On April 26, our Most Honored Father M. Vincent did us the kindness of giving us a conference on the danger of disunion in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and His Charity said to us, "Sisters, our topic for today is very important, since it involves nothing less than the continuance or the entire dissolution of your Company. So, Sisters, each of us should raise our minds to God, place ourselves in His presence, and entreat Him in His goodness to give us the thoughts we need on this subject. In preceding conferences, I noticed that you needed some help in finding motives or reasons for what had been suggested to you. That's why I felt it would be better to change the method in order to make it easier for you to understand what you will be taught, and this will be a big help to you in making your meditation. I'll use questions and answers, as is done for catechism lessons.

"This conference has three points. The first concerns the reasons for desiring that no disunion ever arise in your Company. How right it is to desire this, Sisters! If anyone can't give an answer, please don't worry about it because persons who say little sometimes do better, and those who catch on quickly and have no trouble discussing what is proposed to them, sometimes don't do as well, although there are some who speak and do so well. Those who speak well, Sisters, should humble themselves profoundly—that's a gift for which they should express their gratitude to God—and those who have a hard time understanding what is suggested, or have difficulty expressing their thoughts, should put themselves in God's hands and take fresh resolutions to do good.

"Well now, Sister, tell me what reasons we have for desiring that disunion should never arise in the Company, either among individual Sisters or in general; for example, if the whole Company was divided, with some wanting one thing and others something else. First of all, what do you think the word 'disunion' means? It means that
something that should be whole and entire is divided. Take my body, for instance, all the members together form only one body. They form a union as long as they are joined to the body, but, if my hand were cut off, don’t you see that there would be disunion? Now uniformity is what maintains union in the body of a Community: observance of the same Rules, the same way of dressing, and the same harmony. There would be no union if Sisters had contrary desires and complained to others. God grant that this may never happen to your Company! All right, Sister, go ahead.”

“I really had a hard time understanding the meaning of the word ‘union.’ I thought, Monsieur, that it was a virtue Your Charity has frequently explained to us and that all of us should have it in order to do God’s Will.”

“And you, Sister, why should we desire that there never be any disunion in the Company?”

“Because, Monsieur, where there’s union and harmony, there is love of God and the neighbor, and where there’s disunion, we find hatred of God and of the neighbor.”

“And you, Sister?”

“I think union fosters peace and tranquillity, and disunion causes war and unrest.”

“Right you are, Sister! You see, Sisters, all the wars and misfortunes you witness are the result of disunion, which always causes trouble and unrest.”

“Union preserves persons in their vocation,” said another Sister, “and disunion often causes them to lose it.”

“That’s what usually happens, Sisters. Well now, let’s go on; I hope this sort of conference will be more helpful than the others. Don’t you think so, Sisters?” All of them said yes.

“Blessed be God, Sisters! I feel my heart deeply consoled, and I’m as edified as I was ashamed at the last conference—not on your account, Sisters, oh no, but on my own, because of my wretchedness.

“And you, Sister, why should we want union always to exist in the Company?”

“Monsieur, disunion seems to me to be like a building that’s falling down.”
"That's so true, Sister. You see a well-built house that seems to be in excellent condition; but, if it should become unstable—if, for instance, a beam should give way—not only would the beam fall but the ceiling as well, so, instead of union, the house would be in confusion. And that’s why each individual should be on the watch to avoid discord, for, if it were not put right, the whole body would infallibly feel the effect.

"And you, Sister, who come next, tell us some other reason."

"Monsieur, one compelling reason is that union rejoices or pleases God, who is always present where there’s peace. On the contrary, disunion gladdens the devil; a divided heart is like hell—always restless and troubled; and discord, which is born of disunion, puts it in constant turmoil."

"O Sister, what you just said is so true!"

"Union," said another Sister, "is the image of the Most Blessed Trinity which is composed of three Divine Persons, united by love. If we’re closely united, we’ll all be of one will and in complete harmony. Disunion, on the contrary, would give us a picture of hell, where the demons live in perpetual discord and hatred."

"You see, Sisters, how obliged you are to maintain union among yourselves, which is so pleasing to God, so displeasing to the devil, and so useful to yourselves! Be very grateful to God for the grace He gives you to understand this truth!

"And you, Sister, what reason do you have for wanting the Community of the Daughters of Charity always to live in perfect union?"

"It seems to me, Monsieur, that union must give joy to God, because where there’s peace, there God is; on the contrary, disunion saddens God and rejoices the devil, who looks only for discord and disunion in order to ruin us."

"Well said, Sister; God doesn’t want to reside where there’s disunion, and it was to point this out to us that, when He appeared to His Apostles after His Resurrection, His first words were, ‘Peace be with you!’"  

"And you, Sister?"

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1 Cf. Lk 24:36. (NAB)
"I think union is the image of the Blessed Trinity. The three Persons are only one same God, united by love from all eternity. We, therefore, should be only one body in several persons, united with the same end in view for the love of God. On the contrary, disunion seems to me like the image of hell, where the devils and the damned are in a state of perpetual discord and hatred."

"O Sisters, do you see the truth of what this Sister is saying? In no way can there be any disunion in heaven. There was, once; do you know why? When Lucifer and a group of the angels tried to raise themselves above their state, they were immediately hurled into hell, and those who continued to be united in their obedience and submission to God remained, and will remain, eternally in heaven. Should there be any disunion among you and it couldn't be remedied, it would be absolutely necessary to remove those who were causing it."

"Union is so excellent," said another Sister, "that Our Lord willed to give himself to us under the beautiful name of Communion. That's why we must ardently desire that union always exist among us, since God loves it so much."

"And what do you think, Sister?"

"Since union is the source of such great benefits, and since disunion, on the contrary, causes such great evils, it seems to me, Monsieur, that we must do our utmost to maintain union among us."

"I beg God with all my heart, Sisters, to grant you the grace always to reflect on the necessity of union and to help you to remember all the evils disunion may cause, which you've noted, namely, that it drives out the love of God and the neighbor, engenders wars and anxiety, causes the loss of vocation, saddens God, makes souls unworthy of Holy Communion, and separates you from one another. Disunion would cause all those disorders and many others among you, Sisters, whereas union brings many benefits to Communities and to anywhere else it's found."

"It seems to me," another Sister noted, "that one of the strongest reasons we have for preventing disunion among ourselves is that, if we were in conflict, we would displease God who loves union so much, not only in reasonable creatures, but even in all the things
created by His omnipotence, and that He has provided them in their very nature with means of union, even in those things that oppose each other. And since, when God created our souls, His plan was to unite us to himself, and He sent His Son on earth to help us to do so, we would really be very contemptible if we didn’t love union and, by disunion and disorder, put ourselves in danger of losing what God has given us by His love. That would be to oppose oneself deliberately to the most holy Will of God.

“Another reason for always maintaining perfect union among ourselves is that disunion in the Company would be a hindrance to the reception of God’s grace, which it really needs to survive. Otherwise, it could happen that the Company might begin to weaken or—what is worse—might become a scandal to the world, and God wouldn’t be glorified by the service His Goodness wants it to render our neighbor for love of Him.”

“If disunion were to arise among you, Sisters, it could happen that God in His anger might destroy your Company. For those who offended Him in this way this wouldn’t be a great shame, for they would thoroughly deserve it, but what a misfortune if we consider the good that’s now being done, and the even greater good that could be done! Would there be a hell severe enough to punish those who had committed such a great sin? Watch out for that, Sisters! Blessed be God for having inspired the topic of this conference! I hope much good will result from it. I’ve been greatly consoled by it. And don’t you think, Sisters, that it was necessary to discuss this matter?” All the Sisters expressed their joy at this conference.

“Blessed be God, Sisters! It’s His Goodness that inspired all of you to say what you did; but do your best to profit from it, for this must be an important instruction for you, even as useful as a sermon. But what am I saying? Doubtless, anything God inspires you to say should be a sermon for you. Take heart, Sisters!” And still looking at the Sister to whom he was speaking, he said, “Tell us some motive, Sister.”

“We should greatly fear disunion because if two Sisters visit the sick and have some difference of opinion, it would be very difficult
to conceal this; consequently, the neighbor would be scandalized
by it."

"You see, Sisters, that what this good Sister is saying is true, for
the result of disunion is that if one wants to do one thing, the other
will want to do something else; people who see this will not be ed-
ified, and the poor will have good reason for not accepting in good
part the advice they give them for their own good. 'Look at those
Daughters of Charity,' they'll say, 'they don't get along with one
another.' How easily disunion, even among individuals, paves the
way for the ruin of a Community, Sisters! My body is one in all its
members, but just let an incision be made in my hand, causing the
flesh to separate, and it will be felt throughout my body. So it is with
Communities; when one part is out of harmony, all the rest of it suf-
fers, for those who see this and are scandalized by it don't simply
say, 'It's Jeanne and Marguerite who behave like that,' but rather,
'It's the Daughters of Charity.' Because for only two who have
fallen out, the whole body of the Daughters of Charity suffers and
has to endure the scandal, but when all of them are united, how they
edify their neighbor, and God is honored by it!"

"Monsieur," remarked another Sister, "disunion is a very bad
thing because it drives God from our soul, and we shouldn't even go
to Holy Communion when we're not united."

"What an excellent remark, Sisters, for God forbids those who
are at odds with their neighbor from approaching the holy altar, and
He has said so in these words, 'If you bring your gift to the altar and
there recall that you have something against your neighbor, go back
and be reconciled with your neighbor.' ² Quoi! Sisters, to go to Holy
Communion with dissension in your heart, when you are out of har-
mony with your neighbor, that must not be done! That would be
greater cruelty than that of a judge who, to make a man die a misera-
ble death, ordered him to be bound mouth to mouth and stomach to
stomach to a corpse so that, as that body decayed, the man who was
alive would be infected by the corruption and would die by inches.
It would be far worse and more disgraceful to put God, who is life it-

²Cf. Mt 5:23-24. (NAB)
self and the author of life, in a heart infected with disunion. Isn’t this to want to place Jesus Christ among devils? So, Sisters, see if you don’t have good reason to prevent disunion among you, since it is so harmful to you! Blessed be God for the knowledge He is giving you about this! Make good use of it.”

“Disunion among us would be a great evil,” said a Sister, “because God couldn’t be pleased with the service we would render Him; He’d be offended by the persons who should be glorifying Him. It would cause aversions and complaining among us, and the patients wouldn’t be served with charity. That’s why we must carefully avoid any disunion among us, both in general and in particular.”

“As for myself,” remarked another Sister, “I thought that if I were at variance with others, it would be the worst thing that could happen to me, and my soul would be deeply troubled.”

“That’s true, Sister. And you, Sister?”

“I thought, Monsieur, that we should always try to live together in unity because disunion is contrary to the charity we must have for one another, and that God, in punishment for these faults of ours, would withdraw His grace from us. I thought that if disunion existed among us, God wouldn’t make use of us any longer to participate in the graces He wants to bestow on the poor people we’re supposed to serve.”

“And you, Sister?”

“It seems to me that, as far as possible, we must prevent disunion from infiltrating the Company, because not only would we be disunited in body, but, what is worse, we would be cut off from God and unable to attain the perfection He asks of us.” Another Sister noted that it would be difficult for us to have union and charity with outsiders if we were in the habit of being disunited among ourselves.”

“It seems to me,” said another, “that we must always take great care to preserve union among ourselves in order to be an example for those who come after us and to make ourselves pleasing to God. If we were at variance, we would resemble the foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps, for we would be without charity.”
Another Sister said that we really have to want to be united for love of God, whom we should love dearly.

"I also thought," added another Sister, "that we should love union very much, because disunion caused the damnation of Lucifer."

"That's well said, Sister. Lucifer, like the other angels, was once perfectly united to God; when disunion arose among them, those who caused it were driven out of paradise and sent to hell for all eternity. How dangerous it is to be disunited, Sisters! You're fortunate that God is giving you the grace not to experience that peril."

"A sign that God wishes us to be always united," remarked another Sister, "is that even in nature, contrary things have the means of being united. We have to believe that God's intention in creating us is to unite our souls with Him, which presupposes union with our neighbor; otherwise we'd lack charity, which is necessary for union with God." Another reason given by the same Sister is that disunion in the Company would place an obstacle in the way of the graces it needs if it is to last; it would follow that it might begin to weaken or, what would be worse, be a cause of scandal to the world. Furthermore, God wouldn't be glorified by the services His Goodness wants to obtain from it.

"Blessed be God, Sisters! Blessed be God! I assure you that this method of holding a conference really edifies me. I can't tell you how much it consoles me, in the hope that it will be helpful to you and that you'll learn by this means how to discover the motives for saying or doing the things that will be proposed to us. I think that those who haven't yet spoken might find even other reasons, but what has been said shows us sufficiently that we have very powerful reasons for always remaining closely united with one another, for we see that union is the source of all sorts of benefits, both spiritual and temporal, and disunion is the cause of all evils, as experience clearly shows us.

"Let's go on to the second point, which is what should be done in the event that there might be any disunion in the Company, both in general and in particular, if, for instance, Marie had fallen out with Françoise, or Barbe with Jeanne, or if some disagreement had arisen in the Company causing Sisters to take sides; for instance, if
one side should say, 'As for me, I'd like to go to Holy Communion on Thursdays,' and the other might choose some other day. If some were of one opinion and decided on one thing, and others of another, what should be done? Should you take sides, that is, agree with one side or the other? Most of the Sisters said no, and Most Honored Father continued, 'That's the way it should be, Sisters, we must always suspend our judgment. What should you do, Sister, if you heard that two Sisters had fallen out?'

'I'd have to try to bring them together by excusing both of them.'

'You're perfectly correct, Sister. The Bishop of Geneva says in his writings that sometimes two persons get annoyed with each other without rhyme or reason, just as when two heavily laden porters, coming from different directions with their heads down, don't see one another and bang into each other. True, they crashed into one another, but without intending to do so. Sometimes the same thing happens among you. It's true that at times you say or do something without thinking that gives reason for annoyance, but if you had the charity that always prompts you to union, then you certainly wouldn't allow yourselves to get angry. Act like those good porters who don't get into an argument but simply go their way. If someone tells you she's annoyed, say that the Sister with whom she's angry didn't mean it. At times, Sisters, we see some disagreement and disunion among ourselves. Isn't the same true of our own internal organs? You may have heard people say that our bowels occasionally get very upset; they become so twisted that a serious condition may result, and persons sometimes die of it. And you're well aware that there's no ill will among them because they're incapable of that. The same applies to you, Sisters; always live in such perfect union that, by God's grace, you'll be incapable of getting angry with one another. If a Sister complains to you about another, excuse the latter and say, 'Sister dear, our Sister never meant to annoy you.'

'And you, dear Sister, what should be done?'

'In the first place, when we reflect on the great benefits that come from being united and the great evils caused by disunion, with
hearts filled with charity we should ask God for the grace to be able to help our Sisters with that."

"And what do you think, Sister? What should be done if this evil of disunion should arise?"

"Monsieur, we should pray for Sisters who may be in such a state."

"Shouldn't you do some penance for them, Sisters, such as taking the discipline or some other act of austerity? That would be one good means. But what else should be done, Sister?"

"I think we should make inquiries individually, Monsieur, before blaming either one, then try to get both of them to be reconciled—I mean, to ask each other's forgiveness."

"Asking pardon of one another, Sisters, is an excellent means of preserving union!"

A Sister then said, "Would you allow me, Monsieur, to ask pardon right now of my Sisters for having complained because I thought some of them had snubbed me in the street, and also to ask pardon of the Sisters to whom I complained?"

"Most willingly, Sister." The Sister knelt down, and so did all the others, and she then asked pardon with great humility naming each Sister in turn.

"Blessed be God, Sisters! That's what should be done to preserve perfect union. One day I was speaking with the Superior of the Ursuline nuns of Gisors, and she told me about the union and harmony that existed among her Sisters. 'But what do you do, Mother,' I asked her in astonishment, 'to have such tranquillity in your Community that there's never any difference of opinion?' "Monsieur," she replied, 'as soon as some cause for disagreement arises, our Sisters have the custom of kneeling down and asking forgiveness of each other, so that no disunion may come into it.' What an excellent means, Sisters! Love to practice this—and the sooner the better—when you see a Sister is annoyed, or has reason to be annoyed, with you."

"But, Monsieur, sometimes if we try to ask a Sister's forgiveness, she laughs at it or becomes even more irritated; what should be done then?"
“Sisters, if you see that the Sister, either because she’s very angry or in a bad mood or has in mind some other reason for being displeased, is incapable of accepting your act of humility in a good spirit, don’t ask for forgiveness at that time; that would be heaping coals on the fire; you’d put her in danger of becoming even more bitter. Wait until she’s in a better frame of mind, then ask pardon with as much humility as you can, acknowledging before God that you are responsible for the harm she has done.

“And you, Sister, if several members of the Company were disunited, what would you do to restore the union that’s so necessary in your Company?”

“Monsieur, I’d tell Superiors about it, along with what I knew about the reason for the disagreement.”

“That’s right, Sister, for we have to believe that God will bless abundantly what Superiors will do about this. Always bear in mind, Sisters, the necessity of this union, on account of the great benefits that result from it, as you’ve said, and the great evils disunion brings, especially the ones God has inspired you to mention. It’s God who has caused you to speak in that way, Sisters. May He be forever blessed for it!

“And what steps should be taken to intervene? Should we mention it to all the Sisters? You see, Sisters, if two Sisters fall out, you should speak to each of them separately and, after they’ve told you why they’re displeased, remind them of the forbearance they owe to one another. For just imagine, Sisters, sometimes the slightest trifle is enough to make us angry! Occasionally, people have aversions for one another without even knowing why. Often enough, it’s a little envy or jealousy. Antipathy for a Sister may even come from hearing her eat or seeing how she does some other action. If you persisted in this aversion, it would certainly cause disunion. Do your utmost to overcome it, Sisters, and, if there’s any disunion, speak to the Sisters in private.”

After obtaining M. Vincent’s permission, a Sister asked if, in case of disunion, it was advisable for all the Sisters indiscriminately to come together to find some way to settle it. Most Honored Father led us to understand that, as far as possible, everyone should con-
tribute to promoting union among the Sisters, encouraging some, soothing others, and always excusing the absent, but if it was a matter of importance and disunion already existed, then the Superior or Superiorress would have to be informed.

"Isn't this what all of you wish? Don't you want to give yourselves to God beginning right now, to accept that your faults be charitably mentioned to the one who holds the place of Superiorress for you?" All the Sisters said yes quite willingly and agreed with cordial consent. Our dearest Father then said in his usual fashion, "Blessed be God, Sister! That is indeed a very powerful means of maintaining the Company in great peace and union, and the subject of this conference is one of the most important I know of for the existence of the Company.

"Today I was talking to a good priest, Fr. Saint-Jure, who is very devout; he composed those beautiful meditations that we read aloud. I asked him how it is that, in Communities, although all the members have the same desire to serve God and the same will to work at their perfection, slight dissensions still arise. 'It's like this, Monsieur,' he said to me, 'rustic people take offense far more easily than those who are intelligent and refined. The simplest means to keep them in peace is to accustom them to reconciliation.' Now, you see, Sisters, most of you—and a poor keeper of pigs like myself as well—belong to that class brought up in the country." (I'm quoting these words, which Most Honored Father often took pleasure in repeating at very distinguished gatherings, such as those of Bishops, Abbots, Princesses, and other great Ladies who attend the meetings of the Charity.) "You must remember that," he continued, "and, when you're annoyed with your Sisters, be sure that it's not usually for the reason you imagine, but because of your frame of mind."

3The Jesuit writer Jean-Baptiste de Saint-Jure was born in Metz (France) on February 19, 1588, entered the Society of Jesus on September 4, 1604, and died in Paris on April 30, 1657. He served as Spiritual Director and Rector of a number of Jesuit houses and of many mystics. He also acted as Spiritual Director of the cloistered Dominican nuns of Paris, an exceptional position for a Jesuit. Among his books was a treatise published posthumously (1638) on the qualities necessary for the community life of a religious. (Cf. New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 12.)
Another Sister said that she thought the best thing was to call attention as soon as possible to the disagreement among Sisters who had fallen out, then to ask God’s pardon for them and to humble ourselves profoundly at the thought that each one of us is capable of similar faults. She added that if, unfortunately, our infidelities, failure to observe the Rules, disobedience, complaints, and carelessness in mending our ways and advancing in the perfection of the love of God were to draw down His indignation on the whole Company, it would be desirable for each Sister to begin to do penance to implore God’s mercy. Furthermore, a conference should also be held and a strict visitation made to discover the root of the evil, and the persons who had caused it should be dismissed from the Company, if there were no hope of amendment. “If the evil couldn’t be remedied,” she added, “I think it would be better to abolish the Company entirely by gentle and charitable means because, just as God will be greatly honored by it as long as it preserves union and obedience to Superiors, the Company would also be a source of great evils if it no longer did this. I’m ready from now on to endure the shame that would result from this disorder, acknowledging that I have enough shortcomings of my own to be the sole cause of it.”

M. Vincent then questioned another Sister, who replied, “If this misfortune were to befall me, Monsieur, I would be more careful not to give my Sisters any more cause for displeasure, and would want them to profit from the pain I might have caused them, in order to advance in the perfection that God is asking of them.” Another Sister said that, should she have some disagreement with a Sister, she would ask her forgiveness in private before going to bed, and then that of the whole community.

Thoughts of another Sister: “During my meditation I thought that if I saw any disunion in the Company, among others or in myself, I’d inform the Superior or Superioress of it as soon as possible, mentioning the fault quite simply, without excusing myself or complaining about it, even to Sisters in whom I had the greatest confidence.”

Another Sister said she would kneel before the crucifix to ask pardon for her fault and ask the Blessed Virgin to intercede for her.
Then she would go to her Superiors quite simply and request some penance, with the conviction that there was none too great for this fault. She would also ask pardon of the Sister whom she had offended and promise her and her Superiors that she would behave better in future toward her Sisters, love them more tenderly, and show them greater cordiality and deference. Another Sister said that if she had a difference with a Sister, she'd ask her forgiveness, show her how sorry she was, and try to be more friendly to her than previously.

“And you, Sister, what should be done to correct this great evil of disunion, should it occur?”

“We should be glad to be reminded of our faults, and listen to the advice given us so we can put it into practice.”

There were far more Sisters at this meeting than there were reasons given for avoiding this evil, and means for remedying it. Since several had the same thoughts, I will not repeat what each one said. At the end, a Sister very humbly asked M. Vincent, for the love of God and in the name of the whole Company, to offer at the holy altar the earnest desires of the Sisters, to obtain for us from God pardon for the faults committed against our Rules and the bad use we had made of the instructions His Charity had been giving us for so long a time, and to ask God for fresh graces for the full accomplishment of the holy plans He has had for the Company from all eternity.

“Yes, Sisters,” replied M. Vincent, “I’ll be very glad to say Mass for this intention, but not within the next few days because I have to say it for our good King. I ask all of you to receive Holy Communion for his intention, that God may be pleased to restore him to health or, if His Goodness deems it expedient for His glory, to maintain him in the state in which he was on Thursday, when he thought he was dying and was facing death in a noble and Christian manner.”

The same Sister asked M. Vincent if he thought it proper for the Sisters to accuse themselves publicly at the meetings, in his presence and that of all the Sisters, of the faults they had committed, es-

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4Saint Louise. In the conferences she recorded, she refers to herself only in this way.
5Louis XIII, who died on May 14, 1643, with Saint Vincent at his deathbed (cf. III, 435).
particularly against the resolutions they had just taken. "What a good means that is for your perfection, Sisters! I'd have you know that, if from doing this act in private you obtain one degree of grace from God, when you do it in public you'll obtain as many graces as you'll have witnesses of this action.

"I assure you once more, Sisters, that I'm deeply consoled by this conference. We have to leave the third point for the next one, which we'll hold as soon as possible, God willing. At that meeting we'll discuss the means of preventing disunion in your Company. So, make your meditation again on this subject.

"May the Divine Goodness, Source of true union, grant you the grace to avoid all the evils that may be caused by disunion. May God keep you always in perfect union with himself and with your neighbor by true charity, and with yourselves by mortification of your senses and your bad habits, all for His glory. May God bless you! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

15. - EXPLANATION OF THE REGULATIONS

[June 14, 1643]

On June 14, 1643, our Most Honored Father M. Vincent did us the charity of discussing with us the Regulations and way of life of the Daughters of Charity, as a result of the request of a parish Sister to let her have in writing the practices observed in the house. Most Honored Father had not yet made up his mind whether to have a written text; from this we have reason to believe that Divine Providence has reserved to itself the guidance of this work, which it advances and holds back, according to its pleasure.

"The subject of this conference, dear Sisters, will be the Rules and way of life you set up for yourselves long ago and which you're liv-

Conference 15. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; the original is in Saint Louise's handwriting.
1The Motherhouse.
ing, by the grace of God. You yourselves have decided on them—or rather God inspired you with them, for we can’t say that they were given to you, Sisters. Who would ever have thought that there would be Daughters of Charity when the first of you came to a few parishes here in Paris? Oh no, Sisters! I didn’t think of it; neither did your Sister Servant nor M. Portail. God thought of it for you. We can say, Sisters, that He’s the Author of your Company, much more truly so than anyone else. Blessed be God, Sisters, that you—poor country women for the most part—have been chosen by His Goodness to form a Company which, with the help of His grace, will serve Him!

“Sisters, I think you have made your meditation on this subject. The first point deals with the necessity for every Company to have a Rule or way of life conformable to the service God wants it to render Him. That’s quite clear; for there’s a Rule, not only in religious houses but everywhere. We who aren’t religious—and never will be because we don’t merit it—have one. The Fathers of the Oratory, whom I should have mentioned first, have one. It’s difficult and even impossible for Communities to preserve uniformity without a Rule. What a state of disorder there would be if one person wanted to rise at one time and another at another! That would be a state of disunion rather than of union.

“So, Sisters, let me tell you the few thoughts that have occurred to me on this topic, because I haven’t had time to reflect a great deal on it.

“The first reason is that it’s necessary, as I’ve just said; it always has been and always will be. Rules are established in the order of nature; God even wrote some with His own finger for the people of Israel and willed that His law should be ever before their eyes. Perhaps this will also be advisable for your Rules, Sisters. At any rate, it’s essential that each of you has a copy of the Rules to help you to observe them exactly.

“Another reason, Sisters, is that God is pleased by this. What a happiness, Sisters, to be able to please God! Don’t you see, Sisters, the special delight we take in pleasing those we love? People regard it as a special honor and pleasure to please a King—an earthly King—who, according to nature, is no greater than any other man,
subject to the same necessities and weaknesses. We had an instance of this recently in the person of our late good King, of very happy memory, who suffered so much and who, after his death, was found to have worms in his mesentery and one in his stomach. Sisters, if people work with so much delight and assiduity to please an earthly King, from whom only empty, earthly rewards can be expected, with far greater reason should you strive to please God, who is the King of Kings, and who rewards with eternal happiness those who love and serve Him.

"Another reason, Sisters, is that it's easy to observe your Rules. They're divided into two parts. The first tells you, in fifteen articles, how the day should be spent; that is, everything you should do at every hour. The second part contains some recommendations to help you to do it properly.

"I'm well aware that there'll be a little diversity in your Regulations because of the different kinds of poor people you serve, but for your principal activities, all of them can, nevertheless, apply. And should it be necessary to alter something for the service of the convicts, the children, the poor in the parishes, and the Sisters in the rural areas, it will be done. I think all of you will be able to live like those in this house; it's to be desired that your activities be as those of the Sisters here.

"So I tell you, Sisters, that the observance of your way of life is very easy. There's nothing easier and more pleasant than to rise at four o'clock, to offer your first thoughts to God, to kneel down to adore Him and to offer yourself to Him. Now, isn't that really easy?

"As for making your mental prayer, that is, to speak with God for half an hour, what an opportunity and what joy that is! As a rule, people are fortunate to be able to speak to a King; those who find it hard to speak to God for half an hour lack discernment.

"It's not hard to take medicines to the sick and to hear Mass on your return home, either. At the time the soup is to be taken to the sick, go to the house of the Lady who prepares it—or go a little earlier, if need be, as is sometimes necessary, for fear that the servants don't find it ready at the right time. And what difficulty do you find in
making your particular examination of conscience before dinner and saying grace before and after meals?

"After dinner, be sure to get the doctor’s orders and to prepare and take the medicines to the sick. That’s very easy. Afterward, take time to read a chapter of some book of devotion. Don’t ever miss this, Sisters; it’s something very easy and very necessary; for, in the morning you speak to God at mental prayer; and in your reading, God speaks to you. If you want your prayers to be heard by God, listen to God in the reading. There’s no less benefit and happiness in listening to God than in speaking to Him. That’s why I strongly recommend that you do your utmost not to miss it and, if possible, to spend a little time in prayer afterward.

"It will also be easy for you to make your particular examination of conscience before supper. Before going to bed, make the general examination of conscience, retire at nine o’clock, and to go to sleep with some good thought. Isn’t all that very easy, and what reasons could you have for not doing it?

"In addition to what I’ve told you, you should pray your Rosary in several parts; for instance, one decade after morning meditation, two in church before Mass—or up to the Gospel if Mass begins sooner—two more after reading in the afternoon, and one in the evening. If those times are inconvenient, you’re permitted to select others.

"Go to confession and Holy Communion on Sundays and the principal feast days, and not more often without your Director’s permission. I strongly recommend that you be exact on this very important point, Sisters. I’m well aware that there may be several who would like to go more often, but, for the love of God, mortify yourselves in this respect, and reflect that a spiritual Communion well made will sometimes be more efficacious than an actual one. I know this is so, Sisters, and I’ll tell you frankly that too frequent Communions have been the cause of great abuses—not because of Holy Communion itself, but because of the bad dispositions people often bring to it. So, Sisters, please don’t receive Communion more frequently, without permission from your Director.²

²The guidelines of the Church for the reception of Holy Communion, enunciated here by Saint Vincent for his time, were changed on December 20, 1905, by the decree Sacra Tridentina Synodus of Pope Saint Pius X. Today “the Church warmly recommends that the faithful receive
“It’s also very important not to remain idle. Spend your time sewing or spinning, when you have nothing more to do for your patients. Sisters, you have to work for a living and be very exact in the use of time, of which God will demand a strict account of you. He said so himself, ‘I will ask you to give back the time that has gone.’ The good use of time is so precious, and the time at our disposal on earth can be so valuable to us that we should take great care not to waste any of it. Wretched man that I am, what shall I say to God when He asks me for an account of the time I waste!

“The second part of your Rules, Sisters, consists of certain recommendations, contained in seventeen articles, to observe the daily schedule well, to do all you have to do in a spirit of humility, charity, and gentleness, and to honor the holy life of Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. You should form your intention for that at the beginning of each action, and especially when you devote yourselves to the service of your sick poor. What a happiness, Sisters, to serve the person of Our Lord in His poor members! He has told you that He’ll consider this service as done to himself.

“Show great honor to the Ladies. Isn’t it only just to speak respectfully to them and to obey them in all that concerns the service of the poor? They’re the ones who give you the means of rendering to God the service you give to the patients. What could you do without the Ladies, Sisters? So, show them great respect, no matter what their rank. I have to tell you that I’ve noticed that several Sisters are at fault in this. From now on, carefully avoid this, in speaking both to them and about them. They have a very high regard for you and love you, but you mustn’t abuse that.

“You should act in the same way toward the physicians. Don’t find fault with their orders, Sisters, nor prepare your medicines using other ingredients. Be meticulous in following what they tell you for the dosage as well as for the drugs. Sometimes people’s lives are at stake in that. So, respect the physicians not only because they’re better and wiser than you but also because God commands you to do so in Holy Scripture, where there’s a passage that states explic-
itly, ‘Hold the physician in honor, for he is essential to you.’ Kings themselves honor them, as do all the great ones of the earth. So why wouldn’t you, under the pretext that they are well known to you and speak freely to you, show them the honor and respect you owe them? Please watch out for this, Sisters. Even though you may sometimes think that one of them isn’t as competent as another, refrain from misjudging them because it’s ignorance that prevents you from knowing why physicians use different methods to treat patients, which, nevertheless, produce similar results. That’s why, Sisters, you must always show them great respect.

“You must also remember that your principal concern, which God asks especially of you, is to be very attentive in serving the poor, who are our lords. Oh yes, Sisters! They are our masters. That’s why you must treat them gently and kindly, reflecting that this is why God has brought you together; and why He formed your Company. You must see that, as far as in you lies, they want for nothing, both with regard to their physical health and for the salvation of their souls. How blessed you are, Sisters, that God has destined you for this for your entire life!

“People in the highest places consider it an honor to spend a small part of their time doing this, and they do it with such charity and fervor! You Sisters who are at Saint-Sulpice, you see this in those good Princesses and great ladies when you accompany them there! How greatly you should appreciate your state in life, Sisters, since you’re in a position to perform works of charity every day at all hours, and that is the means God has used to sanctify so many souls! Yes, Sisters, didn’t Saint Louis serve the poor at the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris with such great humility that it helped to make him a saint? All the saints—or most of them—have considered it a happiness to please God by this means. Humble yourselves profoundly and remember that this is for you a grace of God far above what you have merited.

3Sir 38:1. (NAB)
4Louis IX, King of France (1214-1270), who founded hospitals and patronized learning, was conspicuous for his humility and his personal example of Christian service.
"Quoi! Because of this the world respects and honors you and admires what God wills to do through you. I’ve just come from the Queen; she spoke to me about you. Sisters, you have good reason to fear that you may become unfaithful to God and ungrateful for His graces if you don’t take the trouble to put into practice the Rules He has arranged to be given to you.

"Refrain from talking too much. Being garrulous is a serious fault, Sisters, and is unbecoming, especially in Daughters of Charity, who should be much more reserved than others. You should also keep silence at the times of rising and going to bed, that is, from reading in the evening until after meditation the next day. What a good practice it is to keep silence, Sisters! It’s in silence that we can hear God speaking to our hearts. Be very faithful to that. If necessity requires that you speak, do so in a low tone of voice and in few words. That practice will help you to become devout.

"The sixth article dictates that you be very reserved on all occasions. You should have a great regard for this virtue, Sisters, for, if people were to see a Daughter of Charity behaving improperly in the street, looking all around her, they would soon say, ‘That Sister will leave.’ If several Sisters behaved like that, there would be grounds for thinking that the Company might soon disappear. This is a very important matter, Sisters. But we have also good reason to praise God, and I can tell you that whenever I meet any of you in the streets I’m edified by your modesty. God be blessed for it! I’ve always remembered the modesty and reserve of a Sister who was coming from a certain place; when I asked her with whom she had been speaking, she replied, ‘Well, Monsieur, I really didn’t notice.’ Sisters, that’s the way to behave.

"You should never pay nor receive a visit, nor allow anyone to remain in your rooms when by doing so you’d be kept from your spiritual exercises. Should you acquire such a habit, it would be a significant fault; gradually it would consume all your time and lead you to be in too much of a hurry when serving your patients, and, what is worse, it’s to be feared that in the course of time you might neglect them to such an extent that the thought of the persons you’d be going to see and those who’d be coming to see you in your rooms
would take up most of your time and attention. This is a very important and dangerous point, Sisters! Be very careful about it, and don’t be afraid to say, ‘Please excuse us; this is the time for our meal, for our prayers, and we can’t postpone them to some other time.’ You see, Sisters, even if, at the time they’re talking with you, you might think they’ll take it badly, don’t hesitate. When they reflect on it, they’ll give you more praise than blame, and you’ll have the consolation of having replied on that occasion as God would want you to do. What a happiness, Sisters, to feel sure that you’re doing what God wills by observing your Rules. So, when someone says to you, ‘You don’t come to see me,’ reply firmly, ‘Madame, please excuse me, we should never pay any visit.’

“You must live in close union and never complain of one another. Great forbearance is needed for this, Sisters, because no one is perfect. If we don’t bear with our Sister, why should we feel that she is supposed to bear with us? This doesn’t mean, Sisters, that some slight difference of opinion may not arise at times: one Sister will want to do one thing, and her Sister another, and what each one wants isn’t bad; nevertheless, if there isn’t some yielding, if one doesn’t give in to the other, there will be disunion. For this reason, Sisters, in God’s name anticipate one another and say, ‘Very well, Sister, since that’s what you want, I agree.’ That’s the real way to be always united, Sisters. Shouldn’t we also act in this way toward ourselves, who aren’t of the same mind for long because today we want one thing, and tomorrow it’s something else? And if we don’t bear with ourselves in these changing moods, we’ll never have peace and tranquillity. Be very careful not to complain about one another, either to the Ladies, your confessors, or any of your Sisters, or to dwell voluntarily on feelings of aversion that may sometimes arise.

“Here, Sisters, is another great means to maintain union and cordiality among you: if you see that you’ve saddened a Sister, ask her forgiveness—at once, if you can, or at least in the evening because to go to bed with anger in your heart is great cowardice. Not only is this the duty of Daughters of Charity, but of every good Christian as
well, since God has said, ‘Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath.’ There are people in the world who act in this way.

“Again, Sisters, although you may all be equal and alike in everything, the Rule states, nevertheless, that where two or three of you are together, one should be appointed Sister Servant. You must submit humbly and willingly to that Sister, regarding her in God and God in her. It will be very easy for you to submit if you reflect that she represents the presence of God for you and if you regard her in God, for it’s by the guidance of Divine Providence that you’re together; you should, consequently, respect her. On her part, the Sister Servant must avoid being overbearing or authoritative with her Sister but should act gently and affably, reflecting that charity is gentle, kind, patient, and endures all things. Now, a Sister wouldn’t be a true Daughter of Charity if she didn’t imitate her mother.

“Show great respect for one another, Sisters, bearing in mind that you’re equally in the service of the same Master and so are bound to hold one another in greater honor than if you were in the service of the greatest lords in the world. This is a piece of advice Our Lord himself gives us: ‘Anticipate one another in showing honor.’ How blessed and edifying your Company will be if you do so, Sisters! Never argue with one another, but rather give up your own will in order to do that of your Sister—I mean in matters that aren’t sinful or contrary to your way of life. It sometimes happens, however, that matters of no importance give rise to disputes of such a kind that we make a mountain out of a molehill. The devil, our enemy and the father of discord, is only too pleased for us to become disunited by this means. We have to be very careful of this, Sisters, and love to please God rather than to gratify our own passions.

“Here’s another article that instructs you not to give or receive anything without permission of the Sister Servant, who is in charge of the house. This point, Sisters, is more important than you think. As soon as you enter a Company, in which no one should possess anything of her own, everything you have is no longer yours but be-

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5Cf. Eph 4:26. (NAB)
6Cf. 1 Cor 13:4-7. (NAB)
7Cf. Rom 12:10. (NAB)
longs to your Sisters as well as to yourself. That's why you're not free to give or receive anything without permission. If it's in any way important, the Sister Servant must ask the Superior's permission. If it's a small thing, she can give permission to accept it or give it away. If you're in a hurry and don't have time to ask for permission you must intend to mention it afterward to your Sister Servant in a spirit of submission, ready to give up or to keep the object, according to her orders. Isn't that right, Sisters? What a powerful means to make you virtuous! Blessed be God!

"Here's another article that's very necessary: you will take care to come at least once a month to the Motherhouse and to do so at the most convenient time. And why, Sisters? To spend a little time speaking in a friendly, cordial way with the Sister Servant about your spiritual state, like a child who might come to its mother for some consolation, to tell her your troubles great and small, to ask her advice according to your needs, to give her an account of how you are practicing your Rules, of your behavior, and of your little differences of opinion, should there be any, doing so quite sincerely, cordially, and honestly. Sisters, the little trials of life are no longer trials with these consolations, or, if they persist, God will give you the grace to love them for love of Him. It's not enough for you to reveal your faults and worries, you should also mention quite simply the graces God has granted you. There are five or six articles about which you should speak. You'll be advised about them.

"Here's one that will be a great help to you, Sisters, in observing your Rules and spiritual exercises well: don't fail to be present at meetings when you're notified of them, no matter what excuse you may have. If a Lady wants you with her at such a time, you have to say to her, 'Madame, I ask you most humbly to allow us to go to the meeting being held at home. We're obliged to be present, and have made arrangements so that the patients won't need anything during our absence.' If you speak to them like that, they'll be very careful not to keep you from them; otherwise, you'd lose a great deal, Sisters, because God, who knows your needs, sometimes allows you to hear at these meetings something useful that you wouldn't hear elsewhere. Furthermore, Sisters, there's always a great blessing at-
tached to attending these meetings, since Our Lord has told us that when we’re gathered together in His name, He’ll be in the midst of us. Tell me, Sisters, isn’t He really and truly Our Lord? And since it can’t be otherwise, why don’t we believe Him? Sisters, I believe it as firmly as if I saw Him here in the midst of us, unworthy though I am; yes, Sisters, I believe it more firmly than I believe that I see all of you here. So, please don’t fail to be present at them.

“In addition, Sisters, have no attachments either to places, persons, or duties, and always be prepared to leave everything when obedience withdraws you from some place, being convinced that God wills it that way. This is the most important thing I could say to you. Without this general detachment, it’s impossible for your Company to last. And, Sisters, you shouldn’t want to be left in a place for your own satisfaction, when it’s necessary to withdraw you from it and to send you elsewhere or to come to the Motherhouse. Another Sister would act like you, and then another, and the spread of this disorder would result in the total ruin of the Company and the cessation of all the good being done and that can be done by others, if you’re faithful to God. What a misfortune, Sisters, for the Sister who was the primary cause of this disorder! God forbid that this should ever happen! Be very careful, Sisters, that no attachments creep imperceptibly among you that might prevent you from being pliable in the hand of God, for the result could be that you might not go to the place where God in His goodness intended to do you the favor of using you.

“Although I recommend to you the exact observance of your Rules and your way of life, and to love to conform yourselves to all that’s done in this house, which is the heart of the Company, nevertheless, since your primary obligation is the care of the sick poor, you should never be afraid to set aside some Rules when the needs of the poor are urgent, provided it’s a real necessity and you’re not neglecting them through mere natural inclination or laziness.

“That, Sisters, is the last article concerning your way of life. You’re being given a copy so you may read it at least once a month. This is imperative. Through this reading, you’ll know the Will of God, and be motivated to put it into practice.
"May God grant you the grace to do so, Sisters! It will be a means for you to become true Daughters of Charity—Sisters pleasing to God. I tell you—and it’s so true—that those who are very exact in keeping and practicing these Rules will soon attain very great perfection and holiness. What could deter you from doing so, Sisters? They’re so easy! You know they make you pleasing to God and that by following them you do His most holy Will. If you’re really faithful in the observance of this way of life, Sisters, you’ll all be good Christians. I wouldn’t be saying as much if I told you that you’d be good nuns. Why do people join religious Orders if not to become good Christian men and women? Yes, Sisters, really make it a point to become good Christian women by the faithful practice of your Rules. God will be glorified by it, and your Company will edify the whole Church. Don’t underestimate the grace God has given and will give you, if you render yourselves worthy of it. Reflect that lately God has willed to provide His Church with a Company of poor country women—as are most of you—to continue the life His Son led on earth. Don’t make yourselves unworthy of your grace, Sisters. For this purpose, I ask God, Sisters, to give you perfect union.

"O my God, we give ourselves to You for the accomplishment of your plan for us; we acknowledge that we are unworthy of this grace, but we ask it of You through the love of Your Son; we ask it of You through the Blessed Virgin; and we ask it of You through our Sisters whom, in Your goodness, You have already taken to Yourself in Your holy paradise. Grant it to us for Your glory, Lord, and bless us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."
A Sister thought that one motive for serving these little children with great care and affection is that their souls are made in the image of God. She also mentioned that Our Lord always loved poor little children, for He told His Apostles to let them approach Him, and taught us that we must be like them in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

"To serve them well it is good to recall all those truths and hope that their little examples will be useful to us in trying to acquire the virtues by which we’ll be considered by God as little children."

"Blessed be God, Sister! I’m really consoled to see the thoughts God is giving all of you. Have no doubt about it; there’s reason to hope for many graces while serving these poor little creatures, abandoned by all but Divine Providence, who has chosen you to serve them."

"Father," said another Sister, "we should consider ourselves very fortunate that God has given us charge of these babies, among whom many will perhaps give great glory to God either on their own or through the instruction they’ll be able to give to others.

"Another reason is that we must believe that God wills us to have this ministry, since He himself inspired our Superiors with the idea, and also the fear that, if we don’t do our duties well, He may entrust this work to others who will do so. I also thought that carrying out this ministry well is a means of attaining our salvation."

Conference 16. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; the original is in Saint Louise’s handwriting.

1Hundreds of children were being abandoned in Paris and its suburbs; the Ladies of Charity assumed responsibility for them, and in 1640 they decided to accept all the foundlings who were brought, entrusting them to the care of the Daughters of Charity. In 1647 they acquired the Château de Bicêtre, where the weaned babies were housed until 1651, when they were returned to a more healthy location in Paris. (Cf. I, 407, n. 4.)

For the history of the Foundlings, one can refer to the following: écrits spirituels, A. 80; the notes on the same subject, (ibid. p. 91); François-Timoléon, Abbé de Choisy, La Vie de Madame de Miramion (Paris: A. Dezallier, 1706), pp. 140 ff.; Alexandre Monnier, Histoire de l’Assistance publique dans les temps anciens et modernes (Paris: Guillaumin, 1856), pp. 395 ff.; Léon Lallemand, Un chapitre de l’Histoire des Enfants trouvés. La Maison de la Couche à Paris (Paris: Champion, 1885).
Reflections of another Sister: "Father, these children, who in all probability are doubly conceived in sin, represent to us a very thorny plant that God is unwilling to throw into the fire, but from which He wants to gather roses; and these roses are their rational souls, which He has created and redeemed by the blood and death of His Son. This thought has given me a great desire to serve them."

Reflections of another Sister: "Father, there are five principal reasons why we should have a great desire to serve these little creatures, abandoned by everyone. The first is the obligation of procuring God’s glory in every way we can, by taking care of these little bodies for love of God, instructing their souls, and giving them good example so that they may one day glorify God in eternity.

"The second motive is that, since these little bodies are doubly conceived in sin, there’s reason to believe the devil will have greater power to lead them into sin and will do his best to send most of them to hell. We have to prevent that because we’re obliged, under pain of sin, to rescue our neighbor from death when we can do so, and the death of the soul has far greater consequences than that of the body.

"The third reason is the example God himself gave us of a child in this state, abandoned by Hagar its mother. Hagar was visited by an angel, who commanded her on the part of God to take care of her child. She picked him up, humbled herself, and by her tears touched the heart of Abraham’s legitimate wife, who took her into her home.²

"The fourth motive is that we should attach great importance to the plan God had in mind in choosing us for this work, which we should cherish above any we could imagine.

"The fifth motive is that the service rendered to these little children is one of the most powerful means we have for advancing in perfection; in it we learn how to overcome ourselves in many of our passions and to avoid idleness.

"One of the first means of serving these babies well is to think that we’re not capable of doing so, to remind God frequently of our

²The Sister who is speaking is confused: it is in another situation that Abraham and his wife Sarai consent to welcome Hagar. (Cf. Gn 16. [NAB])
inadequacy, and to ask Him for the grace of teaching us how to serve them most profitably for His glory and their salvation.

“...In the second place, to reverence these babies as the children of God, and remind ourselves that Our Lord has told us to give them good example because their angels behold continually the face of God.

“In the third place, to be very attentive to whatever they may need and to see that they lack nothing.

“Fourth, not to show more affection for some rather than for others because favoritism causes jealousy and envy, to which these little children can become habituated.

“Fifth, to see to the practice of the Rules: first, in order to be faithful to God, and then, for the children’s welfare. If they’re taken care of at the right times, they’ll be much healthier.”

“Blessed be God, dear Sisters, for the thoughts He has given all of you! They’ve truly consoled me, and I can’t express to you the joy my heart experiences from them, especially because almost all of you have resolved, when holy obedience sends you to help these little ones, to go to serve them with charity, gentleness, and affection. It’s God, Sisters, who gives you this good will. Foster it carefully.

“Reflecting on the guidance of Divine Providence in your regard, I’ve been extremely amazed, Sisters, at the choice made of you from all eternity—you, poor village girls, without experience or knowledge—to the exclusion of many others, to render Him this service, the most important one I know, along with the service rendered Him by the nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu. How grateful you should be for this grace, Sisters! Quoi! From all eternity God was thinking of you for such an important work! Not only was He thinking of establishing a Company for this purpose, but He was even contemplating choosing each one of you in particular to be part of it. Sisters, if you really understand God’s plan for you, you’ll consider yourselves fortunate for that mercy. May Our Lord grant you this grace!

“A second remark, dear Sisters, is that these little children belong to God in a very special manner, since they’ve been abandoned
by both father and mother, and have, nevertheless, rational souls created by the omnipotence of God. They belong to God alone, who acts as father and mother to them and provides for their wants.

"See what God is doing for them and for you, Sisters. From all eternity He singled out this age in order to inspire a large number of Ladies with the desire to take over the care and guidance of these little ones, whom He regards as His own, and from all eternity He has chosen you, Sisters, to serve them. What an honor for you! If persons in the world consider it a great honor to serve the children of the great, how much more should you who have been called to serve the children of God!

"Recently I was in a place where the King 3 was taking a walk. 'Sire,' said his governess to him, when she saw the Chancellor arriving, 'Sire, give your hand to the Chancellor.' 'O mon Dieu!' cried the Chancellor, making a profound bow, 'I'm very careful not to touch the King's hand; I'm not God.' You see, Sisters, he's a King because he's the son of a King, and if the Chancellor, who is one of the highest officers of his Crown, doesn't dare, out of respect, to touch his hand, what sentiments you should have while serving these babies who are the children of God! Sisters, give yourselves to God to serve them with great charity and gentleness, and accustom yourselves to see God in them, and to serve them in God and for His love. What a powerful motive, Sisters! You must conclude from this that God is very pleased at the sight of the service you render them.

"Another motive, Sisters, is the great pleasure God takes in the service you render these babies, just as He also does in their little babbling—even in their little cries and wailings. Each of these cries touches the heart of God with pity. And when they begin to cry and you comfort them, dear Sisters, rendering them the services they need for the love of God and to honor the infancy of Our Lord, don't you give pleasure to God? And isn't God honored by the cries and wailings of these little children? Courage then, Sisters! Have a great

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3 Since Louis XIII had died on May 14, 1643, this was his son, Louis XIV, who was born on September 5, 1638. Pierre Séguiert held the dual titles of Keeper of the Seals and Chancellor of France.
love for the service of these little children from whose mouths God receives perfect praise. It’s not I who say this, Sisters, but the prophet, *Ex ore infantium et lactentium perfecti laudem tuam.* But I’m saying it in Latin. It’s meaning, Sisters, is: ‘Your praise is perfect in the mouths of little sucklings.’ So this is true, Sisters, because Holy Scripture affirms it.

“See how fortunate you are to render service to these little creatures, who give God perfect praise, and in whom the goodness of God takes so much pleasure—a pleasure in some sort similar to that of mothers who have no greater comfort than to observe the little actions of their young ones. They marvel at everything and love it all. In like manner God, who is their Father, takes great pleasure in all their little actions. Do the same, dear Sisters. Consider yourselves their mothers. What an honor to consider yourselves the mothers of children of whom God is the father! And as such, take pleasure in looking after them, in doing all you can for their care. In this, Sisters, you’ll resemble in a certain sense the Blessed Virgin, because you’ll be at one and the same time both mothers and virgins. Get used to looking upon these little children in that way, and it will ease the difficulty of dealing with them, for I’m well aware that there’s difficulty in that.

“Think also about the affection good mothers have for their children. They’ll risk all sorts of dangers to rescue them from a trifling difficulty, Sisters. And what I say is true even of mothers in the animal world, such as mother quails that allow themselves to be captured by hunters in order to save their chicks. When you take good care of these poor babies and give them all they need, then you’ll be acting as their true mothers. How pleased our good God will be with you, Sisters, since you’ll be doing His holy Will in that, and by serving these little ones you’ll be contributing toward giving Him the most perfect praise, which isn’t given Him by theologians but by the voice and actions of these little creatures!

“A fourth motive is that all nations will adore God because these little children have given praise to Jesus Christ. . . . Shouldn’t you

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4*Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have fashioned praise.* Cf. Ps 8:3. (NAB) Jesus alluded to this in Mt 21:16.
consider yourselves very fortunate, dear Sisters, to honor Jesus Christ in the person of these little children and to teach them to give glory and adoration to God?

"But someone might say to me, 'How can I look after these dirty, squalling brats, children of wicked mothers who brought them into the world by offending God, and then abandoned them?' Sisters, you’ll have a great reward on all these counts. In a certain sense you make amends for the offense those sinful mothers committed by abandoning their children in that way, when you devote yourselves to serving them for the love of God and because they belong to Him. You see, Sisters, if God hadn’t called you to this service, if He had left you in the midst of the troubles of the world, you would have been mothers, and your children would have given you far more worries and miseries than these do. And for what? Like most mothers, you’d have loved them with a natural love, as animals love their young. What reward would you have for it? Quite simply, a natural reward: your own satisfaction. This doesn’t apply to the service you render to these little ones for the love of God, Sisters, because there’s no inducement but that for doing it; they’re dirty, and the very thought of their mothers may be somewhat repugnant to you.

"True, Sisters, the work is very difficult, but where is there not some difficulty? It’s everywhere. Were you without problems when you were in the world? Wouldn’t you have some if you were still there? There are trials and tribulations in every walk of life, but in the case of Sisters who are serving little children—as in every other act of charity—the difficulty is followed by such a great reward that the trouble involved should be greatly loved. In the world, you would have been mothers, but not like you are now, for these little ones belong so entirely to God that we may call them His children, since no one else fulfills the duties of father to them. Understand this truth clearly, dear Sisters.

"I’m sure you’ll have great consolation in serving them when you think of the perfect praise given to God from their mouths. The prophets state that God is glorified by little children. Why? Because they’re grateful for the special care He takes in looking after them. Sisters, since from all eternity Our Lord had you in mind to serve
these little children, who glorify Him, this is a great honor for you, and you must, therefore, consider yourselves very fortunate. Yes indeed, Sisters! you must attach great importance to God’s plan for you. He has chosen you—you who weren’t thinking of Him. He allowed quite a few years to pass, during which many children died and, instead of turning to so many people whom His Goodness might have chosen for this holy work, He waited until you were in a position where He could use you for it. How grateful you should be for this grace, Sisters!

“What else? When He chose you there were plenty of people in the world and yet He picked you—Anne, Marie, Marguerite, and all the rest of you—leaving aside many other young women in your own towns and families! How indebted you are to God, and how ungrateful you’d be if you weren’t most thankful for these graces and didn’t do what God asks of you in regard to these little ones! I hope, Sisters, that you’ll never be reproved for that. I ask this of Him with all my heart.

“Now don’t say to me, ‘But, Monsieur, do we have to take such great care of these babies, who have been born of such bad mothers and cause us so much trouble?’ Yes, Sisters, I’ve already told you so; it’s true that you have to go to a lot of trouble, but this effort is the reason why God is pleased. He finds it so agreeable that He certainly reveals it to His saints, and His saints glorify Him for it. If these were well-to-do children, Sisters—I mean children of distinguished families—you’d have a great deal of difficulty, perhaps even more than these give you, and for what reward? Very meager salaries; and you’d be considered servants. But what will you receive for having served these babies abandoned by everyone? God, throughout eternity. Is there any comparison, Sisters?

“What is your place with these little ones? You are, in a certain sense, their Guardian Angels. Et quoi, Sisters! Would you be averse to being with these poor babies when their Guardian Angels consider themselves happy to be there constantly? If they see God, it’s from that place; if they glorify Him, they do so beside these little ones; if they receive His commands, it’s from that same place. They are the ones who lift up to God the glory these little beings give Him
by their cries and prattlings, and they consider themselves highly honored to render them those services. Sisters, act in that way because, together with those glorious spirits, you are entrusted with the care of these little ones. If you do so with the same zeal, considering God in them, you'll see that the trouble entailed will be very sweet to you and easy to bear.

"One means of serving these little children well, Sisters, is indifference, which consists in being prepared to be assigned to this ministry and, in general, to be ready to go wherever obedience will send you. You wouldn’t be true Daughters of Charity otherwise. Animals obey humans; is it possible that a Daughter of Charity might refuse to obey God? Sisters, even saddle horses don't refuse to have a saddle put on them, and those who draw carriages never refuse to lead. I've never—except on one occasion—seen horses refuse to go where someone was trying to lead them, to the right, to the left, forward, backward. They obey the persons who lead them. And you, Sisters, would you want someone to reproach you with the fact that animals are superior to you in submission and indifference? Sisters, be very careful about that and, for that purpose, often call to mind your good resolutions, reflecting that, when difficulties arise, the only way to overcome yourselves is to see God in these little ones and to think that He's saying to you, 'My daughters, the trouble you're taking with these little creatures is so pleasing to Me that it's tangible, and I consider the service you render them as done to myself.'

"Another means, Sisters, is the exact observance of the customs practiced in the house. We don’t have Regulations for them. If there’s something to be corrected, it will be done. But until the Rules have been clearly set forth, be faithful to those observed here, and all will go better.

"Some Sisters will say to me, 'I'd gladly do that but it's too hard for me to live with this or that Sister.' That's not how your mothers acted, Sisters, nor is it a good example for the Sisters who will come after you. In former days children showed such respect for their fathers that they wanted to imitate them at the risk of their lives. Why shouldn't we do for eternal things what they did for temporary and
passing ones? Holy Scripture relates that the children of Rechab\(^5\) used to say that their fathers never drank wine, nor lived in castles or houses, and, consequently, they never wanted to drink any nor to live anywhere but in tents. And although that was no longer done, and people tried to persuade them to act like others, they would never consent to it because they had so much respect for the example and customs of their fathers, and they would say, 'Quoi! For three hundred years our fathers refrained from drinking wine and living in houses; God forbid that we should ever act contrary to their custom!' So, they preferred to die rather than to do otherwise than their fathers had done, and this filled God with pleasure. In the same way, Sisters, you should become habituated to the customs observed in the house in order to imitate the first Sisters of the Charity so that those who come after you may imitate you as their mothers.

"Another means, dear Sisters, is often to think of the grace God has given you in calling you to serve Him in the person of these little children. Since you have been caring for them, their number has reached twelve hundred or more; they all have received holy Baptism. Had you not taken over the care of them, perhaps they would all have died unbaptized and, consequently, been deprived of the sight of God for all eternity, which is the greatest punishment of the damned. What a happiness for you, Sisters, to be able to contribute to such a great benefit, and how honored you should consider yourselves for having had this grace, along with that other one, namely, that through your care, many of these little ones are still alive! If that continues, there will be at least seven or eight hundred of them within ten years, and those who die baptized will go on to glorify God for all eternity. What a happiness, Sisters! You have a share in the praises they give to God, to whom they portray the charity you had for them and all the trouble they gave you. The charity practiced toward these poor little creatures, to whom you give life—or rather preserve the one God has given them—by the care you take of them is a tremendous aid to your salvation. What a happiness, Sisters! Acknowledge that you’re very unworthy of this grace, and try to

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\(^5\)Cf. Jer 35. (NAB)
make yourselves worthy of it, for fear that God may take it away and give it to others who would make better use of it and be more grateful for His goodness.

"Apart from the merit and reward God gives you for serving these little children, a rather powerful motive for serving them conscientiously and assiduously is that sometimes there is satisfaction in it, and I'm convinced that you often have feelings of affection for them. Sisters, you can't have too much affection for them. Rest assured that you don't offend God by loving them too much, since they are His children, and your motive for devoting yourselves to their service is His love. It wouldn't be the same if you had been mothers in the world, for the natural love of mothers for their children is often an occasion of sin; and then they deeply regret and suffer much on that account. But you, Sisters, will be suitable mothers if you see to the needs of these little creatures, instruct them in the knowledge of God, and correct them with fairness accompanied by gentleness. In this way you'll be truly good mothers. And what will be the outcome, Sisters? These babies will grow so accustomed to virtue that they'll be easily inclined to what's good and will manifest the power of God who gathers good fruits from diseased trees.

"So, dear Sisters, be courageous in bearing the little difficulties to be encountered in this ministry, for I know they exist; above all, however, see to it that, from the moment they begin to stammer, they pronounce the name of God. Teach them to say, 'O my God!' Get them to talk frequently of God among themselves; tell them about Him yourselves in simple words adapted to their capacity. Whenever you bring them anything they find good or beautiful, let them know and acknowledge that it's God who has given it to them.

"Finally, Sisters, since it's only the love of God that prompts you to go to so much trouble for them, try to impress strongly on their minds the knowledge of their obligations toward God and a great desire to be saved. The good you do them won't end with their time here because, if they live, they'll go to work in the world; if they marry, they'll give good example to their families and neighbors; if they withdraw from the world, how can they fail, with the good habits acquired from their infancy, to be truly virtuous and to edify oth-
ers! You'll honor God greatly by doing your duty, but rest assured that God will honor you much more by accepting the services you render Him in these little children, and by giving you a great reward in heaven.

"So then, make a special effort to accustom them to speak about God. I've had a mother tell me, after losing a beloved child who had made good use of the instructions she had given him, 'Ah! Monsieur, when he was little, I stayed for hours at his bedside, waiting until he awoke, to see that the first words he uttered would be "My God!"' And do you know why, Sisters? Because when we awaken, the devil tries to put some silly thought into our heads, so that the rest of the day may be the same.

"The last means that comes to my mind now, dear Sisters, is for you to apply yourselves to reflect on the grandeur of your vocation. It's esteemed most highly by everyone familiar with it; appreciate its true value yourselves. Your vocation, like that of the nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu, is one of the greatest I know of in the Church. And God has chosen you, poor ignorant young women, for such a great work. Don't be so amazed at this to the point of feeling proud of it; for, as a rule, God chooses the most uncouth and unsuitable persons to do great things.

"When you serve these little children, when you nurse the sick poor, when you seek them out, you render to God the greatest service that can be given Him; you do your utmost so that the death of the Son of God might not be in vain for them; you honor the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who often did the same things as you do and, when you serve the convicts, you honor the sufferings and calumnies the Son of God endured on the Cross. You'd be the most ungrateful persons on earth, Sisters, if you failed to recognize the grace God has given you by such a holy vocation. But beware, I repeat, beware of being unfaithful to it! What a misfortune! As great as the happiness of Sisters who are faithful to it will be, the misery of those who are not will be as great, for it isn't just for someone to receive a reward for work that he or she hasn't done. The example of Judas and of many others should be a powerful motive to incite us to perseverance. Thank God, Sisters, for having been chosen for
such a perfect vocation; ask Him to give you all the graces you need to be faithful to Him. I beg Him to do so with all my heart and I ask Him to give you the grace to imitate the Blessed Virgin in the care, attention, and love she had for her Son, so that, like her, as true mothers and virgins at the same time, you may bring up these poor little children in the fear and love of God and that, together with you, they may glorify Him for all eternity. This is the wish I make with all my heart, Sisters, asking God to bless you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

17. • CORDIAL RESPECT

January 1, 1644

On New Year’s Day 1644, Most Honored Father did us the charity of giving us a conference on the cordial respect Daughters of Charity should have for one another. After reading the subject for mental prayer on this point, he said to us, “Sisters, you should know that you can show one another two sorts of respect. One is solemn and serious; the other is cordial and warm. Solemn respect is often forced; it’s the respect of inferiors toward superiors. Sometimes it’s shown more through fear than through good will, and in this way it’s neither cordial nor genuine. The respect you owe one another, Sisters, must always be accompanied by sincere cordiality, that is, by genuine deference, in the way the angels respect one other. When you meet, you can picture the presence of your Guardian Angels, who, out of respect for God, honor you with their most affectionate care. But, Sisters, just as respect without cordiality isn’t true respect, so cordiality without respect wouldn’t be genuine but would lead occasionally to taking unseemly liberties and would make this cordiality of little value and subject to change—which will never happen if cordiality is joined to respect, and respect to cordiality. God, by His grace, has endowed many of you with those
two virtues, which are the marks of true Daughters of Charity, that is, daughters of God. For this I thank Him. Should there be any who don't honor these virtues, it is to be feared that they may, on the contrary, become daughters of the devil. You should fear then, Sisters, being deprived of these two virtues; fear that the lack of these virtues may cause people to say that you have the attire of the Daughters of Charity but are not Daughters of Charity. Not that I'm accusing all of you of failing in this, Sisters. I'm well aware that many of you are both cordial and respectful, but this isn't true of everyone. So please fear this and work to make these two beautiful virtues a habit with you.

"The first point of today's conference concerns the reasons for showing cordial respect to one another. Let's consider the thoughts God has given you on this subject, Sisters. I'm sure that, by bringing them to mind in this way, they'll be very precious to you.

"Go ahead, Sister."

"I thought we should have cordial respect for all our Sisters for the love of God, and that Superiors in particular have a right to our respect; we should consider them as God upon earth and obey all of them equally."

"How about you, Sister?"

"The first reason is that God has loved us so much and with so cordial a love that He willed to deliver Himself up for us, and humbled Himself to the point of making Himself like a sinner. As for a poor wretched sinner like me, how could I not love my Sisters and not show them honor, since they're the temples of the Holy Spirit and far more advanced than I in the love of my God?"

"Blessed be God, Sister! Oh yes! The thought of God's love for our Sisters and ourselves is a strong motive for you to have this cordial respect for one another.

"And you, Sister?"

"On the first point I thought that in order to be pleasing to God I must respect my Sisters cordially and look upon them as servants of God and of persons who are poor. I resolved, with the help of His grace, to show them great cordiality by means of the service I can render them. I also thought that, if I preserve this cordial respect, it
will be a great blessing for the Community, will edify all of us, and will strengthen us in our vocation."

"You're right to have had this thought, Sister. What a lovely sight it is to see several persons living together in great union! Yes, Sisters, you'll surely be a source of great edification to everyone.

"And you, Sister?"

"On the first point, considering the importance of this cordial respect, I felt that it was the chief means of maintaining good order in a Community; that the early Christians were exact in practicing this virtue, which kept them in a state of great perfection and contentment, and that, when enthusiasm for this virtue lessened, there was unrest among them. The same would happen to us if we were to fail in this cordial respect, whereas, on the contrary, if we practice it reciprocally, as the Son of God recommended to His Apostles, teaching them to love one another as the eternal Father loved them, there will be good order and union."

"You see, Sisters, how God instructs you to love one another, since His love for us induced Him to give us His Son. Blessed be God, Sisters, for teaching us himself the way to express this cordial respect to one another, namely, by a strong, courageous love and not by feeble, weak expressions!

"Let's go on. Sister, you who come next, tell us your thought on the subject of your mental prayer."

"I thought that, in order to show my Sisters the cordial respect I owe them, I will see God in them and count myself as the least of all the Sisters. I'll speak to them with great gentleness and consider myself fortunate to be the servant of the servants of God."

"And I, Monsieur," said another Sister, "thought that one reason prompting us to have this cordial respect for one another is to reflect often that, if we fail to do so, great harm may arise both for the Community in general and for each of us in particular. Another reason is to reflect that their Guardian Angels are always present. On the second point, I felt that this cordial respect consists in thoughts, words, and deeds, and is sometimes shown by our gestures and facial expressions. We should be careful about this, and I ask all our Sisters to be charitable enough to let me know the failings they've noticed"
in me in this respect. I’m determined, with God’s grace, to correct them.”

“And you, Sister, who come next, I hope God will bless your thoughts and everyone else’s and will make them helpful.”

“A very special reason for this mutual cordial respect is that all my Sisters are spouses of Jesus Christ, and I should always regard myself as the least of all and unworthy of their company.

“One means to practice this cordial respect is to think frequently of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity who form one sole unity. They practice this cordial respect constantly, as do all the saints, who, although they’ve gone to heaven by various ways, still glorify God as one. I thought that, since we’re all united together for a common purpose, we must achieve it by means of this cordial respect. When I have occasion to call a Sister’s attention to some fault, I’ll do so with charity; or, if I fear she won’t take it well from me, I’ll inform our Superiors about it.

“On the third point, I thought that this cordial respect, united with great gentleness, is the best means to avoid quarrels, to preserve mutual love, and to give good example to the neighbor. I resolved to honor my companions and Superiors by seeing God in them.”

“And you, Sister?”

“I thought that, when two of us are together, we must bear with one another, dismiss all suspicions, and frequently recall the commandment Jesus Christ has given us to love one another. If we do so with great charity, the whole Company will benefit greatly. As for myself, I’ve done nothing of what I’m saying, and I’ve taken the resolution, with God’s grace, to practice this cordiality toward my Sisters better than I’ve done in the past.”

“Blessed be God, Sisters! This good Sister has brought up something very important, which would be a great obstacle to cordial respect, namely, the suspicion you might have of one another. Be very alert against this great evil, Sisters! As soon as suspicion enters the mind of anyone whomsoever, good-bye to the deference that engenders respect! Good-bye to union and charity, from which holy cordiality flows! May God preserve you from that!
“And you, Sister, tell us your thoughts.”

“I thought, Monsieur, that if we practice cordial respect toward one another, God, who is charity, will be happy because of it and our neighbor will be edified by union among ourselves. The means of leading us to this cordial respect when there are two of us together is great support for one another and a unity that makes it obvious that we have only one will and the same sentiments and that neither of the two thinks herself superior to the other. My resolution has been to regard myself always as the least of all my Sisters and, as such, to show them great respect—more than I’ve done in the past.”

“And you, Sister?”

“Given the importance of loving one another cordially, I resolved to have great deference for all my Sisters and to respect them as best I can. For this purpose, I thought it necessary to put a good interpretation on all their actions and, should there be any difference of opinion among us, to bear it with great charity, with the help of God’s grace.

“On the third point, I thought that, if all of us have this cordial respect for one another, we’ll be showered with great graces, and even the Blessed Virgin and the saints will praise God in heaven and rejoice on account of it. That’s why I really want to have this cordial respect for all my Sisters. I asked God that it be for His glory and the salvation of my soul.”

“The first reason why the Sisters of the Charity owe this cordial respect to one another,” stated another Sister, “is drawn from the deference the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity have for each other, as we see chiefly in two acts: the proposal of the creation of mankind and the Incarnation of the Word. It seemed to me, Monsieur, that, even though we are several persons, this cordial respect will cause us to be of one heart and one will, although, however, there is no comparison. The second reason is that the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph had this cordial respect for Our Lord on earth and in their relationship with one another.

“This cordial respect is shown when we live together in great peace and gentleness; when we bear with the faults of others, fol-
lowing the example of Our Lord, who put up with the faults of His Apostles and of the people with whom He conversed; and when we try to edify one another by words and actions.

"The benefit derived from this cordial respect is that God will be glorified by it and union strengthened. God will give us the grace to live in the observance of this virtue, if we speak little and avoid complaining of each other."

"And you, Sister?"

"On the first point I thought that Our Lord himself asks us to respect each other cordially. One means of acquiring this cordiality is to ask it frequently of God, in the way He wants us to have it. Another means is to acquiesce to one another in all that is not contrary to our duties. God's goodness is so great that He'll respond, with an increase of love, to whatever we accomplish by this practice for love of Him."

"And you, Sister?"

"My thought is that the practice of this cordial respect will help us to remain in the presence of God, will preserve such union among us that we'll give our neighbor good example, will prevent us from engaging in worldly conversation, and will make us more attached to our vocation. The best means of putting this respectful cordiality into practice is always to be deferential toward one another. I have determined to be very faithful to it, seeing that I'm the servant of God and of all my Sisters."

"Blessed be God, Sisters! See how much good you should expect from the practice of those two virtues. Yes, Sisters, they really will keep you so closely united that people will be able to say of the Daughters of Charity that they live in a little paradise on earth. If you didn't have them, however, your Company would be a little hell; you'd no longer be Daughters of Charity, that is, daughters of union and daughters of God, but daughters of discord and, consequently, daughters of the devil. Sisters, be very wary of this misfortune! Should some fault against these virtues unfortunately be committed, Sisters—if, for instance, you were to say something disrespectful about a Sister—kneel down at once and ask pardon for it, saying, 'Sister, when I said such a thing to you about our Sister, I
was being foolish; pay no attention to it because she’s a fine person.’ If you do that, Sisters, I assure you that in a very short time you’ll improve. I’m speaking not only of the Sister who makes this act of humility for the love of God, but of all those who see this example or hear about it.

“This cordial respect, Sisters, calls for you to greet one another when you meet. And why should you greet one another? Poor village women don’t do this. You should greet one another, dear Sisters, because all of you are temples of God. If we pay tribute to material temples and statues made of stone or something else, why shouldn’t we greet one another, who are more closely related to God? I make exception of churches because the Blessed Sacrament is reserved there; God himself dwells in them corporally. When you greet one another you also greet your Guardian Angels, who always adore God. There have been some persons who had such devotion to their Guardian Angels that they always showed them honor and respect when passing through doors and narrow passages.

“Sisters, greet one another wholeheartedly. People no longer regard you merely as country women. Don’t ask yourselves, ‘What will people say?’ They’ll simply say that you’ve been well taught, and those who notice this action will certainly be edified by it. At Saint-Lazare, it’s customary, even among the coadjutor Brothers, to greet one another when they meet, and to hold their hat in their hand when they’re talking to each other. Men have the custom of tipping their hat, and you should replace this act by the usual bow. Please think about this practice, Sisters.”

“Father,” asked a Sister, “when we meet and have to speak to one another, does Your Charity think it proper for us to say, ‘dear Sister,’ to promote this cordial respect?”

“That practice would doubtless be helpful, Sisters, and I know it’s done in some places, but I’d like to think it over before advising you to do so; we’ll bring it up again at the next conference. I was just telling you, Sisters, that the practice of this cordial respect at Saint-Lazare was very edifying. I assure you that some people who go there to make a retreat are converted not so much by the meditations as by the example of this cordiality. They say that God is
surely in this Company, since there's such great union accompanied by respect in it.

"And you, Sister, tell us your thoughts."

"One reason for respecting each other cordially, Monsieur, is that we're all created in the image of God and that, since this cordiality promotes close union, God will shower His graces more abundantly on the Company; if, on the contrary, we're disunited, the devil will destroy it. We'll practice this cordial respect if we're very humble and deferential toward one another, interiorly as well as exteriorly; if we love the lowliest duties in the house; and if we consider ourselves unworthy of being in the Company."

"And you, Sister, please go ahead."

"One motive to prompt us to practice cordial respect is that God has chosen us and brought us together to render Him the same service; it follows that we must consider ourselves as one body animated by the same spirit—or rather as members of the same body. We'll respect one another if we conceal the faults of others and are deferential to our Sisters.

"As a second reason, I thought of the Blessed Trinity, which shows us in the unity of its essence the distinction of the three Persons in two instances: in the creation of the world, when they deliberated about creating man in the image and likeness of God, and in the determination regarding the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. By practicing cordial respect, we also honor the relationship of Saint Joseph, the Blessed Virgin, and Jesus. To help us to practice this virtue, we must have a good opinion of our Sisters, paying no attention to their slight failings, recalling that God loves them far more than they love Him, that His Goodness takes neither natural inclinations nor stupidity into account, and that their simplicity even draws His graces more abundantly on them.

"It's also good to take the resolution often to habitually practice cordial respect for the love of God, to ask Him for the grace to maintain a lowly opinion of ourselves in our hearts, to speak well of our Sisters on all occasions—with discernment, however, and not in such a way that it may look like we ourselves want to be es-
teemed—to excuse the faults of others and never to correct them except in a charitable way, from this motive of cordial respect.

"Several benefits will follow from this practice: great equality among the Sisters will be obvious; those who are well-born or from the upper class will see that they're only what they are in the sight of God and that the more they humble themselves before others, the higher God will exalt them. The others, edified by their example, won't elevate themselves above what they really are and will be grateful for the graces God gives them.

"This practice of cordial respect, in use from the beginning of the Company, will be deeply instilled into it, will become habitual and will endure, and God will be glorified by it. Should it be lacking, disunion and bad example would be the result, and the Sisters might often scandalize the neighbor."

"Well now, Sisters, may God be blessed for the thoughts His Goodness has given all of you on the practice of cordial respect, and for the resolution all of you seem to have taken to want to practice it! Saint John constantly recommended this virtue in all his preaching, right up to the end of his life. And what did this great saint say, he who was reared in the school of Jesus Christ? Sisters, he kept on repeating, 'Children, love one another.' And those who heard him were astonished: 'But what does this good man mean? He seems to have nothing else to say to us other than to love one another.'

"I say the very same thing to you, Sisters. It's enough for you to learn this lesson well and to put it into practice. Cordial respect will help you to take in good part whatever your Sisters say to you, for we don't get angry at what's said by a person we love; on the contrary, we gladly accept it, convinced that it wasn't intended to hurt us. That, Sisters, is the mark of true Daughters of Charity, who are daughters of God. Those who don't follow the maxim Saint John taught his disciples are angered by everything, misinterpret everything, and never excuse anything. O Sisters! It's the mark of daughters of the devil always to have the spirit of contradiction, disunion, and animosity, allowing themselves always to be guided by their own maxims and never by the advice of others. Beware of this dangerous habit! The practice of cordiality engenders the respect you
owe one another—not as the world manifests it, Sisters, by pretense and outward show, which it will never be, but from a motive of charity and in the way Saint Paul taught us, 'Anticipate each other in showing respect.' What a pleasant lesson, Sisters! Anticipate one another in showing respect. So, we mustn't wait for our neighbor to greet us. Being the first to do so is to anticipate the other.

"'But Monsieur,' you will say to me, 'shouldn't we greet Sisters who are in a position of authority or are more perfect than ourselves?' My reply, Sisters, is that you should anticipate with respect not only those persons, but everyone else as well. Saint Paul makes no distinction when he says, 'Anticipate one another.' The respectful anticipation he recommends isn't based on qualifications or status, but on true charity. Consequently, dear Sisters, it's to you he is addressing this lesson—you who by a very special guidance of God bear this beautiful name of Daughters of Charity, which means daughters who are truly cordial, truly kind, and genuinely sincere. Would it be possible for me to see you in a state of disunion and misunderstanding, lacking respect and deference among yourselves? Fear that, Sisters; I repeat, fear it; it's extremely dangerous.

"'But Monsieur,' you'll say to me, 'shouldn't the Sisters who know how to let blood and dress wounds and are very intelligent lay claim to greater honor and deference than the others?' Sisters, all that is nothing; it can all be lost in an instant. We've seen people in the course of an illness forget everything they had previously known. If the respect due to them as Christians had been based on those qualities, then farewell to all the respect people had for them! Oh no! Natural or acquired aptitudes are not a consideration for this great Apostle, but only charity, which gives grace. Charity is kind, it's gentle, it's patient; it bears all things without complaining. Those are the true virtues you should have, Sisters, if you want to correspond faithfully with the grace God has granted you in giving you the name of Daughters of Charity. If you don't have them, what will become of you? So, don't make yourselves unworthy of this

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1Cf. Rom 12:10. (NAB)
2Cf. 1 Cor 13:4-7. (NAB)
name. People in high places who bear noble names are very careful not to detract from their prerogatives.

"A second reason, Sisters, is that by the practice of cordial respect your Company will be a paradise; yes, Sisters, it will be a paradise. What is paradise? It's the dwelling place of God. And where do you think the earthly dwelling place of God is? In hearts filled with charity and in Companies where there is always union. Live in such a way, dear Sisters, that to say 'a Sister of the Charity' is to say 'paradise,' for where God is, there also is a paradise. If union and true charity are present in the heart of a Daughter of Charity, we may also be sure that God is there. Sisters, Sisters, think carefully about this truth. If you really have this cordial respect, you'll be very good religious women; you'll find your cloister in the good example the others give you. Isn't that true, Sisters? Don't you think that if you live like that, if you never contradict one another, if you have great support for each another, you'll be living like the angels? I assure you, Sisters, that in religious Orders that's all it takes to make perfect nuns. So, please live like that, since you're bound to do so for many reasons, especially because of all your works. As you've seen, you must live within the Company in such union that only charity is apparent. Outside, Sisters, aren't your works those of the angels, those for the service of the sick poor as well as that of the galley convicts, whom you do your best to help to know, love, and serve God? And what do you think it is, Sisters, to be with the little children whom you serve, when all of you are united there in perfect charity? It's a paradise. The host of angels, who watch over their souls, always see the face of God; shouldn't you who assist the children in a similar function consider that you, too, are also living in an earthly paradise? That's why, Sisters, you must work to acquire and preserve this union and cordiality among yourselves. Don't say, like worldly persons who want to be held only to the obligations imposed on them by the rigor of God's justice, 'Would I be offending God by doing this or that?' Think instead, Sisters, 'If I do the slightest thing contrary to my Rules and to the respectful cordiality I owe my Sisters, I'll displease God.' If you only knew what it means to displease God you'd take great care never to grieve Him! To have
received so much from God and to wish to displease Him! What a shame, Sisters! Beware of that.

"Just now I was saying that to live in your Company in union and cordiality is to be in a paradise. I also warn you against the contrary: life in your Company without those virtues would be a little hell. Consider that as certain, Sisters, for the devil, who is a sower of cockle and disunion, would be among you. He'd be among you if, failing in mutual support, you were to say, 'That Sister is so bad-tempered!' Sisters, today she has something on her mind or some ailment that makes her a little less approachable than usual; why do you accuse her of being bad-tempered? Maybe you'll be in the same state tomorrow. If you aren't charitable to her today, how can you expect her to be charitable to you tomorrow? If two Sisters live together in these dispositions, isn't their life a hell, I'd like to know? You see how important it is to practice these two virtues of respect and cordiality. You must frequently ask God for them. He alone can give you this grace, which you need so badly.

"To obtain it, and to preserve it once you do obtain it, humble yourselves profoundly, have a lowly opinion of yourselves, and wish to be regarded as the last and the least. If you do so, Sisters, in a short time you'll make great headway.

"Perhaps, Sisters, some of you may say, 'But what will people think of us when they see that we respect one another? We're known to be country women, and almost all of us are.' Don't let that stop you, Sisters. To whom do you think Saint Paul addressed the words, 'Anticipate one another in showing respect'? To all Christians, Sisters. Therefore, you shouldn't be ashamed or sorry if you're taken for Christians. That's the virtue of Jesus Christ, Sisters; you should do all in your power to acquire it. Where do you think this custom of greeting one another arose? With the early Christians; they recognized one another by that sign. Jews don't greet each other.

"When you greet one another, is it appropriate to use some term of respect? No, Sisters, greet one another simply when you meet. As I said before, that's what's done at Saint-Lazare, and we're satisfied with it.
“This is how we do it: when one of our confreres returns from the country, we each go in turn to welcome him with a cheerful expression, taking great care to bring him what he needs; and if his legs have to be bathed to refresh him, we do it. You can act in a similar fashion, Sisters, welcoming the Sisters with cordial respect, without using affected language, which frequently isn’t a sincere sign of genuine friendship. If two Sisters are together and one is the Superior, the other should submit to her guidance in all that concerns the service of the poor and the duty of observance; if, however—God forbid!—the one in charge were to tell the other to do something contrary to the Rules, she mustn’t obey her, but inform Superiors instead! If any Sister were to have feelings of suspicion, distrust, or dislike of her Sister, even having an aversion for her and treating her spitefully, squelch such thoughts, Sisters, squelch such thoughts. It’s the devil who puts them into your head. Sisters, how far removed these are from the thoughts Daughters of Charity should have of one another!

“So, be easy to please, and don’t oblige the Sister or Sisters with you to be always on their best behavior and to feel anxious for fear you may take their words or actions the wrong way. That’s mainly why, when you approach one another, you should always try to have this cordial respect that you’ll show by a bow and a cheerful expression. ‘But,’ you’ll say to me, ‘how can I show this cheerful expression when my heart is very heavy?’ I tell you, Sisters, it doesn’t matter whether your heart is heavy or not, provided you look cheerful. This isn’t being deceitful, for the charity you have for your Sisters is in the will. If you want to please them, that’s sufficient reason for putting on a cheerful face. How many things don’t people do that are contrary to feelings aroused by natural repugnance! That’s the way virtues are acquired, Sisters. If everyone manifested his or her irrational feelings, you’d see some pretty faces! You have to have greater self-control. When you feel inclined to show impatience or disappointment, mon Dieu! Sisters, don’t do it!

“Our Blessed Father the Bishop of Geneva has given us a wonderful example of this virtue. One evening a high-ranking person
called on him and stayed into the night. His servants forgot to bring any candles, as they should have done. What do you think he said to them? He didn't reproach them for their fault, nor did he scold them; he simply said, 'Well, boys, we could have used a bit of a candle.' Act like that, Sisters, and don't get into the habit of snapping at one another. But what am I saying? May such a thing never happen! And don't use unbecoming language, such as, 'You're annoying and obstinate,' or the like. If you happen to fail in this, kneel down at once and ask your Sister's forgiveness without delay. You have to do it, Sisters; in that way you'll obtain many graces from the goodness of God. I ask Him with all my heart to pour forth on your Company the spirit of cordiality and union, by which you'll honor the divine unity in the Trinity of Persons and the cordial respect present in His Son's family during His human life. You'll also enjoy the peace given by His Son after His resurrection, you'll have great union among yourselves, and your work in serving your neighbor will be beneficial for your own perfection and especially for the glory of God. May He bless you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

“Blessed be God!”

18. - EXCESSIVE SELF-LOVE

December 11, 1644

On December 11, 1644, all the Sisters of the Charity assembled by order of Most Honored Father M. Vincent for a conference on the harm caused us when we yield to too much self-indulgence in body and mind. One Sister gave as a motive that the less attention we give to the care of our bodies, the easier it is for us to belong to God.

Conference 18. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; the original is in Saint Louise's handwriting.

1Saint Louise.
“By renouncing this tenderness by which we become too attached to our bodies, making us merely human, we become one same spirit with God, who fills us with His holy love and gives us a healthy disregard for ourselves. I’ve offended God by being too concerned with my food and clothing; I haven’t been created to become so absorbed with a matter of so little importance, and every time I’ve let myself give way to it, I’ve acted sensually and with vanity. The surest and best means to correct myself is to rely on my Superiors for all my needs and duties, and to consider Jesus in His crib, helpless in His needs, and Saint John in the desert, who was likewise poorly fed and clothed.”

The Sister who spoke next couldn’t find any reason. “I think I’ve offended God,” she said, “by too much self-indulgence regarding food and clothing. I should expect everything from my Superiors and not be concerned about anything but doing God’s most holy Will. This excessive attention to what I want may lead me to gluttony where food is concerned, and to vanity in regard to clothing.”

“And what did you think, Sister?”

“I thought, Father, how very dangerous it is to yield to those tendencies to which nature inclines us. We must rid ourselves of them because they’re a great hindrance to us in the acquisition of perfect love of God, who alone can satisfy us. There’s reason to fear that the same thing may happen to us as to the fig tree that didn’t bear fruit in season and, on that account, was cursed by Our Lord. We would fall into such a misfortune if God were to drive us from His presence for not having His holy love.

“The second point of our meditation is on the sins these excessive tendencies lead us to commit. They lead us to spurn the advice of our Superiors, on the pretext that we’re not obliged to follow so many Rules. We make excuses for our laziness by imagining that they’re too hard for us. Laziness causes us to think that we shouldn’t have to rise so early. We also sin when, because of this self-indulgence and with no great necessity, we want more than our Sisters have or something other than what they have. This may stem from jealousy.
"I thought, Father, that I should overcome every difficulty courageously and say to myself, 'Why am I here? It's not to give my body pleasure or rest.' And should I be so cowardly as to feel an attachment for any one of those self-gratifications and satisfactions, I should mention it to my Superiors so that, if they judge it fitting, they may send me away from there."

"That's well said, Sister! You see, Sisters, there's no better remedy. If you act like that, you'll soon be rid of those petty, annoying tendencies that can be so detrimental to your perfection. Blessed be God, dear Sisters!

"And you, Sister, what thought did God give you?"

"On the first point, Father, I thought that both corporal and spiritual self-indulgence prevent us from having love for God who loves us so much that He left heaven for earth; also that this excessive concern for self prevents us from striving for our own perfection. Next, I asked myself in how many ways this habit might cause us to offend God, and I saw that we sin against the First Commandment of God, which is to love Him above all things, because the pursuit of those satisfactions proceeds only from our self-love. We likewise sin against the Holy Spirit who, in His goodness, gives us so many inspirations. This tendency also interferes with the careful, vigilant attention we owe our sick poor if, on account of this softness, we don't attend to them when we should, putting it off to some other time. It's also a great hindrance to the practice of our Rules; it may cause us to make light of our vocation and prevent us from being gracious and gentle with our Sisters by wanting to get from them what they're forbidden to give us. One means of ridding myself of this excessive self-indulgence is to think frequently of the austerity of the Son of God and that all the saints have willed to imitate Him.

"I've taken the resolution to renounce all those weaknesses to which I've been too attached until now and to have those tender feelings only for God, who has so much tenderness for me; I'll offer to Him, in the person of the poor, whom I will serve for His love, the love I desire to have for Him. I am begging His Goodness to give me the grace to do this."
“Blessed be God, Sisters! That’s how Daughters of Charity should act.
“Go on, Sister, you who come next.”
“Father, my first reason is that, by working to do away with my self-indulgence I will distance myself from self, and the farther I am from myself, the greater will be my love of God, who is my sovereign good. Another reason is that this self-indulgence might incline me to have something special, which is contrary to my Rule, and in this way I’d be going against God’s Will.
“On the second point, I saw that these dispositions are the cause of many sins because they always incite us to want something special; this makes others envious, keeps us constantly preoccupied with ourselves and prevents us from thinking of God. Furthermore, the satisfactions we seek make us too attached to created things. I took the resolution to pay no attention to these spiritual and corporal indulgences any longer, until I had first seen whether they were not contrary to God’s Will; to have no exclusive friendship with any of my Sisters; to have no preference in matters of clothing and food; not to seek any pleasures—for all that is absolutely contrary to the Daughters of Charity—and to rid myself of all indulgence other than that of love of God, for which I am hoping from His grace.”
“Go ahead, Sister.”
“Father, one motive for curing ourselves of being too self-indulgent is that it hinders us from being united to God. When people say to us, ‘Someone is doing something against you,’ we’re so upset by this that we get in a bad mood and become unbearable to our Sisters—and even to ourselves. Another reason is that God has granted me the grace of calling me to the Company, which I should cherish more than all worldly satisfactions; now, if I have too much tenderness for myself, the observance of my Rules and of what I have been taught is bound to suffer.
“Spiritual weakness sometimes causes us to murmur against our Superiors, especially when, in confession, we’re dissatisfied either with what we’ve said or what we might have wanted the confessor to say to us. From this weakness, petty envy and jealousy often arise against those Sisters whom we think are preferred to us, and we let
these feelings show. Likewise, for material things, we watch to see
if others are better cared for than ourselves and, if we think so, we
complain about them. These feelings are an obstacle to mutual sup­
port. That’s why, for instance, a Sister who is more refined than the
others, on seeing some vulgarity, will ignore it. I have resolved,
with the help of God’s grace, to strive to rid myself of these weak­
nesses in order to avoid all those imperfections and sins.”

“Father,” said another Sister, “one reason for ridding myself of
excessive self-indulgence is that the faults I’ve committed have
prevented me from practicing the virtues, especially what our Rules
recommend. On the second point, I thought that this excessive soft­
ness inclines us always to seek our own satisfaction, to be unwilling
to suffer anything, and to attach us to created things. As a result, our
minds are occupied with other things when we try to pray. I took the
resolution to ask God frequently, through the intercession of the
Blessed Virgin, for the grace to be detached from created things so
that I may be more closely attached to Him.”

“And tell us your thoughts, Sister.”

“Father, I think that one reason for detaching myself from my
weaknesses is that I’d be more pleasing to God. Maybe that’s why
He has called me to the Company of the Daughters of Charity and
procured for me the happiness of being able to imitate the life of Je­
sus Christ and that of the Blessed Virgin. Both of them might have
lived comfortably in every respect; nevertheless they endured
many inconveniences the whole time they were on earth, starting
with the day they were born. I also thought that there was no more
certain way of going to heaven, since the Apostles and the saints
passed through it, and that, to purify our souls, we have to control
our bodies. I was really ashamed to see how disinclined I am to
practice this virtue. We can sin in this respect by unrestrained indul­
gence in eating and sleeping, by vanity in our attire—utterly poor as
it may seem—and by murmuring against the Sisters who are in
charge of the house.

“Great harm results from these spiritual weaknesses. They lead
to exclusive conversations and other similar gratifications, which
don’t serve to perfect our soul but merely to maintain our self-love.
I have determined, with the help of God's grace, to work at ridding myself of this great fault, to regard God alone in all things, and to be closely attached to Him at the thought of Our Lord's suffering during His life and on the Cross, keeping the Blessed Virgin in mind."

"And you, Sister?"

"Father, I reflected that, on the day the Son of God left His Father's bosom, He also relinquished all His delights in order to subject himself to pain and sorrow. So, it's very reasonable that I, who have been chosen from all eternity to render Him, in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, services unknown to people, and to work at my perfection, should strive to surmount these weaknesses that are such a great hindrance to me.

"As for the second point, I felt that I'd be offending God if I desired anything special in my clothing and footwear, and my Sisters would complain of it. I would also be acting contrary to our Rules and to obedience, if I wanted better food than the rest of the community, or complained about being treated other than I would like. As for spiritual self-indulgence, I thought we can offend God by petty envy; if we felt, for instance, that our Superiors took better care of others than of ourselves, or if I were attached to my confessor, or if I performed any special act of devotion contrary to the Will of God. I took the resolution to watch carefully over myself and not to harbor such thoughts and desires in my heart, but to abandon myself entirely to Divine Providence."

"And you, Sister?"

"I thought, Monsieur, that I can have no more powerful means to get rid of my excessive tenderness for self than to be detached from all things and to love the shame that comes to me from my faults. On the second point, I thought that we offend God when we're anxious about temporal matters and find it repugnant to obey orders that are contrary to our natural inclination. I resolved to rid myself of all the weaknesses that can keep me from being a true Daughter of Charity."

"Father," said another Sister, "one reason to rid myself of those weaknesses is that they make me even more strongly attached to my own will and keep me from doing God's Will. These attachments
often prevent us from obeying our Rules and from understanding the happiness that is ours of being called by God to this way of life. I have taken the resolution that, when I am inclined to pamper myself, I will encourage myself for the love of God to do nothing of the sort."

"Blessed be God, Sisters! These are good thoughts. Now tell us yours, Sister."

"I thought, Father, that it was quite sensible for me to be cured of these weaknesses because they proceed only from my self-love and are an obstacle to the love I should have for my God. They make us impatient with our Sisters and give rise to feelings of vexation and aversion for those who refuse to give us what we want for our own satisfaction. To get rid of them, Monsieur, I thought I should be indifferent to everything, love only the Will of God, and be satisfied with whatever is given me by way of food, clothing, and everything else. May God grant me the grace to carry out perfectly the resolutions His Goodness has given me!"

"One reason for renouncing our self-indulgence," said another Sister, "is that, when we're preoccupied with what we desire, we're diverted from the thought of God, our Creator and benefactor. It also interferes with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us, for He is a God of peace and doesn't like our minds to be unsettled. In addition, these weaknesses are displeasing to God, make us fragile, and are the source of many sins. They lead us away from the practice of the Rules and, when we're dissatisfied with our Superiors, induce us to murmur against them. I resolved to ask this grace from God often, with a great desire for my perfection, and to strive to mortify myself."

"And you, Sister?"

"Monsieur, the strongest reason for renouncing my self-indulgence, which frequently prompts me to seek my own satisfaction, is that Our Lord, who had a tender, delicate body, didn't spare himself. His example teaches me not to spare myself—a poor miserable creature, who am nothing but vice and imperfection—I want to share in His holy love and the merits of His sufferings that I may one day enjoy His glory."
"On the second point, I thought that our spiritual weaknesses cause us to offend God. Dryness and aridity discourage us and lead us to neglect or omit our spiritual exercises. When our Superiors charitably remind us of our faults, we murmur interiorly or show our displeasure, and that's a great evil. One means to rid myself of these weaknesses, when I question whether what I desire is necessary for my perfection, is to put the matter before my Superiors and submit to their decision. Our immoderate self-love causes us to lapse into two sorts of weaknesses detrimental to our perfection: one, spiritual; the other, corporal. It's very important for us to rid ourselves of both; when things aren't to our liking they prevent us from acting for the glory of God and His love and from benefiting from the advice of those who can help us to make progress. Moreover, it is to be feared that we might find in those satisfactions the reward of the good we have done, instead of receiving it from God through the liberality of His love.

"The faults committed by those who allow themselves to give in to such weaknesses are numerous: they look down on and complain about persons who don't suit them, they're attached to those they like, they don't submit to the guidance of Divine Providence, and they don't accept what comes to them by order of God's Will. Physical self-indulgence lowers us in a certain sense to the level of animals, prompts us to criticize anything that is done contrary to our feelings, and in the end is an obstacle to cordial union. As for myself, owing to my inveterate habit of looking after my own body, I commit many faults, fail to edify my companions, and give bad example to the whole Company.

"To disentangle myself from these weaknesses, I will, with the help of God's grace, strongly desire to honor the way of life of the Son of God, who, to do the Will of His Father, had no attachment to created things nor to bodily needs, and who sought in all things only the accomplishment of this holy Will, which was the nourishment and law of all His actions. I'll also use the example of the saints and set myself seriously to the task of mortifying my senses and passions. In addition, since I can't live like our Sisters on account of my infirmities, I'll humble myself because of my needs and offer to
God all the difficulties that will come to me by His permission, accepting them as acts of divine justice in my regard."

"I can tell you, Sisters, that of all the topics we might choose, none is more important than this one. God be blessed for having ordained that we’ve shared our thoughts on it! Our blessed Father the Bishop of Geneva had the highest opinion of discussing it; he used to say that those weaknesses and gratifications are nothing but self-love. Now, it’s true that our self-love produces those desires in us in two ways: one, corporal; the other, spiritual. The first, as the meditation asserts, has to do with clothing, food, and duties; the second consists in loving our own thoughts and feelings. Now, Sisters, this subject affects in a particular way the Daughters of Charity, whose life should be a total renunciation of self. You must, of necessity, practice this renunciation; aren’t you more obliged than anyone else to be faithful to it? Sisters, it must be accepted voluntarily for the love of God.

"The first reason is that nothing is more strongly recommended in Scripture. Listen to Our Lord: ‘If anyone wishes to come after me and wants to follow me, he must deny his very self and take up his cross’! ² You see, Sisters, self-renunciation implies the surrender of those tender feelings in us, which are nothing else than an ill-regulated love of self. In another passage Our Lord says, ‘If anyone comes to me without turning his back on his very self, he cannot be my follower.’ ³ And again, ‘Anyone who does not turn his back on his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, is not worthy of being a child of God;’ ⁴ that is, Sisters, we must turn our backs on them if they prevent us from leaving everything to follow Him, and it’s Saint Paul who says so. So, Sisters, you have to die to those sentiments and to those desires to be in the company of such or such a Sister. You see, Sisters, we’re pleased to be on good terms with God, and yet we’d like to live in clover, to be loved and admired, especially by the Officers of the Charity in parishes where we’re..."

²Cf. Mt 16:24. (NAB)
³Cf. Lk 14:26. (NAB)
⁴Cf. Mt 10:37-38; Lk 14:26-27. (NAB)
ing poor persons, to be called to meetings and to give our opinion there. This leads us to complain when something is done contrary to our wishes because we’re dissatisfied with it, and then we forget ourselves and say, ‘Why is she in charge? That other person would be much more suitable.’ And the same for the rest of the management of the Charities. What a misfortune if that were to take root in your Company, Sisters! Be on your guard against it, and God grant that it may not happen!

“So much for the first point, which is to rid yourselves of attachments to the empty satisfaction you may take in what you wear, and the pleasure flesh and blood would like to have in eating. It’s Our Lord who is asking this of you by telling you that if you want to follow Him you must renounce yourselves. Would you be willing to refuse Him? Oh no! I’m sure you wouldn’t, Sisters.

“Another reason is that almost all of you, like the first Sisters, are of humble birth and, consequently, such vain satisfactions aren’t natural to you, nor were you accustomed to them in your youth. How fortunate you are—and I along with you—that God has granted us the grace of choosing us from the dregs of the world to make use of us! That being the case, are we to act like we’re knowledgeable persons? Are we to act like we’re better than we really are? If people err by having a higher opinion of us than we deserve, are we to take advantage of that, Sisters? I say further, that even should you be of noble birth, as some of you are, you must never pride yourselves on that, and are just as obligated to rid yourselves of all those weaknesses and vain satisfactions you may have acquired by nature and force of habit. Was not the Son of God greater than you, not only as God’s Son but also as man? Was He not of royal lineage? And yet you see His self-abasement, His hard work, and His constant mortification in such great poverty that He had to earn His living along with Saint Joseph. No, Sisters, it would be unreasonable for you to elevate yourselves above what you are. It would be a fine thing to see a young woman accustomed to rustic living, who never had fine food to eat or been used to vanities, arrive
in Paris with the apparent desire of serving God and continually doing His holy Will, immediately forget that she comes from parents of modest condition, in whose home she was always fed on a little soup and dairy products—rarely on meat—and try to elevate herself above what she should be. Such conduct would be deplorable, Sisters! Let’s take great care not to allow ourselves to be deceived by our sensibilities, which would lead us infallibly to this wretched state of affairs, should we be willing to heed them. Let’s be very careful, Sisters! If today we’ve made to God the gift of all that we are by the grace of our vocation, isn’t there good reason to be very grateful for it? Do you think you’re the only ones called to practice constant mortification? How many upper-class persons, with the same motivation of the example of Our Lord, forsake everything—parents, property, and every kind of self-gratification! If you only knew how beneficial it is to belong to God in this way, you’d utterly despise the vain satisfactions of the world!

“And why do you think that in these latter days God has raised up in the Church a Company that renders Him more important services than any I’m aware of, and whose usefulness is known by God alone? Quoi, Sisters! To leave everything with no hope of possessing anything, not knowing what will become of you, and having no other assurance than trust in God—isn’t that the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ? Is there anything greater, anything more noble? I assure you, Sisters, that I often reflect on this, and I can tell you that I see nothing like it. And yet, as great as that is, Our Lord has chosen the humblest means so that His work might be all the more easily recognized and His Father more honored by it. So, Sisters, consider yourselves very fortunate at having been chosen; humble yourselves profoundly for it, and make yourselves faithful to it; for, although you may consider yourselves poor, weak creatures, and perhaps may not realize the grandeur of your vocation, God is aware of it for you. Didn’t He will that His Son should seem to be of such humble lineage that, when people saw Him perform works apparently above His condition, they asked, ‘Isn’t this Jesus, the son
of Joseph the carpenter?” See how secret God’s plans are, Sisters! That’s why those of you who come from a higher class have to make an adjustment in your way of life and in the way you dress, and act in all things like peasant girls, in order to follow God’s plan in establishing your Community and to see that it subsists; for, without this lowly condition as a foundation, everything would be ruined.

“These are the two extremes in the Son of God. Is there anything greater than to be the only Son of a God; anything greater, as man, than to be of royal blood, anything more lowly and wretched than His poverty and lifestyle? Humble yourselves as much as you can, Sisters. He invites you to follow and imitate Him and, although you may fall far short in imitating Him, His goodness and love are so great that He wills to be honored by this. How wonderful! Believe, furthermore, Sisters, that as long as you are humble, you’ll be safe.

“Since the way of life of the Daughters of Charity is to imitate that of the Son of God, they should have no other practice than penance and mortification. They must, therefore, not allow themselves any physical or mental gratification or vain satisfaction. Your mind will want you to be in this or that parish or with such and such a Sister, or to go to a certain church for some special devotion. These are deceits of the evil spirit, Sisters, although he may suggest beautiful pretexts to you—even in the choice you would like to make of a confessor! Your body will cry out for some petty comforts and dispensations from the Rules—if not in everything, at least in part; it would like to be dressed well and distinctively, albeit rather coarsely, and will indicate that it needs more abundant or better food to preserve its strength. Sisters, beware of all that so as not to be numbered among those of whom Saint Paul says that their god is their belly. That would be to misunderstand God’s plan in calling you to the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and would not give witness to your desire to honor His holy life on earth. Why do you think He lacked almost everything here below, if not to teach

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5Cf. Mt 13:55-56. (NAB)
you to practice poverty? What would people say, Sisters, if you liked to eat well? If we were to do so, if we loved vanity (and don’t forget that even in our rustic way of life we can have these faults), we would deserve blame and contempt. Quoi! Would we depart from the simplicity of our village life? And you who are of more noble birth, would you have given yourselves to God to live this way of life, and then forget yourselves? Let’s be very careful, Sisters, not to provoke God.

"The means of avoiding this danger is to renounce constantly our desires, which prompt us to want this or that. From the day you change your rustic, simple way of life, your poor, shabby clothing, your headdress, and all those practices that encourage you to be humble, you’ll begin to forfeit first of all the grace of God, and then the respect people have for you. You’re held in honor now because you seem humble and virtuous in your way of life; the Ladies esteem and love you; many persons are asking to have you. But, Sisters, if you don’t have solid virtue and begin to fail in it, you should be afraid. I know that many of you would rather die than be unfaithful to your vocation—but not all. I ask you, with the affection of Jesus Christ, to renew your resolution to persevere in your way of life and your manner of dressing. What would those Ladies, who have so much respect for you and who love and care for you, and those parish priests, who speak so highly of you, what would they think if you were to change, if they saw you putting on airs, or if your vanity and selfishness became apparent to them? They’d change their attitude immediately because all the affection and esteem they show you are due only to the good they perceive in you; and if they were to notice the contrary, Sisters, you’d soon see that their esteem and affection aren’t attached to your persons. You’d be held in contempt by them; they’d abandon you and turn to others. A lot they’d care about you! What happened to one of the Apostles, of whom it was said, ‘His office of Bishop must be taken from him and given to another,’ 6 would happen to you.

6Cf. Acts 1:20. (D-RB)
“Well then, Sisters, what do we have to do to avoid such a great misfortune befalling us? We must give ourselves entirely to God and ask Him for the grace of self-knowledge. For when we try to raise ourselves up too high, when we seek our own satisfaction, the blindness of self-love prevents us from seeing that what seems good in us isn’t from ourselves. To the person who would ask, ‘Why did you join the Company? Who started you thinking about it?’ you couldn’t give a straight answer. It’s grace and not nature that brought it about in you, for nature holds out as long as it can. No, Sisters, nature doesn’t prompt us to abandon all, to leave parents, possessions, and friends to come to a place far from home, among persons whose way of life and temperaments are unknown to us, in order to spend our lives among them. God alone can cause us to leave everything, wretched creatures that we are and the object of His justice, to become the object of His love. O happy exchange! To forsake earthly love for a love that’s heavenly, eternal, and totally divine! Let’s direct all our affections to that, and renounce all personal satisfaction. We must make up our minds to do that.

‘But, Monsieur,’ a Sister might say to me, ‘that’s very difficult. Quoi! If I’m living with a bad-tempered Sister, will I have to put up with her? Another Sister may be very unmortified and incapable of enduring anything; do I have to bear with her?’ Yes, Sisters, for if you don’t bear with that Sister, if you don’t put up with that other one, you’re the unmortified one. You’ll find it hard for a while, Sisters, but what seems painful to you at one time will be easy at another. Yes, Sisters, you can be sure that a time will come when what displeases you now will give you pleasure, and some Sisters in the Company could assure you that they delight in the difficulties they encounter in living poorly or being poorly attired. The same will hold true for you. All you need is a little courage, and the matter certainly merits it. You Sisters who have already worked hard to acquire it know this. Remember that, to reach your goal, you must detest self; the Son of God asks this of you in order to follow Him.
"The third means is to pray fervently. If we can’t have a good thought without the grace of God, all the more reason for us to believe that we can’t acquire this virtue, so necessary for our perfection, without that same grace. The Son of God gives us an example of this when He has recourse to prayer in the necessities of His human life. Whenever you find repugnant the temperament of a Sister assigned to you as a companion, raise your mind to God to ask Him for the support you need. If your self-love causes you to feel some repugnance for this way of living or dressing, call to mind immediately that it’s God’s Will, since you have been called to the Company, and give yourselves to Him once again to mortify that self-love and to forget yourselves so that He may live in you.

"The fourth means is to speak with one another about the happiness of souls who have this virtue. Say to one another, ‘Don’t you remember how hard such and such of our late Sisters worked to mortify themselves? How happy they are now! How they are enjoying the reward of their sufferings!’ Those, dear Sisters, are the principal means to help us to do away with our offensive self-love, which result in all those weaknesses that cause us so much trouble.

"O Sisters, how happy we’ll be if, by these means, we’re able to arrive at the self-contempt that is so necessary for our perfection! Yes, Sisters, I’ve shown you this by the warnings Our Lord gave us when He was on earth. This harmful kind of love causes us to disappoint both God and our neighbor, and puts us in danger of never being able to love Him. If, on the other hand, you have contempt for yourselves, then, instead of a harmful love that will ruin you, you’ll acquire a supernatural love, which is the only true love. Sisters, I know that some of you, by the grace of God, have made progress in this heavenly love, and that almost all of you are striving after it. Be consoled if you don’t advance as quickly as you would like. And you Sisters who are brand new to the practice of this skill, take courage, don’t be afraid; Our Lord will help you.”

A Sister then acknowledged her failing, saying that her self-indulgence had caused her to fall into many faults, especially
against the practice of the Rules. "Blessed be God, Sister!" said Most Honored Father. "May His Goodness grant you the grace of accepting this act of penance in satisfaction for the faults you recognize in yourself. Yes, Sisters, acknowledging one's faults in public is an act of penance, and one that may be very pleasing to God. I must tell you, Sisters, something I heard lately about a great Prelate of our day, Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, 7 who is eighty years of age. He's so exact in his daily routine that he'd be unwilling to fail to observe it, although his age and several other reasons could easily dispense him from it. So, Sisters, when God has called you to a special way of life, don't fail to observe it.

"Well now, Sisters, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who came on earth to teach us this detachment from our self-love and to assist us by His example—He who had not a stone upon which to lay His head and all of whose actions were one continual mortification—I ask Him to obtain for us, by His merits, the grace to strip ourselves of any feelings contrary to His holy Will and, in this hope, I pronounce the blessing, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

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7 François de la Rochefoucauld was born in Paris on December 8, 1558. He became Bishop of Clermont on October 6, 1585, Cardinal in 1607, Bishop of Senlis in 1611, and commendatory Abbot of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris in 1613. He resigned his bishopric in 1622 in order to dedicate himself entirely to the reform of the abbeys dependent on the Orders of Saint Benedict, Saint Augustine, and Saint Bernard. With that end in view, he obtained from Pope Gregory XV on April 8 special powers and the title Apostolic Commissary. Supported by such men as Saint Vincent, Fr. Grégoire Tarrisse, and Fr. Charles Faure, he caused order and discipline to flourish once again in the monasteries. The Cardinal died on February 14, 1645, with Saint Vincent at his side, who prepared him to appear before God. His body was buried at Sainte-Geneviève and his heart was given to the Jesuits.
"Dear Sisters, in line with the holy custom of this Company, we’ve come together to speak of the virtues of our Sisters who have died. What a good thing it is, Sisters, to talk about the good actions of the dead! This is what the Holy Spirit desires. That’s why, dear Sisters, it will be a consolation for you to tell us what you noticed in this good Sister, as you’ve already done for others.

"Well then, dear Sisters, let’s begin. You’ve all made your prayer, as usual, on the three points proposed. Tell us, Sister, what did you remark in our good Sister?"

"Monsieur, she had great charity in her heart, which made her very assiduous in visiting the poor. She used to go to see them after dinner when she had some free time, and took special care to instruct them, always speaking to them with great gentleness."

"That’s the duty of a true Daughter of Charity, Sisters: to give all her attention to the poor, so that not only their bodies may receive all the assistance you owe them, but their souls may also have the benefit which, by God’s permission, they will receive through you.

"And you, Sister?"

"I recalled that our dear Sister was very recollected and always walked in the presence of God. She willingly comforted the Sisters she saw who were sad, and encouraged them so gently that their sor-
row was eased. She also took great pleasure in speaking about God, especially with poor persons."

"What a beautiful remark, Sisters: 'She always walked in the presence of God!' What virtue, Sisters! Always to walk in the presence of God! What a powerful means to advance in perfection! What a powerful aid to serve the poor well!

"Tell us, Sister, the thoughts God has given you."

"Monsieur, we should discuss the virtues of our late Sisters in order to please God, who has promised to be in the midst of us, if we come together in His name. We should also do so because what is said encourages us to become better and to persevere in our vocation. Among the virtues she practiced, the first that came to my mind was her fidelity to the presence of God. When she met me weighted down, coming back from the city, she used to say to me, 'Courage, Sister, let's work for God!' And when I would grow slack, 'Sister dear, God is so good!' When she experienced any feelings of joy, I saw that she immediately recollected herself, and these words escaped from her heart, 'Dear Sister, ask God to teach me self-contempt.' I also noticed that she didn't talk much and was very reserved and gentle. I took the resolution to make a habit of the practice of the presence of God and to control my passions in order to overcome the first impulse of my impatience."

"Blessed be God, Sisters, for the graces He has granted this good Sister. Keep it up!

"And what did you think, Sister?"

"Father, we share our thoughts on the virtues of our late Sisters to glorify God for the graces His Goodness has granted them and to encourage us to persevere in our vocation. The principal virtues I noted in her during the short time I had the happiness of knowing her were great modesty and reserve and great exactness in following the regulations of the Motherhouse. She loved obedience, seemed to have her mind fixed on God, aspired only to do His most holy Will, and served poor persons with great zeal, gentleness, and charity. She was quite indifferent about whatever might happen to her. I think she had a great love for poverty because she had nothing of her own.
“One day she told me how she had entered the Company. It was the result of a strong inspiration and a response to the attraction she was feeling during her prayer. She came and presented herself, her soul full of submission to God. 'Whether I’m accepted or refused,' she said to herself, 'I’ll believe it’s the Will of God, and I’ll be content either way.' And although the good nuns with whom she was living were opposed to her plans, she didn’t desist and persevered in her request.

“Oh! how many virtues, Sisters! We truly had a great treasure in this Sister. How many graces! Sisters, you’ve certainly suffered a great loss in this Sister; and God forbid that it was the sins of this wretched creature that caused her death! You see, Sisters, you must think of her in heaven as a model you should imitate. Have devotion to her. She sees your tears; yes, Sisters, she sees the tender feelings of your hearts and loves you, much more than she showed while she was among you.

“And what do you have to say, Sister?”

“On the first point, I thought it was fitting for us to share our reflections on the virtues of our Sisters to give glory for them to God and to see the faults that hinder us from acquiring the virtues they practiced. When she was with the Carmelites she couldn’t stand it when people spoke of the good she was doing; if they did speak of it, she would weep. At least, I’ve seen her cry once, and I think it was because of her great humility, which couldn’t endure praise.”

“Father,” said another Sister, “I thought we should speak about our Sisters who have died because knowing their virtues and their zeal for perfection encourages the whole Company to do likewise. I remarked great humility in the deceased. She wanted the Superior to be informed of her faults. When we were together at Saint-Nicolas, she had a great love of God, a great desire for her own perfection, and great concern for the salvation of the souls of the poor persons she helped and served so lovingly. She was indifferent to everything, and ready to be moved from place to place, adoring in everything the guidance of Divine Providence. She was

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1Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet parish in Paris.
very gentle in conversation, very abstemious at table, and had no attachment to earthly possessions.”

“Sisters, there you have the mark of solid perfection: to be exact in obedience, whether Superiors are absent or present. What a beautiful virtue that is and what great detachment from places! That’s what a true Daughter of Charity must be like; otherwise, she would often fail.

“And what did you think, Sister?”

“Monsieur, we should converse on the virtues of our late Sisters in order to make use of their example by imitating them. I noticed great gentleness and humility in Sister Jeanne. She took great pains to encourage Sisters who came to her. I’ve had a deep desire to imitate her zeal in serving poor persons and to do whatever I may be instructed to do.”

“Blessed be God, Sister, and may He grant you that grace!”

Most of the Sisters repeated the same two motives, namely, that it’s good to discuss the virtues of the Sisters who have died so as to glorify God for the graces He gave them, and to encourage one another to imitate them. For that reason, I won’t repeat them again.

“And you, Sister?”

“The main virtue I noted in her was true humility. ‘I don’t know why,’ she once said to me, ‘people want to make use of me; I can’t do anything well and I’ve been like that all my life.’ When she was ill, I asked her to say something edifying and she replied, ‘To whom are you speaking?’ That was two days before her death. My resolution was that, with God’s help, I’d imitate her humility, since it’s the virtue I need the most.”

“What words, dear Sisters! ‘I can’t do anything well!’ We have in this Sister a true model of virtues. Let’s be very grateful to God for it and ask Him to give us the virtues we’ve seen her practice.

“And you, Sister, tell us your thoughts.”

“I remarked, Monsieur, that during her illness our dear Sister was very patient and resigned to God’s Will. She said she had no other regret in dying except that she hadn’t served the poor well and that, if God restored her to health and life, she’d serve them better than ever. I took the resolution to practice what she recommended
to us on the eve of her death. After a weak spell, she made an effort to speak, and, looking at all of us, said that we were very fortunate to have been called to the service of the poor and that they should be served better than she had done."

"O Sisters, that good Sister really knew how to esteem her vocation as should be done. My heart is filled with consolation on hearing of her virtues.

"Sister, you who come next, go on."

"I remarked in our deceased Sister that her conversation was always good and most often was about the lives of the Saints, and also that when she saw any of our Sisters troubled in spirit, she did her best to console them. When she was thanked for this, she would say that it didn’t come from her but from God. Very often she would tell me how important it was to give good example to others. She had great contempt for herself and often raised her mind to God. I took the resolution to imitate her in this virtue of the practice of the presence of God."

"And what about you, Sister?"

"I know nothing of our Sister’s life, since I didn’t have the happiness of meeting her until she was ill. What I did notice during that short time gives me reason to think that she was virtuous all her life, for she was very resigned to the Will of God in her sufferings and never stopped making interior acts of the love of God. She often declared that she aspired to nothing but her dear Spouse. I want to acquire the habit of making similar acts frequently, so as to arrive at the point I think she reached. A year before she died, she was seriously ill in Nanteuil. She told the Sister who was sent to her from Paris 2 how sorry she was for not having served the poor with the zeal and detachment a Daughter of Charity should have, and her distress at her lack of humility. She often showed us that her mind was in the presence of God. One day she said very affectionately to me, ‘Dear Sister, love your vocation fervently and serve the poor

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2Isabelle or Élisabeth Martin. She was among the first Daughters of Charity and one of the most talented, although she was often in poor health. She was Sister Servant at the Angers hospital (1640), Richelieu (1641), and at the Nantes Hospital (1646), returning to Richelieu in 1648, where she died the following year.
with great humility.' My resolution is to strive to acquire her virtues, especially her fidelity to the holy inspirations God will be pleased to grant me, and also her detachment and indifference.”

“Monsieur,” said another Sister, “I noted her constancy in wanting to become a Daughter of Charity. Although several very virtuous persons were opposed to her plan, she would always say that she wanted to die serving the poor. She resisted courageously all those who promised to provide most advantageously for her during her lifetime, as well as the nuns where she was the extern Sister, who suggested admitting her into their monastery, and the Princess 3 who offered to allow her to select even the convent and the Order she would like. We learned this from one of the extern Sisters of the same convent. She was pressured so much that she gave in for a while. However, she was overcome with sadness, prayer became difficult for her, and her infirmities increased. From this she saw that God wanted her to serve persons who were poor, and she renewed her efforts. Although the devil used some worldly tactics to thwart her plans, she was accepted into the Daughters of Charity. She lived among us, as we’ve seen, in the observance of her Rules.”

“O Sisters, how many graces and what fortitude in a poor, simple girl! I’m filled with respect for so many virtues. Go on, Sister.”

“One day, when I was accompanying her into town, she said, ‘Sister, try to remember clearly the good examples and instructions given us at the Motherhouse. They should be a big help to us when we’re far away from it.’ Afterward I thought that she was trying to teach me not only to remember them, but also to put them into practice.”

“Monsieur,” said another Sister, “I noted that she had such a dread of the sin of presumption that several times during her illness, when people tried to console her by saying that her sufferings would serve her as a purgatory, she showed that she didn’t agree with them. She lived in great union with all the Sisters and wanted

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3Charlotte-Marguerite de Montmorency. She was the wife of Henri II de Bourbon, First Prince of the royal blood, Prince de Condé, Due d’Enghien, Peer and Grand Master of France. This charitable Princess, mother of the Grand Condé, lost her husband on December 26, 1646; she herself died in Châtillon-sur-Loing on December 2, 1650.
everyone to have this union. One day, when a Sister seemed a little apathetic, she said to us, ‘Truly love one another, Sisters, and you’ll always get along well together.’ She was very zealous regarding obedience and, in order to practice it better, would have wanted to live always at the Motherhouse. At the time of her last journey to Nanteuil, she said to us, ‘Alas, Sisters! I’m really afraid that I’m going back again to do my own will. Please pray that it may not be so!’ She had great respect for persons who were poor, which showed us that she saw God in them.”

“Father,” said another Sister, “In the eighteen months I lived with her, I didn’t remark the slightest imperfection.”

“How marvelous that is, Sisters! Blessed be God! In eighteen months not a single imperfection was noticed in a Sister; that’s something I’ve never yet heard said of anyone. Really and truly, Sisters, we have great reason to thank God for having given us such an example of virtue. Take care, Sisters, please tell me—tell me quite frankly—what faults you noticed in her.”

And M. Vincent paused, leaving everyone time to reflect. Finally, a Sister spoke up and said that what might be a virtue in someone else was the only thing blameworthy in her, and that was her immoderate desire to serve God and to devote herself to prayer.

“Isn’t that beautiful, Sisters? Has anyone ever heard something like that of a holy soul? A while ago we were speaking of a Sister who was highly respected and who had some excellent qualities, but it was pointed out that God had tested her by a few minor failings and by some passions not yet mortified. But none of these has been noted in our dear Sister. Well now, O Dieu! what a blessing! We have great reason to thank God for giving the Company such a treasure. I’ll tell you, Sisters, that I don’t remember ever meeting her without feeling edified.”

“Father,” remarked another Sister, “she had great compassion for poor persons. When she couldn’t do anything to help them physically, she would console them, weep with them, encourage them to bear with their poverty and sickness, and teach them how to make good use of these things. Even during her illness, she spoke to them with such fervor that it didn’t seem as if she was in pain. It seemed to
us that everything she did and said was always in and for God. This caused me to reflect that, to be true Daughters of Charity, we must be totally detached from the world in order to be more closely united to God. She spoke with great prudence and was very courteous and gracious with her neighbor. Even when something annoyed her, she acquiesced with great gentleness, if she could do so without offending God. When anyone said something to her that showed her in an unfavorable light, she didn’t get angry about it, but kept a smile on her face, put the best interpretation on everything, and sought every opportunity to humble herself. When the doctors told her she wouldn’t recover, she showed no sign of distress.”

Another Sister mentioned that the conference we have on our Sisters who have died manifests the goodness of Divine Providence which, by its hidden guidance, uses such powerful means to produce such wonderful results in creatures so poor and wretched as we are, and makes us ashamed at the sight of our negligence in adopting the means to become virtuous like our dear Sisters. She often practiced humility in my regard. When she thought I was annoyed at something, she knelt at my feet. And since I was unable to speak because of the shame and embarrassment I felt, she remained in that position until I showed her that I was no longer displeased. She never went to bed with any feeling of antipathy in her heart, or even if she suspected that someone had hard feelings against her. Several times she came and knelt at the foot of our beds to ask pardon with deep humility; afterward, she told me that we should never go to bed if we were at variance with our neighbor and if we could be reconciled.

“She had very great charity for her neighbor and especially for poor persons, regardless of their situation. She would spare nothing to help them in every way she could and judged to be necessary, both for their souls and for their bodies. Her total concern was to see how to bring them some relief, such as finding remedies for their illnesses. She served them with great gentleness. For patients who were incurable, she would miraculously heal them of their injuries and various wounds. And yet she had no experience, for very often she didn’t know where to begin nor what she should do; so she
would then turn to God, and would say afterward, 'Ah! what a good teacher God is!'

"She didn't shrink from the offensive odors that came from the patients. In Nanteuil there was a poor girl eaten away by scrofula and abandoned by everyone because of the stench caused by her disease. Her mother couldn't even earn her living because of the fears people felt on account of her daughter. Our Sister provided for their needs with great care. Twice a day she went to clean and dress the sick girl's sores, despite being ill herself. The foul odor sickened her very much and added to her own weakness. When I was told of her condition and chided her for what she was doing, she told me that her weakness was due to her own lack of courage, and that, since she was unable to render great services to God, the least she could do was to exert herself in the little opportunities she had to serve the bashful poor. 4 Often, before dawn, when those poor persons were not even out of bed, she was at their door with some alms, at a time they least expected; and she did all that very discreetly.

"If she heard of anyone's misconduct, she would look for an opportunity to speak with them, and her advice was frequently followed. If the persons so warned promised to amend and failed to keep their promise, they did it on the quiet, so she wouldn't know about it. Every evening without fail she visited the poor vagrants who stayed at the hospital, where the Daughters of Charity also lived. She instructed them as best she could, especially on the principal mysteries of our faith. If she came across a poor person who needed bread, and couldn't otherwise provide him with it, she would come and ask me to help him with his supper, so as not to do anything contrary to the will of her Superiors. And when I said to her, 'Here's some stale bread, Sister; you can give it to him,' she replied, 'Oh, no, Sister, I'll eat that myself; we should give God only good things.' She took great care to visit the poor elderly people, consoling them and exhorting them to receive the Sacraments. One day she succeeded in persuading an old woman, greatly in need of

4By the "bashful" poor, Saint Vincent seems to be referring to those persons, impoverished by civil and military disorders of the times or by some catastrophe, who were ashamed or embarrassed to ask for assistance.
the Sacraments, to go to confession and receive Holy Communion; the woman died the following day. This led us to believe that it was a special grace of Providence for that poor soul.

"Her charity wasn’t limited to Nanteuil; with the permission of Superiors, she extended it to the neighboring villages. Sometimes she’d go there, greatly fatigued by her own illness. One day a poor young woman had to have a bloodletting in her foot; she did her this service and, half an hour later, the girl had to be given Extreme Unction. People thought that our dear Sister had caused her death, and the rumor spread everywhere, both in Nanteuil and elsewhere. When she saw that I was pained by it, she told me that things would turn out as God wished, and urged me to pray with her. Shortly afterward the girl recovered and came to thank us for the help she had received. From this I saw how resigned our dear Sister was to God’s Will in accepting this blame if the girl had died.

"She was very cordial and patient. When she noticed that I was in a bad mood, she treated me with great gentleness, using little devices and amusements to distract me; she even set aside her own will and feelings to satisfy me. I sometimes shared the state of my soul with her; she would encourage me and say she was worse than I. When she saw that I was unusually upset but wasn’t telling her why, she prayed for me. Very often I felt the effects of her prayers, especially on one Pentecost Sunday. Since I couldn’t bring myself to go to confession, in view of the great fear I had of doing so, I was very sad and downcast all day long. The following day I felt relieved of all my scruples in an instant, and confessed with great ease. When she saw how happy I was—the reason for which I couldn’t reveal to her—she said, ‘Blessed be God that the Divine Goodness has so willingly heard our prayers!’ I’ve felt the power of her prayers on several other occasions as well.

"She had great liberty of spirit regarding whatever concerned the glory of God, and, whenever she noticed anything blameworthy, would speak as frankly to rich persons as to persons who were poor. One day, hearing that certain rich people had evaded their taxes, with the result that the poor were overburdened, she told them outright that it was contrary to justice and that God would punish them
for such extortion. And when I remarked to her that she had spoken out very boldly, she answered that, when there was question of God's glory and the welfare of poor persons, we must never be afraid to speak the truth. During her long illness she never complained except when she was dying, and never omitted any of her spiritual exercises, so much so that sometimes I had to forbid her to carry out her desires and to order her to take a little rest because she was so weak. She was very faithful to mental prayer, which she made twice a day no matter how busy she was, without neglecting any of her duties, and she told me that it was in prayer that she found her strength.

"She always seemed very recollected, especially on Communion days. On those days, almost immediately after her return home, she'd go off by herself for a quarter of an hour, in addition to the time she spent in Church making her thanksgiving. She gave such good example that if she was with anyone, whether at home or elsewhere, she never left without giving some edification. She had a great love of God, longing for nothing but God and for opportunities to do good for love of Him. She had such great contempt for herself that she wanted to reveal her faults to everyone. Whenever I was coming to Paris, she begged me to inform our Superiors of them. Often she would ask me to admonish her in order to help her to correct her faults, requesting that I do this service as a token of my affection."

"O Sisters," exclaimed Most Honored Father, "doesn't it make you very happy to hear this account of the graces God granted to our dear Sister? You should be very grateful that the Divine Goodness gave her to your Company. As for myself, I must confess that I'm filled with grief and admiration: grief for the loss the Company has suffered, and admiration when I see such a gifted Sister serve as an example for all of you and for those who will come after you. What a faith-filled Sister! You see, Sisters, the grace that was in this soul was extended even to you by the effects of what it accomplished in her. I assure you, Sisters, that I often felt a certain reverence at the sight of her—not because of my own virtue, poor wretch that I am, but God sometimes allows predestined souls to act like musk,
which can’t be in a place without filling it with its pleasant fragrance.

“When a Sister at Saint-Germain-en-Laye received news of our dear Sister’s death, she sent the following message to the Sisters of the Motherhouse: ‘We’ve lost a great example. I hope our good God will cause the virtues she practiced to be made manifest on earth for His glory and our encouragement.’

“The lady for whom she was working eight or ten years ago told me that even then she was very assiduous in her prayers; they would come upon her unexpectedly praying everywhere: in the stables, in the cellar, as well as in her room. She rose very early to go to Holy Mass for fear that something might prevent her from going. When her mistress found out, she gave her permission to go every day. On days of obligation she kept a strict fast, and during one entire Lent she had only one meal a day, and very little at that. Her snack and anything else she might have eaten went to poor persons. She was a maid in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where the Court was in residence, and although several persons were living in her master’s home, that did not interfere with her devotions. When she would hear the footmen and other valets swearing, she would reprove them, and she taught catechism to those who needed it. People remarked that the persons she rebuked were ashamed of themselves and withdrew from her presence—a good indication that God was pleased with the service she rendered Him in that area.

“Since it almost always happens that persons in society want to make money on everything, her master and mistress, whether to try her or for some other reason, sometimes ordered her to remove large pieces of wood from the bundles they were selling. ‘If you think you’re going to lose money,’ she would tell them, ‘sell them at a higher price; but I’m not going to remove any of the wood from them.’ Although very obedient in everything, she wouldn’t have done anything that might have offended God.

“She was very charitable, and even at that time she loved the poor. Everything that was given to her went to them. When her mis-

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5A town in Yvelines, where Jeanne had been a servant.
tress reprimanded her for this, she replied, 'Oh! I'm not giving it away, I'm just investing it; it will be paid me back a hundredfold.'"

When M. Vincent questioned another Sister, she said, "Mon­sieur, God wants us to share our thoughts on the virtues of our late Sisters since Our Lord permitted the disciples of Saint John the Baptist to report to him what they had seen of His works, and this was to affirm them in their belief of his teachings to them regarding the Messiah. Our Lord gives us another motive for conversing about our deceased Sisters in His many teachings during His life, but especially when He forbade His Apostles, at the Transfigura­tion, to relate what they had seen before He died; this leads us to think that He permitted it after His death."

Another Sister stated that she admired Sister Jeanne's fidelity in responding to the first call of God, who destined her for the service of poor persons long before she knew of the Company of the Daughters of Charity—a clear indication that God wanted her in that vocation. At that time she was working as a maid in Saint-Germain. She learned by chance that the Carmelites were in need of an extern Sister, so off she went. The Carmelites made enquiries of her mistress who deeply regretted her departure. The information they obtained led them to appreciate Sister Jeanne far more. They accepted her, but it wasn't for long. Shortly afterward she decided to become a Daughter of Charity. The entreaties of human beings were unable to shake her. What a great lesson to teach us how to do God's most holy Will! Since she didn't have sufficient arguments to convince the Carmelites, nor enough strength to endure all the difficulties by herself, she left the decision to Dom Morice, a Barnabite religious. After questioning her and duly con­sidering the way God was leading her, he advised her to give herself to the service of the poor in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, whom he knew only from what she told him about them. He was convinced that it was God's Will.

"She was always very exact in practicing our little Regulations and, although she had a great attraction for prayer, she never let the poor suffer on that account but served them without ever leaving that state of recollection that was almost constant with her. She will-
ingly left prayer when the Will of God called for it, well aware that
she wasn’t leaving Him by going to the poor for love of Him. She
was very detached from everything, even from devotional objects.
All she had was a rosary, her little book, and a surgical kit, and none
of those things of which young women are fond. And although she
was loved in the places where she resided, and might have had ex­
cellent reasons for remaining there, she made it known that she
needed to leave, and came joyfully to the Motherhouse saying, ‘I’ll
learn not to do my own will any longer.’

“One evening, thinking that she was close to death, she begged
the Sister with her to tell her imperfections to all the Sisters after her
death in order to make known her ingratitude and to teach them by
her example not to act as she had done. Then, making an effort to
speak, she said, ‘Sisters, if I feel any regret it’s for not having served
the poor well. Please serve them well. You’re so fortunate to have
been called by God to this vocation!’

“Since it was very difficult for her to speak, we hardly ever came
to see her that she didn’t indicate with her eyes or some facial ex­
pression that her mind was always occupied with God. When she
saw some young Sisters at her bedside, it seemed like she wanted to
encourage them to persevere. Even though she was unable to say
that to them, she made it clear.

“Sisters,” said M. Vincent, “the last time I heard her confession
(I can tell you this for your edification and without breaking the seal
of confession), she felt that she should accuse herself of the satisfac­
tion she experienced in her sufferings. ‘Tell me, Sister’ I asked her,
‘in whom do you place your hope?’ And she answered ‘In God
alone.’

“I’ve read many lives of the saints, Sisters, and I assure you that
few saints surpass our Sister in love of God and of the neighbor.  
*Mon Dieu*, Sisters! Could we possibly have such an example under
our eyes and remain in our bad habits? To have seen the way she de­
voted herself to the observance of the Rules, and to continue to fail
in them? Sisters, learn well the lesson taught by this dear Sister. It
should serve as an encouragement to you. Reflect often that you’ve
been so fortunate as to have had in your Company a Sister in whom
you don’t remember seeing any imperfection. Even little children
have their faults and, as a rule, God permits that there remain in
most Sisters, for their entire lives, some form of passion, in order to try their virtue. In this Sister we haven’t remarked any. Once again, Sisters, let’s be very grateful for this grace. Often people are at a loss to find something good to say about the words and actions of those who have died but, in the case of our Sister, we’re all so filled with the good that was apparent in her that, if we were to examine minutely everything she did during her lifetime, we’d have a hard time finding any fault in it. Blessed be God, Sisters!

“She was very detached. One day when someone asked her if she wanted to see her sister who was in that town, she said, ‘Let the dead bury the dead.’ The same question was asked of her regarding Dom Morice, who had been her Director before she entered the Company; she replied that she had to ask her Superior’s permission. The confessor she had before joining the Carmelites declared that she kept a close watch over the purity of her soul.

“She was very indifferent as to whether she lived or died. Convinced that this illness would terminate in her death, she would sometimes say, ‘I’m going; oh! I’m going.’ ‘Well then, Sister,’ I’d tell her, ‘go happily to your Spouse who is calling you.’ At these words her expression showed that she was greatly consoled. Often she would kiss her crucifix. After several attacks from which she thought she couldn’t recover, she asked the person whom she considered her Superioress, 6 ‘Will I be here much longer?’ The Superioress said she didn’t think so, but that she had to remain submissive to God’s Will to the end. She showed that she was ready for that but was very much afraid that she might become impatient because of her intense suffering. She seldom complained, and when she did, it was a weak, gentle moaning.

“After her death, they opened her up, and it was found that her lungs were pushed up almost against her throat, indicating a severe disturbance of the internal organs. Apparently, she suffered more than do those who die of lung disease. God wanted to lead her to greater perfection.

“Blessed be God, Sisters, for having willed that all the thoughts, words, and works of our Sister should give us reason to glorify Him on earth and to be edified by them! It’s really amazing that we can say that we didn’t note any blameworthy imperfection in her, al-

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6Saint Louise. Recall that she is the one who recorded the conference.
though it's written that the just man falls seven times a day. 7 You can say of her, Sisters, that she was a perfect model in your Company, and this should give you good reason to acknowledge what a great happiness it is to be a Daughter of Charity—I mean a good, true Daughter of Charity such as she was. The last time I saw her, when she was scarcely able to speak any longer, I said to her, 'Well, Sister, tell me now which would you have preferred to be during your life: a great lady or a Daughter of Charity?' 'A Daughter of Charity,' replied this good Sister. What a beautiful reply, which shows us, Sisters, that the state of a Daughter of Charity is greater than all the grandeurs of the world! And who can doubt it, since to be a Daughter of Charity is to be a daughter of God? Who wouldn't prefer this title, Sisters, to that of the daughter of a king? So, Sisters, don't go to any more trouble looking for someone in heaven to help you acquire the virtues of a true Daughter of Charity, since we can believe that she's there. Yes, you're allowed to believe it, for she lived the life and died the death of the just. Each of you may invoke her in private. This is a great loss for your Company, Sisters. God grant that my unworthiness has not been the cause of it!

“What a great motive for gratitude, Sisters, when we see that God has given so perfect a subject to your Company! May God draw from this the glory His Goodness wants us to render Him! He has allowed us the consolation of seeing her die among us, and the desire she had to do so shows clearly how detached she was from all things, with no other wish than that of doing His holy Will in the state of life to which His Goodness had called her.

“Sisters, I consider you fortunate to have had this good Sister in your Company. Blessed are you, my God, for the graces you bestowed on her and for the knowledge you are giving us of her virtues, especially of her readiness to accept death, if God so willed it, and to endure the blame she would have had to suffer if that good young woman whom she bled had died!

“I beg God with all my heart to give you a share in her virtues, to grant you the grace to imitate her detachment in all things, to love the practice of your Rules, to condescend to your Sisters in whatever does not offend God, and to esteem and love your vocation, so that you’ll always be faithful to it. I offer you this prayer, my God,
asking you to bless all our Sisters in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

She lingered a long time between life and death. We were told she wanted to see M. Vincent, but he couldn’t go to her because of important business. Since people were saying that she was so low that there was little hope of her recovery, Sister Elisabeth, one of the oldest Sisters of the house, was sent to visit her. As soon as the patient saw her, it seemed that God gave her renewed strength. “I’ll leave with you,” she said, and continued to improve to such an extent that the doctor gave the assurance that she could travel. The parish priest of Nanteuil and the other administrators of the hospital, even though they really wanted to keep her with them permanently, consented to gratify her wishes at the expense of the Hôtel-Dieu, and procured a litter to transport her to us. This gave her great consolation, although she was in a very pitiful state and unable to travel without danger of dying. Nevertheless, God allowed her to make the trip very successfully, aided by our good Sister. Her arrival was a consolation to everyone, but especially to herself, and she would often say, ‘How happy I am to be here! My God, let me die whenever you wish!’

“Great benefits ensued for us; for, since, out of submission to Divine Providence, we had remained indifferent as to whether she’d come to us or remain where she was, I think God in His goodness willed to let us see that He was pleased with this disposition by rewarding us for it, even in this world, as He did, when, even though we didn’t request it, an autopsy was performed on her after she died.

“But what I appreciate the most is that, two or three days before she died, Most Honored Father came to see her one evening at her urgent request. When His Charity saw that we were afraid she’d die during the night, he and M. Portail said all the prayers for a departing soul, in the presence of all the Sisters who were in the house at the time. Afterward, the senior Sister ⁹ who was there asked his blessing for the whole Company, both present and absent, that God might be pleased to grant all of them, at the hour of death, the grace the Church had just asked for the soul of this dear Sister. His Charity

⁸In the manuscript, the text that follows was inserted a little earlier, before the words “Sisters, I consider you fortunate.” It is repositioned here in order not to interrupt the flow of the conference, to which it does not belong—at least not in this form.

⁹Saint Louise.
consented most willingly and said the words of blessing from his lips as well as from his heart.

"On the eve of her death, she asked again several times to see this dear Father, and in her bouts of anguish and weariness she kept turning toward Saint-Lazare to show us how much she wanted this. God willed to grant her this consolation. When M. Vincent drew near to her bed, she manifested great joy, and the person who knew her state of mind said to him, 'Father, our Sister wishes to have the honor of seeing you so that she can put her soul entirely in your hands. She very humbly begs Your Charity to offer it to God in the way you know will be pleasing to Him, so that the instant it leaves her body it may be united with that of Jesus Christ, in order, by this means, to obtain mercy.' 'My very dear Sister,' he said, 'I promise most willingly to offer your soul frequently to God in the way you wish. I entreat the Divine Goodness to grant this grace to you and to all Daughters of Charity now and for the future.'

"Everyone was so pleased at the thought that they would benefit at the hour of death from the power of this prayer and blessing, that I wanted to write it out in its entirety so that from it the poor Daughters of Charity may know the care Divine Providence takes of their Company and may always be very grateful for it.

"I don't want to omit the fact that when one of our Sisters met Dom Morice, who was Sister Jeanne Dalmagne's confessor before she entered the Company, and told him of her death, recommending her to his prayers, Dom Morice replied, "I don't think she needs prayers, but rather she's the one who'll be praying for all of us." 12

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10Saint-Lazare was just across the street from the Motherhouse, outside the city limits of Paris. At its greatest extent, the buildings and enclosure covered a vast quadrangle which today is encompassed by rue du Paradis, rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis, boulevard de la Chapelle, and rue du Faubourg-Poissonière. (Cf. Jean Parrang, "Saint-Lazare" in Petites Annales de S. Vincent de Paul, 1903, pp. 13-30.) In his petition to Pope Urban VIII (cf. I, 248-57), Saint Vincent gives a detailed description of the situation of Saint-Lazare in 1634.

11Saint Louise.

12Following this, the copyist added: "This good Sister died at thirty-three years of age, having been in the Company of the Daughters of Charity for five years. She died on March 25, anniversary of the day on which God had granted her the grace of giving herself entirely to Him for the service of the poor. Of all those Sisters who had dedicated themselves in this way, she was the first to die. May God be eternally blessed!

"Note that when Mademoiselle, who wrote this conference in her own hand, mentions the senior Sister and the one who knew the interior state of the deceased, she is stating what she herself remarked, but out of humility uses only the generic word 'Sister'. It is easy, however, to distinguish the style of her report from that of the other Sisters."

The manuscript gives, after the conference, a copy of the letter that the Pastor of Nanteuil
On the feast of the martyr Saint Vincent, in the year 1645, Most Honored Father did us the charity of holding a conference on the Rules and practices of our Company. "Sisters," he said, "you know the subject of this conference. I have to remind you of what has been the practice in your Company for a very long time. It's not a question of new Rules but simply of your usual practices. It's getting late, Sisters; I've kept you waiting a long time, and I ask your pardon for having done so. I assure you, however, that I had my cloak on and was ready to come, when a person of rank made me go back.

The three points of your prayer were: the motives for practicing exactly the traditional customs of the Company; the faults that are—or may be—most commonly committed against the long-standing customs and Rules of the Company; and the means to be used in order to keep your Rules more exactly in the future. Well then, I don't think we need to spend too much time on this topic. Let's just consider some of your notes.

"Sister, what were your thoughts on this subject?"

"The first reason, Father, is that we can't be virtuous if we don't practice our Rules; the second is that, without this practice, there can be no union in the Company. I recognized that I was committing many faults against the Rules. I've failed in almost all of them, especially in mental prayer. I haven't had good, holy thoughts throughout the day and, through false politeness and human respect, I haven't gone to bed at the proper time, even though my conscience reproached me. By so doing, I gave bad example to the Sister who was with me, and by many other faults against the Rules as well. I thought that, in order to practice my Rules better, I must renounce myself because I always feel a natural repugnance when I have to overcome myself in something. I've resolved to work at this, with the help of God's grace."

"And you, Sister?"

_wrote to Saint Louise in praise of the virtues of Sister Jeanne._

_Conference 20. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; the original is in Saint Louise's handwriting._
“Father, I thought that since God has called me into the Company of the Daughters of Charity I must follow their Rules, obey our Superiors, and give good example to my Sisters in all my actions. The faults I’ve particularly noticed in myself are failures in silence, and my harsh words and improper conversation by which I’ve often failed to edify the Company, as well as by many other faults that we wouldn’t want to commit in presence of our Superiors. I resolved, with the help of God’s grace, to put into practice the Rules Divine Providence has given us and to obey my Superiors and all our Sisters. May God grant me the grace to do so!”

“And your thoughts, Sister?”

“The first reason, Monsieur, is that, since God has taken me into His service, He expects great perfection of me. The second is that God is so good that He well merits our doing violence to ourselves. Furthermore, He will demand a strict account of all the graces He has given us. The faults I commit against the Rules are caused by my excessive self-indulgence, and my laxity has often been the cause of my negligence in serving the poor. I thought that, as means of practicing our Rules better, I should renounce myself, will only what God wills, and obey our Superiors exactly.”

“And you, Sister?”

“We must be exact in the practice of our Rules because by this means God will grant us the grace of perseverance in our vocation. Every time we fail in the practice of our Rules we act contrary to the fidelity we owe to God. This separates us from Him, and it has made me feel very ashamed because I’ve almost always failed to practice all of them. If I am to correct my faults, it’s important that I love my vocation more, with the help of God’s grace and the assistance of the Blessed Virgin and my Guardian Angel.”

“And what about you, Sister?”

“It seemed to me, Father, that Rules are given to Companies to help them to improve. A second reason is what Our Lord has promised to those who keep the evangelical counsels and to those who perform the works of mercy. These promises are addressed especially to Sisters who have the happiness of being called to Companies established for the exercise of charity. All the articles of our Rules are directed to this, especially instruction of the ignorant and visits to the sick and to prisoners like the galley convicts. A third
reason is that by the exact observance of the Rules in all things, without ever straying too far from what is laid down for us, we edify one another. A Sister who refuses to say, do, or accept what she has been instructed to do may draw others into that same spirit of rebellion and disobedience. I've been so contemptible as to have failed much and frequently in our way of life, especially by not asking pardon of my Sisters each time I've annoyed them; consequently I've given bad example to all my Sisters, of whom I very humbly ask pardon with all my heart.”

“Blessed be God, Sisters! And you, Sister?”

“It seemed to me, Monsieur, that the only means of helping us to please God and to do His most holy Will is the observance of our Rules, which are given to us by order of Divine Providence. I've often failed to practice them by my failures in silence and obedience, and by my great aversion to being reminded of my faults. To practice them better in the future I will often ask God for the grace to do so and will reflect just as often on my duties. Praised be the Holy Name of God!”

“Blessed be God, Sisters! Sister, you who come next, please continue.”

“At the beginning of my prayer, Father, I admired the means God uses to let us know what is most pleasing to Him and what He is asking of us to increase His glory in us. Since in His chief dwelling place there are rules, observed very exactly by the nine choirs of angels, there must also be some on earth in the Companies in which He is pleased to reside, especially in the ones that aspire to imitate the life of Jesus Christ, such as the Company of the Daughters of Charity. It’s only reasonable that all of them in general and each one in particular should be very careful to observe in their entirety the Rules that have been given them and to work hard at them as a means of perfection. I admit that up to the present I've often failed in the practice of almost all our Rules, especially in the deference I owe to all my Sisters. To put them into practice better in the future, I thought I should be very detached from myself in order to become deeply attached to God’s Will, which I find in our Rules, since they've been given to us by our Superiors. My resolution is to be more zealous than ever in the practice of the Rules. May it please God to grant me the grace for this!”
"I can’t be a good Daughter of Charity," said another Sister, "without putting into practice the Rules of the Company, in which I have almost always failed since the time God gave me the grace to belong to it. In order not to fall into these faults again, I need to overcome myself."

"And you, Sister?"

"Father, I thought that, by observing the Rules, we honor truth and shun hypocrisy, since our Superiors, outsiders, and our Sisters believe that we’ve given ourselves to the Company to do everything that’s done in it. Another reason is that God wills it; He manifested that to us when He called us to this way of life. It’s good to recall frequently that it’s God whom we are serving, that He sees us surmounting for love of Him the minor difficulties we have in it, that He knows we’re grateful for it and that, for a little work, He’ll reward us in the end with a happy eternity. Faults against our Rules gradually diminish our fervor, put us in danger of losing our vocation, give bad example to our Sisters and, what is worse, sadden God."

"Blessed be God, Sisters, for the esteem you have for the little Regulations observed in your Company for so long! God desires that order be kept in all things; Saint Paul teaches us that when he says that what is ordered comes from God.

"It may be said in truth that it’s God who established your Company. I was thinking about this again today and I said to myself, ‘Did you ever dream of founding a Company of Sisters? Oh no, not I! Was it Mile Le Gras? Just as little.’ I can tell you in all truth that I never thought of it. Who then had the idea of establishing in the Church of God a Company of women and Daughters of Charity wearing ordinary attire? That wouldn’t have seemed possible. Yes, I did think about the ones [the Charities] in the parishes, but I can tell you once again that it was God, and not I.

"I, though unworthy, was Pastor of a small parish. ¹ As I was about to give the sermon, someone came to tell me there was an indigent man who was sick and very badly lodged in a poor barn. I was informed of his illness and poverty in such terms that, moved by compassion, I made a strong plea, speaking with such feeling that all the ladies were touched by it. More than fifty of them set out

¹In Châtillon-les-Dombes.
from the town, and I did the same. When I visited him, I found him in such a state that I judged it wise to hear his confession. As I was taking the Blessed Sacrament to him, I met the ladies returning in droves, and God gave me this thought: 'Couldn't these good ladies be brought together and encouraged to give themselves to God to serve the sick poor?' As a follow-up, I pointed out to them that these great needs could very easily be alleviated. They immediately resolved to see to it. Afterward, the Charity was established in Paris to do here what all of you can see. And all the good began with that. I hadn’t given it a thought. God is the one who willed it, Sisters, and Saint Augustine asserts that, when things happen in that way, God is their author. In this city of Paris a few ladies had a similar desire to help the poor in their own parishes, but when it came to carrying out the project, they were greatly hindered in rendering them the lowly, difficult services. During the missions I met a good country woman, who had given herself to God to teach girls here and there. God inspired her with the thought of coming to see me, and I suggested the service of the poor to her. Immediately she gladly accepted, and I sent her to Saint-Sauveur, the first parish in Paris in which the Charity was established. A Charity was next set up in Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, then at Saint-Benoît, where there were some good country women. God blessed them so much that, from that time on, they began to meet and come together almost imperceptibly.

"You see from this, my very dear Sisters, that truly the reason given by Saint Augustine for knowing if a work is from God is clearly manifest in your Company, with the result that, if anyone were to ask us how it came about, we can truthfully say, 'I don’t know.'

"So then, dear Sisters, since the plan to bring you together is from God himself, you must also believe that it was by the guidance of Divine Providence that, with time, your way of life was formulated in a set of Rules, and that it’s necessary to put those Rules in

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2Marguerite Naseau.
writing to preserve the memory of what God asks of you and to maintain in their observance those who will come after you.

"The second reason is that, as long as you’re united and bound together by the exact practice of your Rules, you’ll be living in the manner Our Lord asks of you and will be regarded as a little army ready to fight the enemies who might try to break up your ranks; in this way you’ll appear before heaven and earth as daughters of God. Sisters, you have great reason to humble yourselves because of the plans God seems to have for you. If you only knew . . . . Shall I say it, Sisters? I’m hesitating as to whether I should say it or not, for fear that someone may become proud. I’m torn because it might also encourage you. Blessed be God, my very dear Sisters! It’s for His glory. A few days ago I was speaking about you to a great servant of God, Sisters; he told me with great feeling that he saw nothing more useful in the Church. Do you know what has earned you such a reputation in the eyes of the world? It’s the practice of your Rules. And what can maintain you in it? The very same practice—that and nothing else. So, Sisters, stand fast and don’t fail in even one article of them; that is, don’t grow lax.

"Have you ever heard what sailors do, who navigate the high seas, sometimes more than five hundred leagues from port, without seeing land? Mariners feel safe as long as they are exact in following the rules of navigation; if they fail to put the helm down hard when the pilot advises it, or if the sails jam, the ship is inevitably lost. The same is true of Communities, Sisters, especially of yours. Like a ship on a storm-tossed sea, you’re exposed to many and varied dangers! Your vocation is your navigation, and your Rules are your guarantee of safety.

"You have, then, embarked on the ship to which God has guided you by His inspiration. You need a pilot who keeps watch while you sleep. And who are these pilots? They’re your Superiors. They’re responsible for telling you what to do in order to reach port safely. You’ll make port if you’re very exact in the observance of your Rules. If anyone among you wanted to dispense herself from them and asked her companion not to tell on her, Sisters, don’t trust that Sister. How can we expect the pilot to steer us, if she’s not aware of
the rocks and shoals? Sisters, don't trust those who don't want their words or actions to be reported to their Superiors; mistrust yourselves if you have such thoughts. And why, Sisters, should you fear to disclose your weaknesses? Don't you realize that Superiors have the hearts of fathers and know well how to treat the weak as weak and the strong as strong? But the strong shouldn't wish to be treated like the weak; great harm would result for the Company from that. To avoid that danger, Sisters, let me say that it's better to overcome yourselves by a little courage than to allow yourselves to be demoralized by too much laziness and self-indulgence. Here's an example that may perhaps be of use to you: Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, who is over eighty years of age, has for many years never failed to rise at four o'clock in the morning, and I don't think he goes to bed before ten. The Chief Justice 3 does likewise, although frequently he doesn't get to bed before eleven.

"It's very important, Sisters, that you remain steadfast in the practice of your original customs if you want God to continue to bestow His graces on you, without which you'll never do any good. This exactness alone can obtain your perseverance from His Goodness and cause you to be a source of edification to the world. Good Mme Goussault died desiring this; yes, Sisters, she died thinking of you. She died in the evening, but on the morning of that same day she said to me, 'Monsieur, all night long I was thinking about our good Sisters! If you only knew how highly I esteem them. How many things God has revealed to me about them!' Think about this good lady; God gave her so much good will for you. To encourage you still more by her example and to strengthen you in the observance of your Rules, I can tell you that, long before her death, she prescribed certain regulations for herself, and she was very exact in keeping them. She had made it a habit to keep silence while dressing and didn't fail in this. In order not to be distracted by persons

3Mathieu Molié, born in Paris in 1584, became Attorney General in 1614 and Chief Justice of the Parlement of Paris in 1641. Appointed Keeper of the Seals on April 3, 1651, he lost the office ten days later because of political pressure resulting from the Fronde, but was reappointed on September 9. He held the position of Chief Justice until the Queen Regent, Anne of Austria, summoned him to the Royal Court outside Paris. He died on January 3, 1656.
who might enter her room, she had a chapter from a devotional book read aloud to her during that time.

“Sisters, if a woman living in the world is so exact in regard to something to which she isn’t bound, for even greater reason, Sisters, should you not fail to observe all your customs, which you resolved to do when you entered the Company. Although until now you have not had your Rules in writing, nevertheless the custom of the first Sisters obliges you to follow them since you have formed an association with them and you owe them your example; the elder Sisters also owe you this example of exactitude. So then, Sisters, put yourselves out a little and don’t think that the slightest difficulty dispenses you from your exercises.

“Well, Sisters, it’s time for you to leave. I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has brought you together to follow the example of His holy life, to give you His Spirit to practice your Rules, and to grant you the grace to imitate Him in His humility, simplicity, and gentleness so that you may edify one another and be in the good graces of everyone, according to God’s plan. May He bless you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

_Thoughts of Saint Louise on the Conference of January 22, 1645_

The Company has long desired and requested that its way of life be set down in the form of Regulations so that, by reading them, we may be encouraged to practice them. God, who has today given us this grace, asks of us greater fidelity and exactitude than ever.

By the order God has established in heaven and in nature, at all times and in all places where His mercy reigns, He makes us understand that He also wills this in Companies to avoid the condemnation of the only place where there is no order, i.e., hell and its appurtenances. The third reason is that our salvation may perhaps depend on the observance of these Regulations. We are in the Company by the guidance of Divine Providence, and it is through Providence that God’s graces must pass to reach us. Those who lived on earth in Our Lord’s time took up their position in the places through which He was to pass, and it was there that some received the grace
of their calling, and others that of being healed. In a way, then, it would show a certain contempt for God’s graces were we to stray from the path on which He has placed us.

I acknowledge that I’m guilty of all the faults of the Company because I fail in almost every respect and don’t correct others when I should, sometimes out of cowardice and a desire to please. To follow my own inclination, I’ve kept the Company too long at recreation, from which has arisen the bad habit of wasting time—not that we were idle, but the topics of conversation weren’t related to the exact observance God asks of the Daughters of Charity, as, for instance, instructions on how to tend and serve the sick poor.

The principal failings in the Regulations are the lack of respect of the Sisters under the Sister named Servant of the Poor, and the lack of forbearance of the Sisters named Servants of the Poor toward their companions, with whom they are too authoritative in giving orders; the misconduct of Sisters who agree to do or say something contrary to the Rule and promise each other to conceal it; and the laxity and laziness of those who, in order to be dispensed from the observance of the Rules, declare that they’re not obliged to do so.

One means to practice our Rules better is to ask God’s grace for that purpose, and to ask my spiritual father how I can bring into harmony with these Rules my bodily infirmities and the few business affairs I have. I must also be more attentive to what our Sisters in the house are doing, and those outside as well; more exact in finding out about their behavior, and doing all I can to teach them about our way of life and what God is asking of us. May He be forever blessed!
"My very dear Sisters, at the last conference you brought your notes on discussions to be held on the necessity of Rules in Companies. Good things were said that consolled me greatly, Sisters. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired you to say them. Blessed be God!

"I think we stopped on the question of whether it's advisable to dispense with the Rule for the service of the poor. Sisters, the service of the poor must be preferred to everything else. You may even omit hearing Mass on Holy Days, but only in case of great necessity, such as if a patient were in danger of death and needed the sacraments or medicine, or would be in grave danger without you. When you exempt yourselves from some exercise prescribed by your Rules, it must be done with discernment and not to gratify yourself. If you arrange your time in such a way as not to waste any of it, both for visiting your patients and for getting orders from the Ladies and presenting them with the necessary accounts, you'll see, Sisters, that most often you'll have time for everything. When you don't, set aside whatever is less important. In this way you're sure to be faithful to your Rules, and even more, since obedience is regarded by God as better than sacrifice. It's God, Sisters, whom you want to serve. Do you think God is less reasonable than the masters of this world? If the master says to his valet, 'Do this,' and if, before his order is carried out, he asks him to do something else, he doesn't find fault with the valet for setting aside what he had been told to do in the first place; on the contrary, he's more pleased. The same holds true of God. He has called you to a Company for the service of the poor; and to make your service pleasing to Him He has given you Rules. If, when you're observing them, He wants you else-

Conference 21. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; the original is in Saint Louise's handwriting.

This conference is undated. Since the text is written in Saint Louise's handwriting, it is from 1646 at the latest. Despite certain difficulties, the form and size of the sheets of paper, and the remark concerning the "notes" lead us to believe that it followed the conference of January 22, 1645.
where, fine, Sisters, go there with no doubt that it's the Will of God."

A Sister said that she often missed prayer at five o'clock, and asked if that was a breach of Rule. "Sister, if you miss it for the reasons I've just mentioned, you're not breaking your Rules. In such a case, try to recall that your Sisters are beginning their prayers, and offer them to God; you'll have a share in them. Offer Him also what you're going to be doing at that time, which will be entirely consecrated to God; by this means, Sisters, you'll all be united. Perhaps you'll tell me that you have so many things to think about that even when you're praying you can't spend a quarter of an hour without being distracted. Don't be surprised at that; the greatest servants of God occasionally have these same difficulties. A few days ago I was speaking to a good priest, converted a few years ago, who spends a great deal of time in prayer. He told me that frequently he had neither any taste for it, nor satisfaction in it, except to say, 'My God, I'm here in your presence to do your most holy Will. It's enough that You see me.' You should do the same."

A Sister pointed out the difficulty arising from the fact that neither she nor her companion knew how to read. "It's true, Sister," replied M. Vincent, "that this is a little difficult. One time we spoke at some length on this subject and suggested making use of pictures of the life of Our Lord. That was done for a time but, apparently it doesn't work, since the practice has been abandoned. There's another very simple means, and that is to take the Passion of Our Lord as the subject of your prayer. There isn't one of you who doesn't know all that took place during it, either from having heard it preached or from having meditated on it. The Passion of Our Lord is such an excellent means of meditation, Sisters! It's a fountain of youth in which you'll find something fresh every day. Saint Francis never had any other subject for mental prayer than Our Lord's Passion, and he recommended to all his dear spiritual children to make use of it constantly. And from what source, Sisters, do you think great Saint Bonaventure drew all his knowledge? From the sacred book of the Cross. You'll do well to accustom yourselves to this. I
advise you to do so; then you won't miss making your meditation for want of a reader.

“Sisters, it’s important for all the Sisters to be exact to this practice of mental prayer, as well as to all the other observances of your Rule in order to be united, so that at the time the Sisters are praying at the Motherhouse, those at Saint-Paul, Saint-Jacques, Saint-Jean, Sedan, Angers, and everywhere else are also praying. Many graces and blessings will flow to your Little Company from this. If, of necessity, a Sister should be detained with a patient or elsewhere through charity or obedience, she could, nevertheless, be united in spirit and will with her Sisters. As long as you act like this, Sisters, you will be sure that God is pleased with you.

“This uniformity is so pleasing to Him that He has commanded it for the welfare and guidance of the universal Church. Go throughout Christendom; you’ll always find Mass celebrated in the same way, with the same words, and the same Pater Noster. Go to the Levant, to far-off lands, or to the Antipodes; the prayers are always the same, and it’s by this means in particular that real Christians are recognized. If this is true of Holy Church, it isn’t surprising that all Companies act in the same manner. Go into all the houses of the Capuchins, and you’ll see that they pray the Divine Office everywhere in the same way. The same can be said of the other Orders. If you didn’t imitate them, there would be reason to fear that irregularities would soon bring about the ruin of your Company. Pay close attention to this, Sisters; it would be a great misfortune both for you and for those whom God might call to His service through your good example, if you didn’t do so. May God, in His goodness, preserve you from causing such a great loss to our poor, dear masters! Not that God wouldn’t raise up in your place better servants for them. Have no doubt about that, Sisters, but what would you not lose for all eternity! Blessed be God that all of you seem to want to be faithful to Him and are grateful for the graces He bestowed on you by calling you to His holy service!

“I was deeply consoled at the last conference to hear one of our Sisters say that, when she fell asleep with a good thought, it preserved her heart from bad ones. Going to sleep like that is a good
habit, Sisters. Recently I was speaking to Mme de Liancourt. ² She told me that a gentleman named M. de Chauderonne had adopted the devout custom of always sleeping with his hands joined. God rewarded him for that by the grace of dying while at prayer. It’s very important, Sisters, to acquire good habits. You should also have great respect for your regular observance of the grand silence from after night prayers until after prayers the next morning. Don’t speak to any Sister without necessity, for fear that you may be interrupting the conversation of her soul with God. That time is totally consecrated to Him, Sisters; Our Lord has said so: ‘I will lead my spouse into silence and there I will speak to her heart.’ ³ Just see the harm you would do to one another, were you to interrupt such sacred conversation. I told you on another occasion that Mme Goussault was very exact about keeping silence. If a lady of rank, who had so much to do and had no obligation to observe silence, was so exact, how much more careful should you be, Sisters, to observe your practices faithfully, since you gave yourselves to God to do so, and because God has subjected you to Rules that oblige you to it!

“Your Rule prescribes, Sisters, that you study at the appointed times how to read and write. I’d like all of you to acquire this knowledge, Sisters—not to be learned, for that often only puffs up the heart and fills the mind with pride, but so that it might help you to serve God better. Do you think, Sisters, that those who teach or study philosophy are better Christians because of that? No, that’s not why you should study, but so that you may be able to write out your receipts and expenses, send news about yourselves to distant places, and teach poor little village girls. I’m convinced that knowledge is of little use and that a theologian, no matter how learned he may be, finds that his knowledge is no help to him in making his prayer. It’s more common for God to communicate himself to sim-

²Jeanne de Schomberg, daughter of Maréchal Henri de Schomberg and wife of Roger du Plessis, Duc de Liancourt, was a pious, talented woman. She helped Saint Louise considerably in her charitable works, encouraged the zeal of Adrien Bourdois, and took under her patronage the Daughters of Providence. Pascal, Arnauld, and Le Maistre de Sacy finally succeeded in winning her and her husband over to Jansenism. She died in the Château de Liancourt on June 14, 1674, at the age of seventy-four.
³Cf. Hos 2:16. (NAB)
people, ignorant persons of good will rather than to the more learned; we have many examples of that.

"Devotion and spiritual inspirations and acts of love are given more frequently to truly devout girls and women than to men, with the exception of those who are simple and humble. Among us, the Brothers sometimes give a better account of their prayer and have more beautiful thoughts than we priests have. And why is that, Sisters? Because God promised it and is pleased to converse with the lowly. So, those of you who can't read should be consoled and reflect that this can't hinder you from loving God, nor even from making your prayer well. If a Sister had such great difficulty in making her prayer that she became completely helpless, she could ask permission to say the rosary. And, in accordance with the advice given her, she'll make use of this beautiful devotion.

"Our blessed Father used to say that, if he were not obliged to say his Office, he wouldn't say any other prayer but the rosary. He strongly recommended it, and he himself prayed it without fail for thirty years to obtain purity from God through the purity He gave His holy Mother and in order to die well. So then, Sisters, the recitation of the rosary is a very beautiful devotion, especially for Daughters of Charity, who have such great need of God's assistance to obtain this purity, which is so necessary for them. Blessed are the souls who give themselves to the service of God for the sake of purity! You have great reason to glorify God, Sisters, for the grace He has until now given your little Company for this virtue. The Sisters who have already died let us see that clearly enough. The purity of their lives has greatly edified us. In due time, we'll speak of the latest Sister to have died. May God be eternally blessed! That's why, Sisters, I exhort you always to have great devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

"Another of your maxims is not to waste time. What an excellent and necessary piece of advice! People used to ask Saint Anthony in his day how to be saved, and his reply was always, 'Keep busy.' He showed this by his own example because, apart from his prayer time, he did manual labor. I recommend that to you, Sisters. When you come home from visiting your patients and have nothing to do,
take your distaff or something else and set to work; in this way, Sisters, you'll edify your young Sisters, and they'll do the same after you. You should also strive as far as possible to be uniform in all things because, Sisters, if any of you were to love to be different she'd no longer be a Daughter of Charity but a daughter of pride. May God protect you from that, Sisters!

"Your way of life also prescribes that you make a short annual retreat, that is, the spiritual exercises, and you do that, Sisters, in order to recognize your failures of the past year and to rise from them more courageously. Those eight days of silence are a harvest time. What a happiness if you use well that time God gives you to speak with Him heart to heart! It is then that Our Lord's promise to lead your soul into solitude is fulfilled. That's why I beg you, Sisters, not to fail to make it. You'll learn there to be true Daughters of Charity; you'll also learn there how to serve the sick well. You'll go over in your mind the actions of Our Lord when He was on earth, you'll see that He spent a good part of His time serving His neighbor, and you'll take the resolution to imitate Him. What do you think Our Lord did? He wasn't satisfied with restoring the sick to health; He also taught them how to act when they were well. Imitate Him."

"But, Monsieur," a Sister then objected, "should we who are so ignorant instruct others?"

"Have you any doubt about that, Sisters? Don't be afraid to ask God for the right thing to say to them; He won't fail to inspire you. Is there anything more beautiful? How touching to see that, not satisfied with the trouble you're taking, you have on your lips words that testify that your heart is filled with the love of God and that you want to communicate this to our masters, His dear poor persons! Yes, Sisters, do all you can for that purpose; give yourselves to God to serve Him in this way, and don't ever be with a poor person again without giving him or her some instruction.

"You should also, Sisters, show great respect for the orders given you by the physicians for the treatment of your patients, and take care not to omit even one of them for the times as well as the dosage of the medicines, for sometimes it's a question of life and death. Carefully observe the way the physicians treat the sick in the
towns—where there are some—so that when you go into the villages, you can make use of this knowledge: when you should bleed a patient, how often you should repeat bloodletting, the amount of blood you should draw each time, when to take it from the foot, when to use cupping glasses, when to give medicines and which ones are suited to the various kinds of illnesses you may encounter. All that is very necessary, and you'll do much good when you've been trained in everything. It's good for you to have brief discussions on this subject.” A Sister then said that this was sometimes done by way of question and answer.

“You should present yourselves to the Directress at least once a month to give an account of your conduct. What a holy custom of your Company that is, Sisters! Don’t fail in it. But let your communication be sincere and cordial. Speak at that time not only about your failings, but also of the good you are doing by the grace of God, and do so in order to purify it. If you omit making your communication to her, you place yourselves in danger of being tempted because you see, Sisters, God tells the just man to do well the good he does. It isn’t enough to bring food and medicine to the sick, nor even to instruct them, if you don’t unite to it the virtue God asks of you and the intention He wants you to have in those good works. Communication with your Directress will be a great help in both these matters because God blesses the submission and humility that prompts you to speak to her for love of Him. When you go to visit a sick person, do so in union with Our Lord and to imitate Him. In this way, Sisters, you’ll merit far more than by performing great acts of penance. It’s the intention that counts. An action of little value is elevated by a good, upright intention and becomes great in the sight of God. If you can’t make one for each of your actions, at least renew your intentions from time to time.

“You also have the custom of never going out without permission. When you’re out, be very careful never to go anywhere other than the place for which you have permission. As soon as you return, don’t fail to present yourself to the Directress, or the person

*Saint Louise. Saint Vincent refers to her by various titles, e.g., Superioress, Directress, Sister Servant of the Motherhouse, etc.*
who represents her, to give her an account of what you did when you were out.

"As long as you remain within the enclosure of obedience, which is your cloister, you’ll be safe, Sisters; if you go beyond it, be afraid from then on and believe that you’re in danger.”

A Sister then asked if it was a good thing for her to ask a Sister to reprove her for her faults. After reflecting on the matter as usual, M. Vincent replied, “Sisters, when you see that a Sister has no objection to your admonishing her, do her the charity of reminding her with meekness and cordiality; but if you see that she’s disheartened, and doesn’t take it well, don’t reprove her. Your willingness to help her in her need can still be yours in not saddening her. A Sister who isn’t docile and objects to being reminded of her faults should have great reason for fear and self-distrust. That’s why I ask you, Sisters, to give yourselves to God to accept the admonitions given you, no matter from whom they may come; otherwise, it’s to be supposed that there’s some hidden pride or natural aversion and repugnance in our character. And why should you be annoyed that someone reproves you, Sisters? Saint Peter was willing for Saint Paul to correct him, although he knew quite well that Our Lord had made him the head of His Church. Act the same way, Sisters; when a Sister is willing that you correct her, do her that charity. The Bishop of Geneva recommended that so strongly to his dear Sisters of the Visitation, not only to accept admonitions willingly, but also to manifest joy at being reproved! He went even further, for he advised the Sister, after thanking the person who gave the admonition, to accuse herself of a fault that had not been noticed; for instance, a Sister reprimanded for showing irreverence by remaining apart from the others in church should reply, ‘Thank you, Sister; God allowed you to notice this fault, but if you had seen my soul, you’d know that it was far worse, because my mind was wandering.’ I assure you, Sisters, that if you act like that, you’ll make great progress.

“Sisters, I ask Our Lord, the author of every Rule, to grant you the grace to observe very exactly those Rules it has pleased the Divine Goodness to give you for your way of life, so that, keeping yourself in their observance as on a ship, you may arrive safely in heaven, where you’ll receive the reward of your labors. And for that purpose, I ask God to give you His holy blessing, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”