, 3:293. His examples and his teaching, 3:97 ff.
1. Ardent Zeal, 3:97 Vincent, infirm and eighty years old still has the desire to go
to the Indies even if he would die on the voyage, 3:98. Merchants travel fearlessly
by sea and soldiers fight fearlessly in war, "Should we then fail in our duty as helpers
and saviors of souls because of the troubles and persecutions we may encounter?"
3:101. 2. Disinterested zeal. He desires that everyone should imitate the zeal of the
apostles, Ibid. 3. Constant and persevering zeal. Example of the missions in
Madagascar and in Barbary, 3:102-03.

4. Zeal of the Missionaries.
Vincent asks God two or three times each day to destroy the community if it is not
being useful to his glory, 1:117; 3:89. Vincent desires that all those who enter the
company come there with the thought of martyrdom, 1:183. "How happy is the
Missionary 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," 2:84. He cites the example of the sick Missionaries at Warsaw
during the war in order to aid the plague-stricken, 2:166. Ardent exhortation of the
saint for the spirit of zeal, 2:170-71; 3:98-99. A Missionary without zeal would only
be the corpse of a Missionary, and a carcass from Saint Lazare, 2:236-37. If our zeal
is true we must desire that the whole world be evangelized, 3:27. Whoever is called
to be a Missionary is called by God to save souls. Explanations, 3:90. It is impossible
that a Missionary who lives in a cowardly way will succeed in his work and achieve
his salvation, 3:104. Resist any temptation to abandon the works of the company,
Ibid. Regard as anti-christs the cowardly who will speak of abandoning the works
that God has confided to the Congregation, 3:104-05. If some Missionaries were obliged to beg for their bread or to sleep on hay and someone asked them: "Poor priest of the Mission! What has brought you to such an extremity?" What happiness if you could respond: "Charity," 3:107-08. See, Foreign Missions.

Zelazewski (Stanislaus), priest of the Mission. Sent to Poland, 2:164.