
Spiritual Writings

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Letters: 1625-1640

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A.2 - LIGHT

In the year 1623, on the Feast of Saint Monica, God gave me the grace to make a vow of widowhood should He call my husband to Himself.

On the following Feast of the Ascension, I was very disturbed because of the doubt I had as to whether I should leave my husband, as I greatly wanted to do, in order to make good my first vow¹ and to have greater liberty to serve God and my neighbor.

I also doubted my capacity to break the attachment I had for my director² which might prevent me from accepting another, during his long absence, as I feared I might be obliged to do.

I also suffered greatly because of the doubt I experienced concerning the immortality of the soul. All these things caused me incredible anguish which lasted from Ascension until Pentecost.

On the Feast of Pentecost,³ during holy Mass or while I was praying in the church,⁴ my mind was instantly freed of all doubt.

I was advised that I should remain with my husband and that a time would come when I would be in a position to make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and that I would be in a small community where others would do the same. I then understood that I would be in a place where I could help my neighbor but I did not understand how this would be possible since there was to be much coming and going.

I was also assured that I should remain at peace concerning my director; that God would give me one⁵ whom He seemed to show me. It was repugnant to me to accept him; nevertheless, I acquiesced. It seemed to me that I did not yet have to make this change.

My third doubt was removed by the inner assurance I felt that it was God who was teaching me these things and that, believing there is a God, I should not doubt the rest.

I have always believed that I received this grace from the Blessed

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1. Louise de Marillac (August 12, 1591-March 15, 1660) had wanted to be a Capuchin Nun. She had undoubtedly made a promise to God to do so. However, Father Champigny, her first spiritual director, told her that her delicate health would not permit her to become a religious. Following the advice of her family, Louise married Antoine Le Gras on February 5, 1613. He was secretary to the Queen Marie de Medicis. Their son, Michel, was born the following October 18.
 2. Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley, a friend of the de Marillacs and of Francis de Sales.
 3. Sunday, June 4, 1623.
 4. The Church of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, rue Saint-Martin, the parish church of Louise de Marillac.
 5. Vincent de Paul was, at the time, a tutor in the de Gondi household which was situated in the parish of Saint-Sauveur.

Bishop of Geneva¹ because, before his death, I had greatly desired to communicate these trials to him and because since that time, I have had great devotion to him and have received many graces through him. On that occasion, I had a reason for believing this to be so, although I cannot now remember it.

1. Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva and Founder of the Visitation, had died in December 1622.

CORRESPONDENCE

1625-1630

1625

April 17: *Founding of the Congregation of the Mission.*

c. November: *Monsieur Vincent began work at the Collège des Bons-Enfants in the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet.*

December 21: *Death of Louise de Marillac's husband in his home on rue Corteau-Villain in the parish of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs.*

1626

Louise de Marillac settled on rue Saint-Victor in the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet.

Beginning of Louise de Marillac's participation in Monsieur Vincent's charitable works on behalf of the poor.

1629

Beginning of Louise de Marillac's visits to the Confraternities of Charity: In May the first trip to Montmirail.

Founding of the Confraternity of Charity in the parish of Saint-Sauveur in Paris.

1630

Founding of the Confraternity of Charity in the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. Louise de Marillac becomes the first President.

Arrival of Marguerite Naseau who has "come to serve the poor."

November 10: *"Dupe Day": failure of the conspiracy organized to overthrow Richelieu, the Prime Minister. Arrest and imprisonment of Michel de Marillac, Keeper of the Seal, one of Louise's uncles. Another of her uncles, Louis, Field Marshal of France, will also be arrested and imprisoned a few months later.*

L.1 - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

June 5, 1627

Monsieur,

I hope that you will excuse the liberty I am taking in telling you how impatient I have become because of your long absence, troubled as I am about the future and by not knowing where you are or where you are going. It is true, Father, that I find some comfort in my trial from the thought of the business that is keeping you away, but that does not

prevent the days from seeming like months for someone as lazy as I. However, I want to await calmly the hour of God, and I recognize that my unworthiness is delaying it.

I have been aware that Mademoiselle du Fay¹ has been more anxious than usual. We spent the Feast of Pentecost together. After services, she would have liked to confide in me but we remained open to and desirous of accomplishing the will of God. The work which your Charity gave me is finished. If the members of Jesus need it and you want me to send it to you, Father, I shall not fail to do so. I did not want to do this without your authorization.

At last, my Most Honored Father, after some worry, my son is placed in school. Thanks be to God, he is happy and is doing well there. If that continues, I shall be very relieved concerning him.

Allow me, Father, to bother you again about the 28 year old girl that they wish to send from Burgundy and confide to my care. From what I hear, she has a good background and is virtuous. Prior to this, the good blind girl from Vertus² had told me that her 22 year old companion might also come here. She has been under the direction of the Oratorians for the past four years and is a true country girl. I am not convinced that she wants to come but she has given me some assurance that she desires to do so.

I humbly implore you to tell me what I should do in this matter. The person who is going to Burgundy plans to leave Monday. Since I thought that you would be returning this week, I promised a reply.

For the past month our good God has permitted my soul to be unusually aware of Him, nevertheless I remain constantly in my imperfections. When I shall no longer place any obstacle in the way of the effects of the prayers which I hope to receive from your Charity, I believe I shall mend my ways. These past days I have greatly desired you to remember to offer me to God and to ask of Him the grace of accomplishing His holy will in me despite the opposition of my misery. Therefore, I most humbly supplicate you, Father, and ask your pardon for bothering you. By the goodness of God I remain, Father, your most grateful servant and unworthy daughter.

1. Mademoiselle du Fay, Lady of Charity of great devotion. Her paternal uncle, René Hennequin, married Marie de Marillac, one of Saint Louise's aunts.
2. Pilgrimage to the much frequented shrine of the Virgin Mary at Aubervilliers.

L.2 - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

January 13, 1628

Monsieur,

About three weeks ago, while I was at Mademoiselle du Fay's, I had an opportunity to write to you. I am afraid that my letters have been lost. They dealt principally with the advice which I was asking of you concerning my son. However, I am no longer in the same situation, Monsieur. Either God does not want him to become a priest at this time, or the world has raised obstacles to his doing so because his fervor has greatly diminished. I found such a great change in his attitude that I spoke freely about it to the Mother Superior¹ who advised me to place him simply as a boarder with these good ecclesiastics² for reasons which I will explain to you if God grants me the grace, which I greatly need, of seeing your return. Certainly I have never been more acutely aware of your absence because of the needs which have since arisen. In this I must recognize my weakness and I assure you, Father, that if God grants me the grace of recalling the past I will not find in it reason to be proud of myself. For the love of God, I ask for strength through the help of your prayers. I thank you most humbly for the trouble you have taken to write to me and for the honor you have shown me by thinking of me. I do not deserve this, and God is indeed good to put up with me. O my very dear Father, offer my will to the divine mercy for I want, with the help of His holy grace, to be converted and to call myself truly, Monsieur, your very humble servant and unworthy daughter in Our Lord.

P.S. Mademoiselle du Fay is still suffering from her physical infirmities. She has been in bed almost constantly for the past two weeks. Fortunately she does not have a fever. She greatly desires your return.

L.3B - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

Saturday Noon (May 1630)

For the past year there has been no Procurator for the Confraternity

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1. Mother Superior of the Monastery of the Visitation, Mother Anne-Catherine de Beaumont.
 2. The priests of the Seminary of Saint-Nicholas-du-Chardonnet, a community founded by Monsieur Bourdoise (1584-1655) for the education of the clergy.

of Charity.¹ However, there is a good man who faithfully records receipts and expenditures. At the present time he is quite willing to accept the office by election.

The Ladies of Charity have become a bit less fervent in the exercise of charity. They often fail to visit the sick on their appointed days because the Treasurer is so good-natured that she has the food cooked for them. Moreover, she and the Superioress have sometimes been satisfied with simply giving money to the sick. They have also given money to other needy persons and have frequently neglected to supply meat, preferring to give the sick eggs or some other thing they fancied.

These Ladies, or at least most of them, also go months without receiving Holy Communion. They need to have their fervor rekindled by a sermon when a priest goes there for the election of the Procurator.

The Superioress has been content to keep the strong box herself and has given both keys to the Treasurer. They are having problems receiving the sick. They claim that there should not be a Confraternity of Charity to admit only those who have nothing at all since there are few, if any, of this type while there are many whose goods are so tied up that they would rather starve than sell what they have and help themselves.

1631-1636

1632

January: *Monsieur Vincent and the Congregation of the Mission take up residence at Saint-Lazare.*

May 10: *Death of Field Marshal Louis de Marillac, uncle of Louise, beheaded on the Place de Grève in Paris.*

August 7: *Death of Michel de Marillac in his prison cell in Châteaudun.*

1633

c. February: *Death of Marguerite Naseau.*

November 29: *Founding of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.*

1634

Founding of the Confraternity of Charity at the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris.

July 31: *First Conference by Monsieur Vincent to the Daughters of Charity.*

1. Confraternity of Charity of Villepreux, established on the land of the de Gondi family.

1636

Transfer of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity to the village of La Chapelle.

L.4 - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

To Monsieur Father Vincent

September 4 (c. 1634)

Monsieur,

I am returning the Rule of Saint-Sauveur to you. I had not seen it. It appears that the first part makes the Confraternity completely dependent upon the Pastor. I do not know if this is wise. It is certainly true that the Pastors in Beauvais would be delighted to have it that way. However, this would immediately lead them to want no one else to know what was happening within each Confraternity. On the other hand, I believe, Monsieur, that the Officers must keep them informed about the reception of the sick, at least telling them whom they will accept. A provision must be made in the Rule stating that the Pastor records the votes during an election and that the Treasurer gives the financial report in his presence. No mention should be made, however, of the Vicar General. The number of Ladies should be indicated as is the case in the present Rule. It should also state that vacancies will be filled by those upon whom the Company has agreed, and subsequently they will be presented to the Pastor to be incorporated and receive his blessing.

As for the question of a Procurator, I do not know if we can easily find one for every Confraternity. The Ladies would never turn over the records of the collections to him. As for keeping the accounts, I think that the women can take care of this themselves. There would be nothing else for him to do except perhaps to see to it that any legacies there might be would be administered for the benefit of the Confraternity. In that case, one Procurator for all the Confraternities would appear to be sufficient. These suggestions are only for Beauvais. The ordinary Rule is good for Liancourt, especially the provisions which recommend friendship among the members and give the greatest [details] concerning the morning and evening exercises and the practice of recalling the presence of God during the day. Also, Monsieur, I recommend that vacant places be filled as provided here. Good Procurators can be found everywhere.

Please let me know, Monsieur, if you will now add a particular article for this Officer who is seeking so earnestly to be admitted as Procurator

for the goods of the Confraternity. Let me know also if the Rule will provide for two girls to be named by Madame de Liancourt¹ as nurses for the sick. They would reside in the housing which the Duchess would furnish for this purpose and would be obliged to bring medicine to the sick of La Bruyère, Cauffry and Rantigny as well as Liancourt. They would be expected to visit the sick at least twice a week and to carry out all that is required by and provided for by the foundation set up for this purpose. In this area, collections are taken up in the homes on Sundays and in the churches on major feasts. The Procurators keep a book in which they record the receipts from each collection. The Treasurer does the same. Only strong boxes with two locks are to be used. I think that it should be added that the two guardians are to be members of the Confraternity.

I believe, Monsieur, that it would be appropriate to have a register in each strong box similar to the one which I left with you so that all the happenings of the Confraternity could be recorded in it. I think that the Act of Establishment should be written at the beginning, followed by the Rule, the names of the Ladies, and the results of the election of the Procurator and of the officers. Place could be left after this for subsequent elections.

Toward the middle of the book, a place should be indicated where a record is to be kept of the names of the Ladies who have died and of those who have replaced them. Another section should be reserved for pious legacies and for extraordinary gifts, while a list of furniture belonging to the poor should be kept in another section. The book that I brought you is from La Bruyère because the Act of Establishment contains all the necessary signatures.

I believe that the Superioress must also keep a register in which she writes the names of the sick poor, the date on which they were received, and the date on which they died or were discharged by the Confraternity.

If you had not told me to draw up this report, Monsieur, I would not have dared to do so. I do not know why I have delayed so long in writing except that I realize that my mind is very slow both to do good for others and for my own practices.

Good Sister Jeanne from the parish of Saint-Benoit² has just brought me three girls from Colombe who seem very promising and who desire to serve the poor anywhere that they are sent. I believe that they will go to see you one of these days. I am sorry that I missed the day that your Charity was willing to give me. I think it was my fault. I have great need of a few days to think about myself and be renewed. I believe, Monsieur,

1. Madame the Duchess de Liancourt, born Jeanne de Schomberg (1600-1674), Lady of Charity. She established the Confraternity of Charity on her estates.

2. Parish of Paris

when the time comes for me to take charge of the Confraternity of Charity of the parish of Saint-Laurent, if you wish to honor me by employing me for this, that I should spend a few days there. I could use this occasion, if you judge it appropriate. But for the love of God, Monsieur, ask the divine mercy to let you know my needs; otherwise, I will believe that He wishes to abandon me completely because He allows you to feel this way.

I am enclosing a report of each of the Assemblies of Beauvais. I believe that it would be well for the Rule that you are drawing up to be for Saint-Sauveur.¹ When you send it, you could ask that it be sent to the other Charities to be copied. If you would be so good as to take the trouble to re-read the letter I sent you from Liancourt, you will perhaps find something more that I am not telling you at this time. Please excuse the disorder of my presentation. I almost want to blame my poor memory, but you know me as I am and as I always shall be, Monsieur, your very humble daughter and most grateful servant.

P. S. Collections are made every Monday in Beauvais, but I think it would be well to take them up also on major feasts in the church. I believe that with the imminent establishment of the Mission at Beauvais, as the Bishop wishes, it will be easy to obtain all that could be desired for the good of the Confraternity. I did not undertake to suggest this collection.

L.5 - TO MONSIEUR DEHORGNY²

(at the Collège des Bons-Enfants)

September 29, 1635

Monsieur,

I received the 100 pounds which you sent me. I beg you to take the trouble to tell me how many shirts, caps and handkerchiefs you want, as well as whatever else you need.

I am very sorry that the linen bourse was too large. I am sending you a chalice veil. Please let me know if it is the right kind. With the help of God, I shall not fail to do whatever you want. You are too kind to me.

1. Parish of Paris

2. Monsieur Dehorgny, one of the first Priests of the Mission. He joined Monsieur Vincent in 1627. He was, in turn, Superior of the Collège des Bons-Enfants (1632-1635, 1638-1643, 1654-1659), Assistant General of the Congregation (1642-1644, 1654-1667), and Superior of the house of Rome (1644-1647). Monsieur Vincent often sent him to visit the Vincentian houses and those of the Daughters of Charity. At the death of Monsieur Portail, he was named Director of the Daughters of Charity.

I thank you most humbly for the honor you do my son. He is going to profit from the good you do him. God wants him to benefit from it and to be grateful for all your charity. I recommend him constantly to your prayers as well as myself who remain, Monsieur, your very humble servant.

L.43 - TO SISTER BARBE¹

*Daughter of Charity, Servant of the Sick Poor
of the Parish of Saint-Paul² (Paris)*

(c. 1636)

My very dear Sister,

I am very concerned about the illness of our dear sister whom I most cordially greet at the feet of Jesus Christ, frequently inviting her, for His holy love, not to become weary of experiencing within herself the needs of our masters, the sick poor, for assistance, cordiality and gentleness. It is in this state that she can show her fidelity in loving the holy will of God. And I am certain that you, my dear Sister, are taking good care of her. But I beg of you, Sister, call a doctor immediately and take care of the sick of the parish.

You know how important it is, in that parish, not to give occasion to anyone to gossip. Visit the sick, please.

Although our other sisters look after them well and show them much charity, it is more appropriate for you to tend to them yourself. I hope that our good God will bless the care you give, and I pray that He will grant you sufficient strength and courage to overcome the little difficulties

1. Barbe Angiboust (1605-1658) from the parish of Saint-Pierre of Serville, near Chartres. She joined the very first Daughters of Charity on July 1, 1634. Louise discovered the richness of her character very quickly and sent her as "the foundation stone" to numerous establishments: 1636: the parish of Saint-Paul, then the parish of Saint-Sulpice in Paris; 1637: Saint-Jacques-de-la-Boucherie; 1638: Saint-Germaine-en-Laye, then Richelieu; 1642: the galley slaves; 1645: probably Serqueux; 1646: Fontainebleau; 1649: Saint-Denis; 1652: Brienne; 1653: Châlons; 1654: Bernay; 1658: Châteaudun. Barbe Angiboust was also chosen for visitations: the foundlings placed with wet nurses (1644, 1648); houses of the Daughters of Charity: Liencourt in 1649; Sainte-Marie-du-Mont in 1657; Varize in 1658. On March 25, 1652 she committed herself totally to the service of the poor by making perpetual vows. She died on December 27, 1658.
2. Serving the poor of the parish of Saint-Paul from 1632-1633 onwards, the Daughters of Charity had to live there when the Motherhouse was transferred to the village of La Chapelle.

you will encounter. I remain in His most holy love, your very humble sister and servant.

P. S. If you still need another sister, please let me know.

L.6 - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

December 1636

Monsieur,

Madame de Beaufort¹ told me that this is the opportune time to work for the establishment of the Confraternity of Charity of the parish of Saint-Étienne. She added that the Pastor strongly favors this and authorized her and another Lady to take up a collection during the present feast days, which they did. I beg you most humbly, Monsieur, to take the trouble to inform me how I should act in this matter.

I had thought of telling her, if you approve, that the Ladies who show the greatest desire for this holy work should go to the Pastor and tell him that, in order to begin well and to persevere, they need to gather together a large number of persons, both from the nobility and from the lower class, so that some of them will contribute most of the funds while the others will give themselves more willingly to visit the sick poor on their appointed days. So that no one will be inconvenienced, it will be suggested that it would perhaps be well to divide the parish into two districts. However, in order to work efficaciously, the first thing that must be done is to ask the Pastor to have a detailed report drawn up by an ecclesiastic who knows the parishioners well and then to have a sermon preached on this subject in his church after which all the Ladies named would be assembled. An announcement would also be made at Mass inviting all women, of whatever class, who would like to participate in the work, to come to the Assembly. At the Assembly, the Rule observed in other parishes would be proposed.

I am telling you all this, Monsieur, so as to save time. These good women have been trying to encourage one another to undertake this work for so long, that I feel we must strike while the iron is hot. However, please tell me if you want something different from what I propose. Please, you know it must be like that.

I thank you most humbly, Monsieur, for your charity. God knows well that I needed this help and He sent the address of a good milkmaid who has been supplying us for three days.

Here we are at the end of the year. If God gives me the life to begin

1. Madame de Beaufort, Lady of Charity of the Parish of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont.

another, I want it to be profitable for His service. I beg your Charity to say a few words to me about this. The poor are satisfied with little. I will consider myself most fortunate since I gave myself to God through you, and I am, Monsieur, your very humble daughter and servant.

P.S. Monsieur, all your daughters take the liberty of recommending themselves to your charity.

1638-1639

1638

Beginning of the work with the foundlings.

Establishment of the Daughters of Charity at Saint-Germain-en-Laye and at Richelieu.

Epidemic of the plague in Paris.

1639

Beginning of the work with the galley slaves.

Establishment of the Daughters of Charity at the Hospital of Angers: trip of Louise de Marillac with three sisters at the end of November.

L.7 - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

La Chapelle (January 17, 1638)

Monsieur,

The Procurator of the Confraternity of Charity and our sisters are accomplishing wonders today for the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus. They themselves wanted me to send a message to beg you to provide them with a conference for vespers. They cannot be recited before two-thirty. They would like to have Father de la Salle, but if that is not possible they would be pleased with another. I join my plea to theirs so that they may be encouraged to persevere.

I believe that you know that Sister Barbe¹ is here and that she and I are both in good health. I think it would be well if she had the honor of seeing you before she leaves. Should we not think about the little furnishings that she will be needing? Please do not worry about the wet-

1. Barbe Angiboust was sent to serve the poor in Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

nurse for the infants. They have not arrived yet. Ours will suffice for the time you indicate and even longer.

I remain in the love of Jesus, Monsieur, your very humble and most grateful servant.

L.26 - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

July 2 (c. 1638)

Monsieur,

They have come to tell me that the plague¹ has broken out in the house where our sisters of the Hôtel-Dieu are living. I beg you to tell me if I should withdraw them or, if I leave them, whether I should tell the Ladies not to go there and whether we ourselves, that is, the sisters of this house² should go. Do you think there is any danger in taking them jellies for the Hôtel-Dieu?

You have forgotten me and the need which I told you I had to discuss with you. I do not know what the Lord is telling me in that, but I hope that your Charity will let me know because I am, Monsieur, your very humble daughter and most grateful servant.

P.S. I am not speaking to you about what I had done so badly for the sisters. I shall wait to hear what it pleases your Charity to tell me to do.

L.38 - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

Sunday (c. 1638)

Monsieur,

I am sending your reply to Madame Pelletier³ by Sister Turgis.⁴ I am

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1. The plague epidemic in Paris.
 2. The Motherhouse at La Chapelle.
 3. Madame Pelletier, undoubtedly the daughter of Madame de Herse, see Letter 126, who had married the nephew of Madame Goussault, see Letter 11. She did not continue in the Company of the Daughters of Charity.
 4. Élisabeth Le Goutteux, the widow Turgis, entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity in 1636. Intelligent and cultured, she helped Louise de Marillac with total devotion and replaced her during the times of her absence from the Motherhouse. Louise de Marillac entrusted to her the responsibility for the new community in Angers in 1640. She sent her there again for a few months in 1644. Sent to Richelieu in 1646, to Chars

so wicked that I would have preferred, given her imminent departure, that this message had never been sent. Monsieur de Liancourt was here yesterday. I did not see him, but he sent me word that his wife was greatly upset by my return to Paris. My little blood-letting of yesterday put me into a sweat for the entire night which greatly relieved me, thank God, so I am now out of bed. Because I have neither the strength nor the health to go to see you in this bad weather, and I need to talk with you, I told the brother porter that I was going to beg you to take the trouble to come here. I take this liberty because of the confidence which your Charity gave me in this regard in the past and because I believe, Monsieur, that I am still, your very humble and most grateful daughter and servant.

L.89 - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

Thursday (c. 1638)

Monsieur,

Sister Turgis is greatly upset because the Sergeant of the Company of Monsieur de Castillon came to tell her that he would be sending soldiers to be billeted in the quarters at the front and in the ones where the children are housed. They will be noisy. Please let her know by this porter, if she does not come herself, whether upon her return she should refuse to let them stay, relying on the support of Madame the Duchess d'Aiguillon¹ or Madame the wife of the Chancellor until your Charity can obtain a prohibition from the Queen, or whether you have a better solution. I remain, Monsieur, your very humble and most grateful daughter and servant.

in 1647, then to Chantilly in 1648, she died after a brief illness in 1648.

1. Marie de Vignerod (1604-1678) was the niece of Richelieu. Widowed at 18 years of age, she who had become, despite herself, the Marquise de Comlet, entered Carmel. Her powerful uncle brought her back to the court of Louis XIII against her will and gave her the dukedom of Aiguillon as a dowery. The Duchess d'Aiguillon participated in all of Monsieur Vincent's works and assisted him out of her immense fortune.

L.8B - TO MONSIEUR VINCENT

Tuesday (c. 1638)

Monsieur,

Just a word. I believe that it is necessary to attend promptly to this poor girl who has so won the hearts of the local people that rumor has it that they will not accept another if we remove her. She has been seeking advice for a long time from everyone, especially a bachelor club known as the Gentlemen of the Corner from whom she receives delicacies, bottles of wine and pâtés, and thanks to whom she lives excessively well. I humbly beg you, for the love of God, to reflect on the problems resulting from this terrible situation of which I think I am the cause. I beseech you, Monsieur, to pray to God to ask Him to pardon me, your very humble and most grateful daughter and servant.

L.9 - TO THE MOTHER SUPERIOR OF THE BENEDICTINES

at Argenteuil¹

La Chapelle, May 16, 1639

Madame,

You are perhaps surprised, since I do not have the honor of knowing you or of being known by you, that I am taking the liberty of writing to you. I would not do so were I not convinced that you would not be offended because it is for the love of God, whom we desire to love and serve, that I am sending you a girl from here who is of good character and filled with good desires to fill the place of a lay sister which I have heard is vacant in your house.

I was informed of this by one of the daughters, servants of the sick poor of the parish Confraternities of Charity, whom God has called and maintained in this state for eight years. I did not want to believe, Madame, that it was you who ordered her to be turned away from her vocation. I could not imagine that those who know the importance of a vocation would want to set up obstacles to the designs of God and place a soul in danger for her salvation by withdrawing help from the abandoned poor who are in great need and who can only find relief in the service of these good girls, who are detached from all self-interest and who give themsel-

1. The Confraternity of Charity was established there in 1634.

ves to God for the spiritual and corporal service of these poor creatures that His goodness wills to look upon as His members. Would to God, Madame, that the girl you already have in your house is serving you well and is happy. I want to believe that she was not called to the work in which she was employed, otherwise she would be most blamable. But Madame, I beg of you no longer to permit them to be accepted as candidates with your consent. This could be a temptation for many others, although it does not prevent me from being, as I am in the love of Jesus Crucified, your very humble and most obedient servant.

L.11 - TO SISTERS BARBE ANGIBOUST AND LOUISE GANSET¹

(at Richelieu)²

October 26, 1639

My dear Sisters,

I have no doubt that you have been greatly moved by the death of Madame Goussault,³ widow of the President. The debt we owe her should lead us to imitate her so that God may be glorified. I hope that you will do so with the help of His grace. You have already felt the effects of this grace, my Daughters, in the good which His loving kindness has willed you to accomplish in the place where you now are. However, I have learned what I have always greatly feared. Your work, which has been succeeding so well for the relief of the sick and the instruction of girls, has done nothing for your advancement in perfection. On the contrary, it seems to have hindered it since the good odor of virtue which you were spreading is beginning to dissipate.

Reflect, my dear Sisters, on what you are doing. You frequently cause God to be offended. God is not glorified and your neighbor is scandalized. On account of you, the holy exercise of charity is held in less esteem. How will you dare one day to appear before God to render Him an

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1. Louise Ganset, Daughter of Charity, was sent to Richelieu in 1638, to the galley slaves in 1644, and to Maule a few years later.
 2. Richelieu: As early as 1637, Cardinal Richelieu asked Monsieur Vincent for missionaries for the city, south of Chinon, which he had had constructed at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Daughters of Charity were sent there at the end of the year 1638 to serve the sick and to run the school.
 3. Madame Goussault, born Geneviève Fayet. In 1631, she became the widow of Antoine Goussault, Advisor to the King and President of the Administration of Finances. She suggested the establishment of the Confraternity of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu to Monsieur Vincent and became its President. She favored sending the Daughters of Charity to Angers. She died like a saint on September 20, 1639.

account of the use you have made of the great grace which He gave you when He called you to the state in which He has placed you? He had expected to derive glory from your works but you have usurped it. You, Sister Barbe, do so by your lack of cordiality toward the sister whom God has given you, by your haughty attitude and by the little forbearance you show for her infirmities. How could you forget that when you were placed with her as her superior you were obliged to become like a mother with even greater responsibilities than a natural mother since you must help your sister to work out her salvation and grow in perfection. This obliges you to act with great gentleness and charity as the Son of God recommended when He was on earth. When you accepted this duty, were you not immediately aware of the degree of humility which it required of you since it furnishes you with so many occasions to recognize your weaknesses? Should you not always keep before your eyes the awareness that when you command something you are doing so by obedience, and that of yourself you have no right to order anything?

Courage, my dear Sister! I hope that the harm is not so great that it is without remedy. Place your faults clearly before your eyes without making excuses because in reality nothing outside of ourselves is the cause of the evil we commit. Admit this truth before God. Stir up in your heart a great love for our dear Sister Louise. In the sight of the merciful justice of God, throw yourself at her feet and ask her pardon for your coldness toward her and for all the pain that you have caused her. Promise her that, with the grace of God, you will love her as Jesus Christ Himself wills you to and will show her the concern that you must have for her. Then embrace her with these true sentiments in your heart.

And here you are, my dear Sister Louise, fallen once again into your bad habits! What do you think of the state you are in? Is it a life without restraint? Far from it. It must be one of continual submission and obedience. Is it possible that you have never reflected upon this, or if you do so that you have so little love for God and so little fear for your salvation that you fail to do what you are obliged to do? My Daughter, practice a little mortification. What do you gain by making visits or going on pilgrimages without permission? Do you want to live according to your own will in everything? Have you forgotten that you must not do anything or go anywhere without the permission of Sister Barbe, whom you accepted as your superior before your departure, and whom you must love as much or more than if she were your mother? I think that you never reflect on your state in life because you do so many things that are incompatible with it. Would you not regret losing your vocation for such trifling satisfactions?

I believe that the cause of most of the faults that you commit—and this has just occurred to me—is that you have money and have always liked possessing it. Take my word for this and rid yourself of this

affection. Place everything in the hands of Sister Barbe and be satisfied with what she considers appropriate. Cultivate a love for poverty in imitation of the Son of God. By so doing, you will obtain the graces necessary to be a true Daughter of Charity. Otherwise, I doubt very strongly that you will persevere. I say this to you with the fear that you will not heed my word, but I could not refrain from speaking. Accept it graciously because it is the love that God gives me for each of you that causes me to speak in this way. Courage, my dear Sister! I am confident that you will not disregard my little corrections. Recognizing how much God merits to be loved and served, repent for having so badly acquitted yourself of this responsibility from the time He gave you the grace of calling you to this way of life, and particularly to this place where He has bestowed His blessings upon your holy employment. Take a much firmer resolution than you have made in the past. Throw yourself at Sister Barbe's feet with . . . (letter torn).

Do you not see that your souls are not at rest, and therefore, that you are not sharing in the holy peace which the Son of God brought to those who are of good will, nor are you partaking in that peace which He left to His holy Apostles when He ascended into heaven.

Admonishing you of your faults has brought my own before my eyes. This causes me, my Daughters, to tell you that the one that troubles me most at this time is the bad example I have given you in the practice of the virtues which I recommend to you. I beg you, my dear Sisters, to overlook this, to ask pardon of God for me and the grace to amend my life, which I desire with all my heart.

I have also been very negligent about writing to you. I hope and pray that you pardon me. I offer to our good God the act of reconciliation which I am convinced you will make with hearts filled with good will. I unite my heart to yours so that together we may obtain the mercy of which we stand in need and the grace to live henceforth in the love of Jesus Crucified, in whom I remain, my very dear Sisters, your very humble sister and servant.

P.S. Do you know, my very dear Sisters, what I expect of your reconciliation after a renewal of affection? It is that you will open your hearts to one another; that you will rarely be seen one without the other; that you will make your visits to the city together; that you will avoid particular friendships with the Ladies, refraining from visiting them at all and preferring to remain at home with one another. I do not mean that you should refuse the visits that good women will have the charity to make to you. True humility will regulate everything.