the means God gives us to resist them; above all, let’s ask Him for the grace for ourselves and for all our Sisters to die a thousand times—if that were possible—rather than ever to consent to the temptations our enemy may send us against our vocation.

“This is what I ask you, my God, for myself, for all our Sisters here present, and for those who are not. We are weak, my God, and capable of giving in at the first assault. You have called us by pure mercy; may Your infinite goodness be pleased to preserve us. On our part, with the help of Your holy grace, we will do all in our power to render You all the services and all the fidelity You await from us.

“Grant us, then, my God, grant us the grace to persevere until death. I ask You this by the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, confident that You will grant it to me. I will now pronounce the words of blessing, with which I entreat You to bestow on the entire Company the spirit that from all eternity You have willed it to have. *Benedictio Dei Patris.* . . .”

33. - PURITY OF INTENTION

July 11

“The first point of this conference deals with the reasons why Daughters of Charity should perform all their actions in a spirit of charity and with God in view, that is, Sisters, with the intention of pleasing God; second, some means to be taken in order to perform all our actions in this way, and third, the evils that may arise, or the harm there is in not doing our actions with this intention.

“That’s the subject of the present conference, Sisters. It has been a long time since we’ve had such an important one, because it’s the

*Conference 33. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Elisabeth Heliot.*

*The year of this conference is not indicated on the manuscript. Since Sister Elisabeth Heliot, who wrote it, died in late 1650, it must be placed between 1646-50, and most likely between 1646-49, because in 1650, Saint Vincent gave a conference (Conf. 48) on July 14.*
intention that gives weight to all our works and makes them meritorious in the sight of God.

"Sister, would you please tell us the reasons you’ve thought of with reference to this topic?" The Sister replied that, if we do all our actions with the intention of pleasing God, He himself will be our reward. To have the intention of pleasing God means that we shouldn’t seek any reward but act purely for love of Him. Without this intention, it’s impossible to persevere in our vocation.

"Isn’t that beautiful, Sisters? I can’t let it pass without calling your attention to it. If the Daughters of Charity were at this point, what glory and service they’d give to God, and how God himself would take pleasure and delight in them! And you, Sister, why is it good for Daughters of Charity to perform all their actions in a spirit of charity?"

"Because it’s more pleasing to God, Monsieur."

"And what do you have to do to have this intention of being more pleasing to God, Sister?"

"To ask God, the first thing in the morning, for the grace to do nothing all day long except for love of Him."

"And if a Sister doesn’t do that, what happens to her if she works hard from early morning with nothing on her mind other than to get on with her work and with no thought of God?" The Sister replied that, without this intention, we labor in vain and all that we do counts for nothing. Another said that, to induce us to do all our actions well, it’s good to call to mind God’s greatness; another, that we should do them with quiet promptness and without haste, especially since that sometimes prevents us from lifting our soul to God.

Another Sister said that one reason for doing all our actions in a spirit of charity is that we’re far removed from this virtue, which is so necessary and without which we bear unworthily the name of Daughters of Charity, since it’s to be feared that we may be so only in appearance and not in reality. A further reason is that if we don’t act with God in view, we’re acting to please creatures; consequently, we receive our reward in this world and won’t receive that of our heavenly Father, since we’re not working for Him. A third reason is the warning Saint Paul gives us that, if we were to do all
kinds of good deeds but didn’t have charity—meaning the pure love of God—all that would serve us as nothing.

One good means is to keep ourselves in the close presence of God and in that way to motivate ourselves to please Him who sees us constantly; to examine ourselves more often to see whether our intentions are not mingled with any others than the love of God and, if we notice any that are not pure, to strive to uproot them.

Another means is to be strongly convinced that poor persons are the members of the Son of God and that, in them, we serve the person of Jesus Christ.

“On the third point, I thought that, without this spirit, great disunion may arise in the Community, especially since, where charity is wanting, so is union; consequently, there is no Community because what maintains it is union of hearts. The result is that many even lose their vocation because, if the actions performed in it are lowly and humble, and they’re not elevated by the spirit of charity and the thought of the presence of God in which they should be done, we easily allow ourselves to be influenced and discouraged by the spirit of the world, which is simply a spirit of pride and ambition, and we are unable to sample the humiliations of Jesus Christ. My resolution is to consider God alone in all my actions so as to do them for love of Him, with the help of His holy grace.”

With regard to the first point, another Sister said that it’s appropriate to bear in mind the Sovereign Majesty of God, that the principal end of all our actions is to please Him, and that they couldn’t be acceptable to Him if they lacked the spirit of charity. The second reason is that, if we don’t perform our actions in this spirit and with this intention, they’re lost to us and can’t be meritorious before God. The third reason is that we’re called Daughters of Charity, and we’d act contrary to the meaning of this name if we had any other motives in our actions than that of pleasing God and of doing them in a spirit of charity. So that our actions may be animated with this spirit, it’s well to unite them with similar actions of Jesus Christ and to His constant aim of pleasing His Eternal Father, in order to make up for what is lacking in ours, and to the spirit of charity with which all His actions were animated, in order to heat up the tepidity of
ours. Another means is to lift our souls to God each day and, if possible, before each of our principal actions, to ask Him for the grace to do this in a spirit of charity, with a view to pleasing Him alone. On the third point, I noticed three principal faults contrary to this holy practice, the first of which is that, if we don’t have the intention of pleasing God, nor the spirit of charity, we perform our actions indifferently or they have no merit. Another fault would be to do them for our own satisfaction, with no other aim than self-gratification. The third—and the worst of all—would be to do them to please others and to win esteem for ourselves.

“Very good! dear Sisters, by the mercy of God that’s very good indeed! You’ve brought forward some excellent reasons and, from the way you presented them, it seems that your hearts have been touched by them and that all of you are determined to begin the practice of doing nothing from now on except with the aim and intention of pleasing God. That’s what Saint Paul meant by the words, ‘Whether you eat or drink, do it for the love of God!’ If actions of this nature are made meritorious and pleasing to God in everything when they’re done for love of Him, Sisters, how much more will actions be that are excellent in themselves, such as prayer, the observance of Rule, assisting the poor, etc.! Yet we often do them without intention and without attention. Mon Dieu! dear Sisters, how much will we be losing by not applying ourselves to what we do, and of how much we deprive Our Lord by not offering our actions to Him!

“Do you think, Sisters, of the pleasure God takes in regarding a soul that’s intent on pleasing Him, careful to offer Him all it plans to do? It’s beyond imagining. Sisters, and the Sister was so right in saying that it gives joy to God. Yes, it’s a joy to Him, His good pleasure, His delight. He’s like a father is with a son who takes care to bring him everything people give him; if someone gives him something he has no rest until he has found his father and says, ‘Look, Dad! Look what I have; this was given to me; I did that myself!’ And the father takes indescribable pleasure at seeing the docility of

\[\text{Cf. 1 Cor 10:31. (NAB)}\]
that child and those little tokens of his love and dependence. The same holds true of God, dear Sisters, and in a far higher degree. When a person says to Him in the morning, ‘My God, I offer you everything that may happen to me today,’ and, in addition, on all the principal occasions that arise to do or to suffer something during the day, she glances interiorly toward the Divine Majesty and says in wordless language, ‘Look at what I’m about to do for love of You, my God; this situation is painful and hard to bear but, for love of You, nothing is impossible to me;’ then, Sisters, God gives an increase of grace in proportion to the use His Goodness sees the person making of it. If today she’s had the strength to surmount one difficulty, tomorrow she’ll have it to overcome another—or several—far greater and more painful.

“Many other things have been said that could help you to understand the importance of this practice, the glory God receives from it, and the benefit that comes to souls who devote themselves to it, but it would take me too long to repeat them to you. What, then, should be done? That’s the whole point.

“It was said in the first place that we should turn to our Guardian Angels, and it’s true....”

34. - THE GOOD USE OF ADMONITIONS

January 22, 1648

First point: the reasons we have for consenting to have our faults made known and being admonished for them.

Second point: the means of profiting from the admonitions given us.

“It’s been a long time since we discussed a matter of so great importance, Sisters. It’s a question of showing the reasons why it’s expedient and even necessary for our faults to be made known and for our Superiors or others to do us the charity of reminding us of them.

3The rest of the conference has been lost.
Conference 34. - MS. SV 1, pp. 1ff.
This is a practice repugnant to nature, but grace will make it easy if we have the sincere disposition God is asking of us in the way of life it has pleased His Goodness to choose for us.

"Sister, is it well for our Superiors to be informed of our faults?"
"Yes, Father."

"Why should they be made aware of them?"
"Because that makes us more careful to watch over ourselves."

"And you, Sister, do you think it’s a good idea for our Superiors to know when we’ve failed?"

"Yes, Monsieur, for sometimes we commit faults without realizing it; and when our Superiors do us the charity of reminding us of them, we see that they’re faults and take care to avoid them."

"But, Sister, what if it’s a fault of which a person knows she’s guilty and perhaps wants to keep on committing? I don’t think there are any such persons in the Company—may God preserve us from that—but it can sometimes happen. A Sister who may be somewhat indisposed will see in this a reason for not rising in the morning and, for fear of becoming ill because of it, will stay in bed. She knows this is against her Rule but, because she sees some reason for excusing herself, she thinks she’s really excused. Is it well for the Superioress to be notified of this?"

"Yes, Father, because the admonition of the Superioress will counteract the laziness that keeps us from doing what we should do."

"Also, Sister, in the case of Sisters who aren’t in this house, like those in the parishes, or out in the country, or in the hospitals, if they commit any faults, is it well that others be informed of them—Mademoiselle, if she’s in a place where that can be done, or the Sister Servant of the places where they are?"

"I think that no matter where we are, Monsieur, if we commit faults, they should be made known to our Superiors and also to others because the shame that ensues prompts us not to fall into the same faults again."

"Well, Sister, suppose someone were to accuse you wrongly sometimes, what should you do then? Wouldn’t it be better to explain that a mistake had been made?"
“I think it would be more pleasing to God to say nothing, Monsieur, and to endure that calumny with humility because we commit many other faults that people are unaware of.”

“If I understand correctly, Sister, you think that, should we be unjustly rebuked for some fault, it would be better to accept the correction without saying anything rather than to justify ourselves. I certainly agree with you there, and I hold that, unless the silence were sinful or would harm the interests of our neighbor, it’s far better to act in that way. That’s imitating Our Lord. How many persons made accusations against Him, found fault with His life, censured His teaching, and vomited execrable blasphemies against His person! Yet, no one saw Him excuse himself. He was brought before Pilate and Herod; yet, He said nothing in His own defense and, in the end, allowed himself to be crucified. There’s nothing better than to follow the example He has given us. In this respect I can tell you, dear Sisters, that I’ve never seen anything happen to a person who refused to defend himself—never. It’s not up to us to give explanations; if people blame us for something we haven’t done, it’s not for us to defend ourselves. God wants us to leave the discernment between truth and falsehood to Him, Sisters. He’ll know the opportune time for making known the truth. If you knew how good it is to leave all these concerns to Him, Sisters, you’d never try to justify yourselves. God sees how we’re maligned and doubtless permits this to test our fidelity. He knows how you take it, the good results you draw from it, or the bad use you make of it and if, for the moment, He allows you to be charged with it, He’ll certainly know how to manifest the truth later on. It’s a true and infallible maxim, Sisters, that God always justifies those who don’t try to justify themselves.

“Just tell me, Sister, do we do well by not saying anything when corrected for a fault we haven’t committed? Do we have an example of that? Did Our Lord ever give us any?”

“Yes, Father,” she replied.

“Yes, Sisters, He gave us the example not in one solitary action but throughout His life. In these circumstances, Sister, is it a good practice to picture Our Lord before Pilate when the crowd falsely
accused Him and He offered no defense?" The Sister replied that this practice seemed good and useful to her because our emotions are usually aroused, and, if we're not careful, nature immediately takes the upper hand.

"And in such a case, Sister, wouldn't it be well for her to seek out one of her Sisters—the one to whom she's the closest—and tell her of her displeasure? 'I've just been talking to the Superioress, who told me I had committed such and such a fault. But that's not true. I did say it, but not in the sense she says I did. Am I not allowed to justify myself? Bon Dieu! is my whole life going to be like that?' What do you think, Sister? Would there be any harm in unburdening yourself in that way?"

"Yes, there would, Monsieur," replied the Sister, "because I might win over the Sister to my side and, instead of doing myself any good, I'd cause harm by murmuring and give my Sister reason to complain on another occasion when something displeased her."

"So, Sister, you think it would be wrong to complain?"

"Yes, I do, Monsieur."

"You're so right! and this is such a great evil that when mention is made in Holy Scripture of the seven sins God detests, 1 it is stated that murmuring is abominable in the sight of God. Yes, Sisters, of those seven sins there isn't one that God seems to hold in greater horror than murmuring, and, although murder and robbery are specified among the seven, murmuring is still more abominable. All of you are horrified at the mere mention of the word 'murder,' yet, if we don't keep our evil inclinations tightly in check, we'll often allow ourselves to give way to murmuring. Be very careful about that, Sisters. What do you think murmuring is in your Community? It's a plague that ruins everything. To destroy everything, all you need is one Sister who complains and another who listens to her. It's the mother of division.

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1Sacred Scripture contains several lists of sins, e.g., Prv 6:16-19, but it is not properly the origin of what are called the seven capital sins. Following Saint John Cassian and Saint Gregory the Great, Christian tradition refers to "capital" sins because they engender other sins; they are pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth.
"Tell me, Sister, why do we usually make excuses for the faults people accuse us of committing?"

"I think pride is the cause, Monsieur; and I say that because many times I’ve had experience of this, and sometimes have allowed myself to give way to complaining of my Superioresses and Superiors, for which I ask pardon of God, of you, Father, and of all my Sisters."

"Blessed be God, Sister, for the knowledge His Goodness has given you of the origin of this evil! It’s very true that it comes from pride, which can’t endure that someone should think anything but good of us. That’s why, Sisters, we have to make the effort to uproot this evil, detestable vice from the Company; and to do it more easily, we’ve arranged with Mademoiselle that, at the usual Friday conferences where you accuse yourselves of your faults, if someone does not accuse herself of a fault, one of the Sisters who witnessed that fault should kneel down and say, ‘Sister, in a spirit of charity, I remind you that recently you committed such a fault. I’m so wretched that I’ve committed many others of which I’m ignorant but, because the Rule so ordains, I remind you of this one; and if someone has noticed any of mine, I very humbly ask her to have the charity to remind me of them.’ And she will kiss the floor. That’s the way we’ve judged it advisable to remind someone of her faults—in these or similar terms, but always very humbly and charitably. Do you think that will be helpful, Sister?” M. Vincent had the charity to question several Sisters one after the other, even the oldest, then all in general; and everyone agreed.

Mademoiselle said that she judged this practice very necessary, provided the Company not only agreed to it but also desired it, bearing in mind the good that would follow from it. To this, Most Honored Father responded, “You’ve seen the great blindness that closes our eyes to our own faults, Sisters; you’ve seen the progress we can make if we’re admonished in the proper manner; you’ve already approved the means I suggested to you; do you want this, Sisters?” They all declared that they did.

Mademoiselle begged him to allow one of our Sisters to do her the charity of admonishing her. To this he replied, “If all our Sisters
had the happiness of being reminded of their faults, it wouldn't be fair, Mademoiselle, that you and I alone should be deprived of such a benefit and be so unfortunate as not to receive this charity from someone. In certain Communities, a person is specially charged to admonish the Superioress. It will therefore be necessary for a Sister, who will be your Assistant and will take your place in your absence, to receive the complaints to be made; then, after hearing them, she will make her prayer on the subject and mention them to you. But I have a complaint to make about the man who is responsible for admonishing me, because he doesn't have enough charity for this and overlooks some of my really serious faults.

“So, Sisters, these are the means God wants the Company to use to work at its advancement and the destruction of pride. If there are any Sisters who can't accept admonitions, that's a very bad sign; it's an indication that they're willing to let pride hold great sway; and it's greatly to be feared that, without a very special grace, they'll make no progress. They'll render themselves unworthy of profiting from them if they don't soon take the trouble to make good use of them. If the Sister who is so disinclined to this is young and if, after being admonished, she doesn't change, I don't think the Company should keep her; if she's older, she must correct herself at all costs because she's supposed to give the example. You should know, Sisters, that some can't be of one mind and others of another; there has to be complete uniformity, and all of you, with the help of God, must continue to desire what you've just expressed.

“An Emperor had several sons—ten or twelve, I'm not sure. Before he died he wanted to let them see the importance of unity for the peace of a State and the welfare of all. He had a large bundle of arrows brought to his bedside, and said to the youngest, ‘Come here, son; take this bundle of arrows and break it in two.’ ‘Father,’ said the boy, ‘I can't.’ He then turned to another, who gave the same answer, next to the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, and all the others, who all admitted their inability. The father then said to the eldest, ‘Take one of them out of the bundle and see if you can break it.’ The eldest did so quite easily. ‘Children,’ the father then said, ‘this teaches you that as long as you're united and closely bound to-
gether, all the powers in the world can do nothing against you, but as soon as you begin to be divided among yourselves, you'll be easily defeated.'

"I say the same to you, Sisters; if all of you are always of the same will, if you're all in harmony, your Company, which God in His goodness has taken care to form, will be maintained with good results and will serve as an example, and all the powers of earth and hell will be unable to do anything against it. But as soon as there are any Sisters who are attached to their own ideas, then good-bye to the poor Daughters of Charity, if God doesn't come to their assistance. May it please the Divine Goodness that, as long as the world shall last, this poor Company may always remain within the limits prescribed for it by God, and may humbly give the neighbor the relief and assistance to which it has committed itself!

"Because it's getting late, Sisters, and most of you have come from a distance, we'll leave the conclusion of the present conference for some other day. In the meantime, we'll ask God to bless the resolution that each and every one of you has now taken, to be willing to be reminded of your faults by whomsoever and in whatever manner He may permit, without harboring any ill feelings against the person who reveals them. May it please His Divine Majesty to accept the disposition you now seem to have, and be willing to bless its beginnings, while I, wretched man, utter the words of blessing, "Benedictio Dei Patris . . . ."

Reflections of Mademoiselle

"The first reason for consenting to be reminded of our faults is that, if we are well aware of them, we'll have greater fear of the judgments of God. The second is that if we're content to have our faults revealed and that helps us to know our own weakness well, then we'll tolerate our neighbor more easily and more charitably. The third is that we're blind on this point, and if, by being told of them we know them well, we'll find this very beneficial for our progress in the perfection God wills and asks of us, along with a greater knowledge of the obligations we have to the holy humanity
of Our Lord. This will enable us to increase the grateful love we should have for Him.

"One means to benefit from admonitions is to show clearly that we're willing not only to be reminded of our faults but also to have our Superiors informed of them. A second means is to manifest friendliness and affection toward the Sister who did us this act of charity. Another means is that, if we feel our heart protest through pride, and we want to complain of the person who has done us this favor, we should kneel at the foot of the Cross, if we can, or take our crucifix in our hands and reflect how often Our Lord was falsely accused, without complaining, and, on the contrary, said that if anyone had seen Him do wrong, they should have admonished Him for it. With the help of God's grace, I am determined to make better use than I have done in the past of the slightest remark made to me by anyone who calls my attention to a fault, acknowledging, before God and you, Father, and all my Sisters that I have truly failed in that through my pride."

35. - THE GOOD USE OF ADMONITIONS

March 15, 1648

"This conference, Sisters, is a continuation of the last one, which was on admonitions, that is, on the reasons we have for consenting that our faults be made known to others—including the Superioress and Officers—and being corrected for them. This topic was so important for the welfare of the Company in general and the progress of each Sister in particular that it was judged advisable to hold a second conference in which each Sister—or the majority—should report how, on the occasions that presented themselves, she made use of what was said at the last one; if, despite the resolution taken before God and the promise that was unanimously made, she let slip any harsh or disdainful words about Sisters suspected of having re-

Conference 35. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Elisabeth Hellot.
ported the faults; and if, instead of profiting from those admonitions, any attempt was made to see where they came from; lastly, whether there have been any complaints.

"Please tell us, Sister, why a Daughter of Charity should be glad to have her Superioress notified of her faults and for the Superioress to correct her for them." The Sister replied that it was a means of preventing us from falling into them again, yet she had been so weak that, having been reminded about something, she wouldn't admit that there had been any fault in it, but maintained obstinately that there was none, thereby failing in submission; subsequently she had a fit of bad temper which, on several occasions, had given bad example to the Company. For this she asked pardon of God, of Most Honored Father, and of all our Sisters.

"You admit, then, Sister, that they were faults?"

"Yes, Father," said the Sister, "faults that were the result of my willfulness and pride."

"Blessed be God! You're quite right in thinking that, Sister; and I thank the goodness of God, who has made you see this so clearly that, recognizing a lack of fidelity to God in having failed to accept willingly, as you had promised, the admonitions given you and that this made you lose your temper, become angry, complain, and give bad example, you are willing to be admonished from now on. For, tell me, Sisters, if a Sister had a conspicuous smudge of dirt on her face and, because no one said anything to her, went out in that condition, wouldn't she have good reason to complain and to say, 'Because of you, people laughed at me.' And yet, the same holds true of us. We're not aware of our own faults; we're blind on that point. Those to whom God has entrusted us—and many others as well—see them clearly. If they didn't tell us, wouldn't we be right to complain or to think they don't feel that we're far enough advanced to be able to profit from admonitions? Yes, we certainly would. If you consider the advantages to a person reminded of her faults, and the disadvantage to the one who doesn't receive this act of charity, you'll say, 'I want to be admonished; it's the greatest benefit and the greatest charity that someone could do for me! Quoi! everyone else would know their faults, and I'd be like some-
one in the house afflicted with ozena! Everyone would shun me because of my imperfections, and I'd be like a person with ozena, who infects everyone else without even being aware of it!

“I’ve used the word ozena, Sisters, because persons who have it don’t realize that they have the disease. They have stomach trouble, bad breath, and infect everyone else, but they themselves are unaware of it. An Emperor had it so badly that no one could bear to stay around him. As soon as people came near him, they felt their stomach turn, and he knew nothing of it. One day one of his friends said to him, ‘Sire, you should consult some skillful physicians about your ozena; maybe they’ll give you some remedy.’ ‘What!’ he said, ‘What! do I have that disease?’ ‘You have it so badly,’ said the other, ‘that no one can stand being near you.’ ‘And why has this been concealed from me for so long? Why haven’t my friends ever told me about it? Why didn’t my wife tell me?’ He went off to find the Empress. ‘Beloved, why didn’t you ever tell me that I had ozena?’ ‘Alas, Sire!’ said she, ‘I made sure I didn’t because I thought that all other men had breath that smelled like yours.’ What an innocent this Princess was!

“But please note the nature of this disease! Now, there’s the ozena of sin which infects the soul, just as the other infects the body, and, if those who have no other interest than the glory of God and your salvation didn’t tell you about it, you’d all be so infected with it that you’d have no idea you were tainted by it.

“Mademoiselle, would you please tell us if you’ve noted any progress in the Company since it was decided that Sisters should be reminded of their faults?”

“Father, so far we really haven’t begun this practice; maybe that’s because I haven’t yet asked the Sister whom Your Charity designated to admonish me. Perhaps she hasn’t begun it because my pride might not have easily accepted it. I very humbly ask pardon, Father, of you and of all our Sisters, for this negligence and for all the faults I’ve committed. In a spirit of humility and charity, I’ll tell you that, since the last conference, although our Sisters had con-

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1Saint Vincent is referring to the disease characterized by intranasal crusting, atrophy, and a fetid odor.
sented to be reminded of their faults, it often happened that some of
them haven’t taken it well and have complained, saying among
themselves, ‘Who said that already?’ or some similar remark,
which indicated their displeasure that people were aware of their
faults. Some of them also allow themselves to refrain from Holy
Communion on the appointed days without asking for an exemp-
tion. Furthermore, Father, a certain liberty has slipped in with re-
gard to rising on time in the morning. Some Sisters stay in bed until
five o’clock, half past five, and even six, without asking permission
or mentioning their needs. There are still other faults, which I forget
at the moment. I ask pardon of the whole Company for not having
reminded them of these when I thought of them.”

“So then, Sisters, there are principally three things in which Ma-
demoiselle has noted relaxation in the Company; pay close atten-
tion to them, for they’re very important. The first is rising in the
morning. To make this easier for you, I’d like you to make up your
mind the previous evening to be faithful to answering the voice of
God, which will call you the next morning. The voice of God, Sis-
ters, is the bell that summons you to go to adore God. Imagine that
it’s saying to you, ‘God awaits you; come, all of you, to adore Him.’
It’s the custom of the Church to say at the beginning of Matins,
‘Come, everyone; come to adore God.’ It seems to be calling all
nations, Princes, and peoples to come to adore God; that, Sisters, is the
thought you also should have on rising: ‘I’m going to adore God,
and He’s waiting to receive the oblation of my heart.’

“As for Holy Communion, you should know, Sisters, that you
must also ask to be dispensed from receiving it on the appointed
days, and permission to go to Communion on other days. From the
day you entered a Community under obedience to a Superiress,
you’re no longer free to act according to your own will and judg-

2 Since the time of Saint Vincent, there have been developments of doctrine and practice
regarding Holy Communion. Here he is speaking of receiving Communion on the days
appointed, or when permission is granted by one’s confessor for other occasions. On December
20, 1905, on the urging of Saint Pius X, the decree Sacra Tridentina Synodus was promulgated,
encouraging frequent—even daily—reception of Communion, especially in religious Orders and
Communities. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), “the Church warmly
recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion when they participate in the Eucharist”
(p. 356, no. 1417).
ment. She knows you better than you do yourselves; it's up to her to prescribe what's to be done.

"The other failing is the one we're now discussing; we've already said something about it. I'll tell you again clearly, Sisters, that although you may feel some repugnance at being reminded of your faults, you mustn't be surprised at this because very few persons can be told of their faults without being upset by it. Nature loves itself and finds it painful to hear its imperfections mentioned, but we must accustom it to this; therefore, Sisters, nature must be punished when we see that we've committed a fault. A Sister will admonish me and, instead of humbling myself, I'll try to justify myself and to show her that she's wrong; or, if I can't, I'll be satisfied with saying to the other Sisters, 'I've been told this or that just now, but it's nothing; it's a misunderstanding or has been reported incorrectly. Who would tell such tales? If I knew, I'd let them have it.' Sisters, as soon as you see that you've reached that point, punish yourselves to overcome this cursed nature, tainted by sin, which suggests all these reasons to us. Go to the Superior, or, if it's another Sister, go to her, and say, 'Sister, I ask your pardon, I've taken badly the admonition you had the charity to give me. I'll try, nevertheless, to make good use of it, and I also entreat you, even if you see that my self-love is piqued, not to stop reminding me.'

"Let me tell you in connection with this, Sisters, that a holy religious, a very important person, had great repugnance at being admonished; yet, when the first emotion had passed—for he always became angry—he would get over it, ask pardon, and beg people to continue to remind him of his faults. He spent three or four years engaged in this conflict, then succeeded so well in overcoming himself that nothing gave him more pleasure than to be reproved. Then he felt greater joy than the repugnance he had previously experienced, and he reached this point because of the violence he had done to himself in bearing with the admonitions and humbling himself for them.

"Tell us, Sister, why is it right for us to be reminded of our faults?"
“Because it’s a means of correcting ourselves, and that helps us to preserve our vocation.”

“Very good! Our Sister has noted two great means for us: one means for correcting ourselves—for who wouldn’t correct herself after an admonition?—and one means to preserve our vocation. Nothing can preserve it better than to raise ourselves up, by means of admonitions, from the faults that might cause us to lose it, were we not reminded of them.

“The Visitation Nuns have a beautiful custom, which I find very helpful; when one of them reminds another of a fault, the one who receives the admonition kneels down and says, ‘It’s true, Sister, that I’ve committed this fault through malice, pride, or some other motive; at the same time, I also committed another one because of such or such a reason.’ You see, Sisters, instead of excusing themselves, they admit their faults, point out even greater ones that aren’t apparent and, in addition, add another one. If it should please God that this be introduced into the Motherhouse and done in a spirit of humility, I defy all the demons in hell—even should they be ten times more numerous than they are—I repeat, I defy them to be able to upset it.

“Sister, you down there at the back, do you think it’s right for a Sister to be admonished of her faults?”

“It seems to me, Father, that it’s the best means we could have to correct them. Recently I was so proud that, when admonished of a fault by one of my Sisters, whom I myself had asked the charity to remind me, I showed that I didn’t like it. I most humbly ask your pardon for this, and I ask pardon of you, Sister, who did me that act of charity.” The other Sister knelt down and said, “Sister, I’m the one who asks your pardon. I didn’t admonish you as I should have done because there were other people present.”

“Oh, that’s the way to do it! One accuses herself for not having taken the reproof well, and the other for not having given it properly; in this way, each tries to put the blame on herself. I recently asked one of our Brothers who doesn’t belong to our house here, ‘How is your family,’3 Brother? Are you getting along well in the country?’ ‘Monsieur,’ he replied, ‘it can’t be otherwise because it’s

3Saint Vincent often refers to the local community of the confreres as the family.
only a question of who will humble himself more; if any fault is committed, each man says that he’s guilty of it and takes it on himself, so we have no trouble living very peacefully. We’re like children, and it’s a marvelous blessing from God.’ This good Brother really consoled me by that and made me see that their great peace and union was due to the fact that each was willing to be admonished, and even considered himself guilty of the faults. There was a holy rivalry among them to see who would humble himself most.

“It’s a key to the spiritual life, Sisters, to be willing to be reminded of our faults, to take admonitions well, and to believe that, if people knew us, they’d help us to see other faults. This humbles us interiorly because, if we take a good look at ourselves, we’ll see that there’s no one more wicked than we are; and, because we neglect to look closely at ourselves on account of the ugly things we see there, admonitions reveal to us what our self-love was hiding. If we accept them well, we’ll find that this will gradually lead us to greater perfection.

“Stand up, Sisters,” he said to the Sisters who had remained kneeling. But the holy custom is to kiss the floor when you have accused yourself of your fault. . . . That’s excellent! As long as the Daughters of Charity act in this way—that is, that they admonish one other in a spirit of charity, humble themselves, and are faithful to the recognition and avowal of their faults—all hell will not prevail against them and will never be able to harm them. On the other hand, however, if someone among you were so ill-disposed as to be unwilling to be admonished and, instead of humbling herself, were to rebel and display her ill-humor to others, the smallest demon in hell would easily overpower her. Please be on the watch for this.

“Sister, please tell us why we should want to be reminded of our faults?”

“It seems to me, Father, that this helps us to improve more and more and gives the Sister who admonishes the chance to do an act of charity, and the one who is being admonished the opportunity to make an act of humility and submission.”

“That’s well put, and you’re so right, Sister, in saying that it helps us to improve, that the Sister who admonishes does an act of
charity, and that the one who receives the admonition makes an act of submission. For, what greater help can we have to improve than to know our imperfections, and what greater charity can we do for someone who isn’t aware of them than to point them out to her?

"Alas! as soon as we see a spot of mud on someone’s linen or clothing, we immediately say, ‘Be careful, Sister, you don’t want that to be ruined.’ And yet we’d see stains on someone’s soul without telling her! That would be failing in charity. So, remember, Sisters, that it would be failing in charity not to admonish your Sister if you saw her fall into a conspicuous fault and she wasn’t aware of it. Not that everyone should give admonitions, nor on every occasion, but you must choose your time so that the reminder may be beneficial.

"Sister, please tell us your thoughts on the topic under discussion."

"During the short time I meditated, Father, I thought it was necessary for us to be reminded in order to make us careful to correct our faults. I know from my own experience that I commit many faults that I notice but don’t correct because no one says anything to me about them. Since I’ve come to the motherhouse and since the last conference, I’ve committed many against the practice of my Rules, where I haven’t been careful. On the contrary, I’ve often used some slight pretext to excuse myself from them, especially rising in the morning. By so doing, I gave very bad example to the Sister with whom I was living, for she could easily see that there was no legitimate excuse for it. I’ve also failed greatly in the matter of admonitions, for I’ve neglected to correct the faults for which I was so gently reminded, out of compassion for my weakness, that I didn’t realize they were admonitions. Because of my pride, I also took issue with Mademoiselle when she had the charity to remind me of a fault, because I was unwilling to admit that it was a fault and was too impertinent in trying to justify myself. For all that, Father, I most humbly ask pardon of God, of Your Charity, of Mademoiselle, and of all my Sisters. I beg them with all my heart to mention the faults they’ve noticed in me so that I may correct them."
"Blessed be God, Sister, for the avowal of your faults His Good­ness has allowed you to make! That’s an excellent disposition for correcting them. As far as rising in the morning goes, we’ve already spoken about that. If each Sister didn’t do something about this, we’d really have to worry that in the end it wouldn’t be observed any longer. One means of preventing this disorder is to ignore the slight indispositions that might try to keep you in bed; for, if you stay in today because of them, tomorrow there will be others, and you’ll always find some excuse. I make exception for the sick, but only those who are really sick and who suffer from not being able to keep the Rule. Apart from that, I don’t think one should exempt oneself for minor ailments that are inconsequential. If you feel slightly unwell and stay in bed today and then again tomorrow, and if it doesn’t pass, it’s not rest that you need, and I think your health would improve if you followed the Community schedule.

“We had a priest with us who was very soft on himself. He had a few slight ailments and thought that rising in the morning contributed somewhat to them. ‘Very well, Monsieur,’ he was told, ‘we shall see; stay in bed for one month without getting up and we’ll see in the course of time how you’re feeling.’ So, he spent a month sleeping to his heart’s content and, at the end of that time, came to me and said, ‘Monsieur, I acknowledge that I have to follow the Rule. I’ve been resting all this time, and I’m worse than ever. Please let me get up.’ We granted his request and he’s doing very well. It’s so true that early rising never does any harm; on the contrary, it dispels the humors that accumulate with too much sleep, and you’ll always see that a person who rises regularly in the morning will have better health than one who lazes about and sometimes gets up early but more often late. Nothing accumulates unhealthy humors more than too much sleep. It causes catarrh, congestion, and a thousand other ailments that exercise eliminates. Furthermore, rising is the first act of fidelity we render to God when the bell summons us to do so; and the rest of the day is usually determined by rising in the morning. Believe me, there’s no use haggling with your pillow, for you won’t get the better of it.
“Well, Sisters, it’s getting late, and it’s time for each of you—and myself first of all, who have the greatest need of it—strengthened by God’s grace, which He’ll never refuse us, provided we’re faithful to Him, to take a good resolution to cherish and have special affection for those who will do us so much good as to admonish us of our failings, in the belief that there are no more sincere proofs of real affection than that.”

“But, Father,” said a Sister, “what if a Sister asked someone else to mention her faults, and the latter excused herself saying that she was too young? Would that be right?”

“Sister, the one who excused herself would be between two virtues: humility, which would suggest to her that she’s too young; and charity, which would oblige her to admonish her Sister. Now, since humility here concerns only herself, charity, which concerns the neighbor, is more perfect; in that case she should prefer the act of charity to humility. Even better, she’s doing both: she’s humbling herself by thinking that it’s not for her, the younger one, to admonish her Sister, and she’s practicing charity by accepting, because this virtue demands it and the Rule ordains it.

“You see, Sisters, what you’re trying to do now is what the Church did in the fervent days of the early Christians. For four hundred years this practice was observed, not only with ordinary people but also with Princes, Kings, and Emperors. It was the duty of a deacon to write down the faults of which he was informed; this was done in accordance with the word of Our Lord who said that if our neighbor didn’t correct himself after first being admonished in private and then in the presence of two or three witnesses, recourse was to be had to the Church.

“The Bishop himself also said it when the case required it, as did Saint Ambrose with the Emperor Theodosius. ‘You’ve had many people put to death,’ said the saint, ‘and for that you’re stained with innocent blood. I won’t open the door of the Church to you until you’ve cleansed yourself by suitable penance, and I forbid you to enter it.’ ‘Father,’ said the Emperor, ‘I confess that I have sinned.

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4Bishop of Milan and Doctor of the Church (c. 339-97).
You are my Nathan; you admonish me for my sin and I acknowledge it. Help me to obtain God's forgiveness, and I'll do whatever you command.' 'You've followed David's example as a sinner,' replied the saint, 'follow it now as a penitent, and I'll open the Church to you.' And he sent him away just like that until he did penance.

"One of the Kings of France, an Emperor, was publicly flogged for a crime he had committed, and Henry II, King of England, who had Saint Thomas, the Archbishop of Canterbury, put to death, was condemned by the Pope to be publicly flogged for his crime. He endured it humbly, so true is it that Kings must recognize that they depend on God, who is greater than they. May God give each and every one of us the grace to recognize the importance of this practice and how greatly it can contribute to the perfection of each of us in particular and of the whole Company in general! May it please the Divine Goodness to bless the resolution we've taken once again to accept, and even to desire, that all our faults be made known to our Superiors, and to impart to us, with His blessing, His true Spirit, in order to make good use of this! Benedictio Dei Patris. . . ."

**36. - THE GOOD USE OF INSTRUCTIONS**

May 1, 1648

"Dear Sisters, the subject matter of this conference is confined to two points: first, the reasons we have for profiting from the instructions given to us by our Superiors in the conferences and elsewhere; and second, the means we'll use to put those instructions into practice.

"Sister, you down there at the back, please tell us your thoughts."

"Monsieur, I think that one reason for profiting from the instructions given us at the conferences is the thought that you hold for us

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5 Old Testament prophet and adviser to Kings David and Solomon (cf. 2 Sm 12:1-15. [NAB]).
6 The conference mistakenly had Henry I.
7 Thomas Becket (1117-70), Chancellor of King Henry II and then Archbishop of Canterbury. Conference 36. - MS SV 9, pp. 139ff.
the place of God, and therefore we should listen to you and profit from all you tell us, as coming from Him."

"Alas, Sister! I'm a miserable sinner and nothing else. And you, Sister, did you make your prayer on the present subject? Would you please tell us your thoughts?"

"I thought, Father, that when we've forgotten our duty, God allows us to be reminded of it at the conferences, and this reminder coming from God is one reason why we should profit from them. On the second point—the means—I thought that listening humbly to these instructions is a good means to profit from them, and I resolved to do so."

The two Sisters who spoke next repeated substantially what the first Sister had said. Another stated that it was a means of advancing in virtue; another, that it was the voice of God who was instructing us at the conferences through the mouth of our Superiors, and that one means of profiting from them was to be convinced that the admonitions given there were sound.

"Not just the admonitions, Sister," replied Most Honored Father, "but everything that is said and not only what the Superior says—for, alas! I'm only a poor wretched sinner—but also everything the Sisters say. For you see, Sisters, it's God who speaks to you and instructs you, through you yourselves, in what He wants you to do. Before you learned of the topic we're now discussing, you hadn't thought about it; you placed yourselves in the presence of God; He spoke to your hearts and helped you to understand the reasons why you should profit from what is said during the conferences; or, if the conference is on some other topic, He teaches you the reasons you have for practicing the virtue that's being discussed and the means you will use from now on. When you're questioned on it, you tell us the thoughts you had; consequently, we must listen to them as an inspiration God has given you both for yourselves and for us.

"Sister, why do you think a Daughter of Charity should benefit from what is said at the conferences?"

"Because God is glorified by it, Monsieur."
“What you mean, Sister, is that God in His goodness, wishing to
give the Company the virtues it needs, allows it to receive His in-
structions and is glorified when we’re faithful to the practices He
ordains for us and has taught us. And what else?”

“It’s for our advancement.”

“So then, Sister, you think that, when God has instructions given
to you, His plan is to help you advance in the perfection of your
state; and you’re quite right. And what should be done by a Daugh-
ter of Charity to whom God has given some inspiration during the
meditation she made on the subject of a conference to guide her in
the practice of a virtue or to get rid of some imperfection? Shouldn’t
she tell others? Should she keep it secret for herself alone? No, she
should mention it humbly and simply, knowing and realizing that it
doesn’t come from her but from God, who gave it to her and wants
her to share it with others, since they all share with her the ones
they’ve had.

“Sister, tell me a means of profiting from the instructions given
at the conferences.” The Sister replied that she thought it was help-
ful, for that purpose, to retain them in her memory. “Do you think,
Sister, that a Daughter of Charity who remembers what was said at
the conferences has certain advantages?”

“Yes, Father, because that will help her on various occasions,
and her neighbor will be edified by it.”

“So you think, Sister, that a good Daughter of Charity who
comes prepared to the conference, planning to make good use of the
instructions given by the Superioress, the Superior, and the Sisters,
who listens very attentively with the intention of pleasing God, and
who leaves with her mind and heart filled with the thoughts with
which God has moved her; you think, I repeat, Sister, that this
Daughter can serve her neighbor? And how can she serve her?
She’ll serve her by her modesty, her example, and her words filled
with the Spirit of God, which she will have stored up; she’ll also
serve her by being more punctual in giving her what she needs at the
proper time, moved as she will be by the desire to please God and to
serve Him in His members, who are the poor. And do you think, Sis-
ter, that God doesn’t communicate himself to a poor Daughter of
Charity, who, before becoming one, had very little education and scarcely knew who God was; a poor girl who perhaps had never done anything but work in the fields? You should know, Sisters, that these are the souls to whom God communicates himself most intimately and efficaciously. From the day they put themselves, once and for all, into the hands of God, and devote themselves to know, love, and serve Him, these souls are raised up, and His Goodness communicates greater knowledge to them."

“But what do they learn, Monsieur, and what instructions do they receive in the Company?”

“Understand, Sisters, that even if you had no other instructions than these occasional conferences, you’d have enough to enable you to reach a high degree of virtue and of the knowledge of God, provided you made good use of them; yes, that would suffice. There are souls—but good, holy souls—who need only one word to give them a profound knowledge of God. We have an example of this at our house; I’m speaking of a poor farmer from the mountains of Auvergne. All his life he had only worked at plowing and at tending goats and, while doing this, he communed with God in such a way that he spoke of Him as well as any Prelate, theologian, or anyone else could have done; and I don’t ever expect to hear anyone speak so well. And where was he instructed? In a sermon to which he had given all his attention, and on which he had subsequently meditated; and God, who delights in simple, humble souls, had communicated himself lavishly to him.

“If God granted this grace to a poor peasant who plowed fields and tended his father’s goats, do you think He’ll refuse it to a Daughter of Charity, who gives and consecrates herself to Him to serve Him in His members and who, at her work, collects, like a bee, the honey of the sacred words she has heard at a conference, a sermon, an instruction, or in an admonition from her Superioress or some Officer? Oh! there’s no doubt, Sisters, that those who are on this road will go far in a short time; if they wander away from it, they’ll come back, and you’ll see them increase in virtue like the dawn, which is only a dot at sunrise but keeps on growing in fullness until midday.
“Believe me, Sisters, lowliness doesn’t keep the Son of God at a distance from us; He has no need of grandeur; He is grandeur itself, but He wants simple, humble hearts, and, when He finds them, how wonderful it is to see Him make His home in them! In Holy Scripture He glories that His delight is to converse with the lowly. Yes, Sisters, God’s pleasure, His joy, His satisfaction, so to speak, is to be with the humble and simple who are conscious of their lowliness. What a great incentive for hope and consolation for us, and what a great motive for humbling ourselves!

“And you, Sister, why do you think you’re obligated by the instructions given at the conferences?”

“Because God, who causes them to be given to us, will demand an account of us, if we don’t benefit from them.”

“You’re quite right to fear that God will demand an account of you, Sister, because it’s His word. How attentively would we not listen to a messenger coming to us from the King or from some great nobleman! That thought, that word to which Sister refers are the thought and the word of God. And shouldn’t we have good reason to fear, if we don’t set great store by His word and the value it deserves?”

“Sister, please tell us something more on this.” The Sister read her notes, which contained the following: “The first reason I see for profiting from the instructions given to us at the conferences is that God will be glorified by it and instructs us on how to live our vocation with greater virtue and perfection. Another reason is so that we may advance in virtue and acquire knowledge both for ourselves and for our neighbor. Another idea that occurred to me is that the conferences are the school of Jesus Christ, to which He is calling us when our Superiors tell us to come. We should therefore come to them with a great desire to profit from them because, without this desire, we would never benefit from them. Another means is to listen to them very attentively; another is to reflect often on them and discuss them with one another.”

Another Sister was questioned and said that one reason obliging us to profit from the conferences is that in them we are instructed on our Rules. Another motive is that if we don’t benefit from them, it is
to be feared that Our Lord may abandon us to ourselves and leave us without instruction, as He commanded the Apostles to do in regard to those cities that refused to listen to them. One means of profiting from them is to put into practice immediately whatever we’ve heard at them.

Another Sister said that, since the conferences were suggested by the Holy Spirit, there’s reason to believe that nothing except what we’re obliged to know and practice will be treated at them. Another reason is that, if we neglect them, God will demand a very exact account from us, since they are means He has given us for going to Him and which we might not have used. The means for that are: to have great respect for the conferences; to ask the assistance of the Holy Spirit before and after hearing them, that it may please the Spirit to imprint on our hearts what we’ve heard; and when occasions arise for practicing the virtue or shunning the vice that has been treated, to remember what has been said so as to be strengthened by it.

When Mademoiselle was asked to share the inspirations God had given her on the matter, she said that one reason for profiting from the instructions given at the conferences was that, when God saw that we were disregarding the instructions He gives himself by His graces and holy inspirations, or through our Guardian Angels, He allowed our Superiors to warn us of the faults into which we might fall and to show us the road we should follow to attain the perfection of our state. If we neglect this grace, it is to be feared that His Goodness may withdraw it and we might remain without inspiration. This would be a great misfortune for each one in particular, given the danger of loss of a vocation, and for the whole Company in general, which would be on the verge of ruin. We would also deprive our neighbors of the help they should expect from us, and this would cause us to be unfaithful to God’s graces. The better to convince ourselves of this, we should reflect that, since these words come from God, we should esteem them as we esteem God himself, and not allow a single one of them slip by without profiting from it. Another means is to come with a great desire to become better, and for this purpose, before the conference we should ardently ask the
Holy Spirit for this grace, so that, with the help of the Spirit, we may listen to it faithfully and attentively; afterward we should discuss it among ourselves and reflect on it often.

Several other Sisters were questioned, all of whom said in different terms almost exactly what is given above. For this reason we won’t report here what they said, but only what Most Honored Father said.

“Sisters, I thank God for the insights He has given you on the present subject, but before going back to the thoughts you had, it’s apropos that you know the origin of conferences and for how long they’ve been in use. You know, Sisters, that Our Lord used conferences for the establishment of His Church. From the day He brought His Apostles together, He gave them conferences; then, when His company had grown larger and had Apostles and disciples, He sometimes held meetings with them. It was during such a conference that Saint Philip, whose feast we celebrate today, said to Our Lord, ‘Lord, you are speaking to us of your Father, but show us your Father,’ and Our Lord replied, ‘Whoever sees me, sees my Father; my Father and I are one.’

“The Apostles presented their difficulties at these conferences, and Our Lord responded to them. He spoke of the spread of His Church and the means God would use to make it flourish. So we may say, dear Sisters—and it’s a fact—that Jesus Christ himself instituted the conferences, and made use of them for the beginning, growth, and perfection of His Church. After His death and glorious Ascension, the faithful were instructed by His Apostles and priests, who used no other method than the conference. There were no sermons; when the Christians were assembled, the conference began.

“After the Apostles, and for a very long time in the early Church, the use of conferences was continued; but the number of Christians became so large that it would have been difficult to instruct them in this way, so preaching in public was begun. Conferences continued to be held among Church leaders: the priests, deacons, and others who were involved in establishing it. From this, we rightly con-

\[\text{1Cf. Jn 14:9. (NAB)}\]
clude that we should have a high—a very high—opinion of conferences, since they were instituted by Jesus Christ himself, who used them with His Apostles for the establishment of the great kingdom of the Church, which has reached the stage we now see. After long use, He allowed this custom to be abandoned for a time; in our own day He permits it to be renewed and gives us this means for our growth, as it was used for the growth of the Church. What a great grace, what great mercy of God, Sisters, that in the Company of the Daughters of Charity this blessing exists of being able to do among ourselves what Our Lord did with His Apostles!

"The second thing to note is that Our Lord is in the midst of us when we’re assembled for His glory; we can have no doubt of this, for He says so himself: ‘When two of you are gathered in my name, I will be in your midst.’ 2 Now, dear Sisters, if God promises His presence to two, all the more reason will He give it to the whole Company, made up of a great number who assemble in His name and for love of Him to strive to work for His glory. Assuming this to be the case, we must conclude that this action is of very great importance for the glory of God and our own progress, and that we must participate in it with the intention of pleasing God and of receiving the instruction He has someone give us there, so we can put it into practice and be pleasing to Him.

"With the intention of pleasing Him, because it’s His word. Speaking to Superiors, he says, ‘Whoever hears you, hears me.’ 3 For it’s not the word of your Superior, alas! a poor miserable man! Oh, no! it’s the word of God, who deigns by him or by her who speaks (because you can be instructed by a Sister—yes, by a Sister), who deigns, I say, by this means to help you to understand your obligations. And with respect, because He is present; He sees and hears you, and notes how we accept what He has someone say to us. That being the case, dear Sisters—first, that conferences go back to the time of Jesus Christ and, second, that when we’re gathered together, He’s in the midst of us—you must know that, in order to make us know and understand how greatly we should esteem His

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\text{Cf. Mt 18:20. (NAB)}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\text{Cf. Lk 10:16. (NAB)}\]
holy word, Our Lord replied to a good woman who said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you,’ ‘More blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.’

“You see how Our Lord values His word, Sisters. He admits that His mother is blessed to have borne Him, a mother chosen by God from all eternity to be the mother of His Son, a mother blessed among all women, who proclaims that God has done great things in her and that all generations will call her blessed; yet Our Lord places above such a mother ‘those who hear His word and keep it.’

“So, Sisters, it should be a great joy for us when we hear that there’s an opportunity to listen to this sacred word, the word of life, the word of eternal life. When the notice is brought that your Superiors are informing you that a conference will be held on a certain day, how you should rejoice among yourselves, Sisters! The first Sister to hear or to receive the note should say to the next one she meets, ‘I have good news for you, Sister. We’ll have a conference tomorrow; my God, we’ll hear Your holy word from the mouth of our Superiors or of our Sisters. It will be Your word, my God, for You will inspire them.’

“'To explain to us the difference among the people who hear His word, Our Lord declares in the Gospel that the word of God is like the seed the farmer sows in his field. Some, He says, falls by the wayside and the birds come and devour it, it is trodden underfoot by the passersby, and thus produces no fruit. Another portion falls among stones; it brings forth a few little leaves, but withers away before producing any fruit and, like the first, is a loss to its owner. A third portion falls among thorns and, instead of taking root, is choked immediately, and remains as sterile as the others. The fourth falls on good ground, finds good soil, and springs up, takes root, increases, and multiplies in such a way that one grain yields a hundredfold, or at least sixty.’

“Our Lord wanted to show us in this the difference among persons who go to conferences. All actually go to them, but it’s to be feared that the same thing happens as in the case of the sower’s

4Cf. Lk 11:27-28. (NAB)
This beautiful seed of the word of God is scattered into the hearts of all who hear it; this beautiful word, this holy, life-giving word is intended to serve as food for all persons. It’s like the seed the sower plants, which would become nourishing food if it found everywhere a fertile soil in which it could fructify.

“There are souls who hear the word of God and receive it, but the birds of the air, which are distractions, carry it off immediately, like the seed that falls by the wayside and nothing of it remains because it didn’t have time to take root there. As soon as it’s heard, it’s lost because the first thought that entered their mind diverted attention from it. Others receive it into their hearts and speak of it occasionally; but, because their hearts haven’t been prepared by mortification, they are like hard, unplowed ground. The seed has indeed sprouted and produced a few leaves, but it quickly withers away without bearing any fruit. Other souls are like the seed that falls among thorns. They do, indeed, receive the divine word, but the cares, worries, and restlessness with which they are filled choke the word they’ve received; for, since their mind is too filled with cares, they’re not nourished by this holy food.

“It’s true, dear Sisters, that you must go to the sick to bring them their medicines, the neighborhood is spread out, and the number of patients is very great, but it’s also true that this shouldn’t hinder the practice of your Rules and especially your mental prayer, which prepares you to receive the word of God with fruit and profit. There are good souls among you, filled with esteem for the word of God, and convinced of their need to be humble, submissive, mortified, serene, and not restless or fretful, living in a holy joy founded on God and tending toward God. Ah, Sisters! these souls are like good soil, thoroughly plowed and tilled, that receives the seed, gives it the necessary sap, and causes it to bring forth fruit in due season. By the grace of God, there are some of these among you—I won’t say how many—but, by the grace of God, the number is large. Take care, Sisters, that each of you may be in this number; act in such a way that this divine word may find good soil in which to take root.

“Since this is so, Sisters, why should we benefit from the conferences and instructions that are given us? You’ve said, ‘because God
speaks by the mouth of those who are questioned. God has promised to communicate himself to the humble and lowly and to reveal His secrets to them. Why, then, shouldn't we believe that what is said comes from God, since it's said by the lowly to the lowly? Yes, Sisters, God takes such pleasure that we can say that His great pleasure is to reveal himself to the humble. What beautiful words of Jesus Christ, which show clearly that it's not in palaces like the Louvre nor in the residences of Princes that God takes His delight! He says so in Scripture, 'O Father, I praise and thank you that you have hidden your mysteries from the great ones of the world and revealed them to the humble.' He doesn't look for pomp or external display but takes pleasure in a humble soul, in a soul taught by him alone and makes no account of worldly knowledge. What a motive, Sisters, for loving the conferences, since it's there that God reveals His secrets to you and shows you the means for your growth!

"If we discuss a virtue, someone will give one motive, and another, another; this Sister will give one means, that one, another; and God wants each of you to be inspired by all the motives mentioned and instructed by all the means suggested. 'But it's a Sister who gave this motive and that means.' No matter! It's God acting through her; it's God who communicated them to her; it's from Him they come and, because they're from God, they should be precious to you, and you should take careful note of them.

"The third reason, stated so well, is the help we get from these instructions for our conduct. A Daughter of Charity will be in the home of a Lady, a sick person, or someone else, and there an opportunity will present itself to practice the virtue of modesty or to put up with something repugnant to nature; she remembers something she heard at a conference; ah! she'll be energized and will experience no more difficulty. She'll have had some slight disagreement with her Sister, and the devil will try to dissuade her from humbling herself, but she'll recall having heard at a conference how pleasing an act of humility is to God; she'll go and cast herself at the feet of her Sister, and both of them will profit from the conference they

\[\text{Cf. Mt 11:25. (NAB)}\]
heard a long time ago; so true it is that conferences are extremely necessary and very profitable.

"If you ask me what can maintain each of you individually, dear Sisters, I'll answer that it's prayer, for it's the daily manna that comes down from heaven. But, you see, if you ask me what will maintain the entire Company, it's the conference. Nothing will give the Community more light, nothing will give it greater instruction; nothing will raise it up more quickly from its falls and prevent it from committing faults than the conferences. That's the way God speaks to you, that's how His guidance is revealed to you and His ways made known. You should praise God, Sisters, for having begun to participate in the conferences and for having been chosen for this because, as I've told you, conferences were no longer in use, and you've been raised up to restore them. Be very careful not to misuse them, Sisters.

"Before going any further I'll tell you—for it's necessary for you to know this—that if you find no benefit in prayer, you won't profit much from the conferences. You see, dear Sisters, gardeners take the time twice a day to water the plants in their gardens because without this assistance they would wither away during very hot weather. On the contrary, thanks to this watering, they draw their nourishment from the soil because a certain humor coming from this watering rises from the roots, flows through the stem, and gives life to the branches and leaves and savor to the fruit.

"In the same way, dear Sisters, we are like those poor gardens in which drought causes all the plants to die, unless the gardener's care and hard work make provision for this. That's why you have the holy custom of mental prayer which, like a gentle dew, moistens your soul every morning by the grace it draws from God. When you're worn out by encounters and difficulties, you have again, in the afternoon, this salutary refreshment, which continuously invigorates all your actions. How beneficial this will be for a Daughter of Charity in a short space of time, if she is careful to refresh herself with this sacred dew! You'll see her growing day by day in holiness, just as the gardener sees his plants growing day by day, and in a short time she'll advance like the beautiful dawn that rises in the
morning and goes on increasing until noon. In this way, Sisters, she’ll go on until she has reached the Sun of Justice, who is the light of the world, and be swallowed up in Him, as the dawn is lost in the sun. For all these reasons you yourselves have mentioned and which God suggested to you, dear Sisters, perhaps you’ve been fully persuaded of the importance of these talks.

“Let’s go on to the second point. Someone was perfectly right to say that, to profit from them, we must value them. What we’ve already said on the first point has helped us to understand how we should value this custom. What should be done next? That also has been mentioned, by the grace of God; both the motives and the accompanying means to make good use of instructions were given. It was stated that we should pray at the beginning. What an excellent means, Sisters! You can’t imagine how efficacious it is. To offer to God what will be said, to offer Him ourselves to hear and to profit from it, to offer Him all those present and to ask the assistance of the Holy Spirit and of our Guardian Angels and the other ones who are there, so that what is said may be imprinted on our heart by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and that we may be faithful to it by the ministry of our Guardian Angels; to make a profound act of humility before God, to acknowledge our unworthiness to participate in this benefit because of the misuse we’ve made of God’s graces, and to take the resolution to put them to quite a different use in future.

“The second means is to listen carefully and with close attention to the sacred words of God that come from the mouth of those in whom He has placed them and, while listening, to raise our soul often to God to ask Him for the grace to profit from them. My God, I hear what is being said, but if You don’t give that grace to my heart, this divine seed won’t germinate in it. Furthermore, dear Sisters, we should be edified by everything, because we should beware of judging and of saying, ‘This or that Sister said that, but she doesn’t do it,’ or ‘This one spoke better than that one,’ or “That was poorly expressed.’ O mon Dieu! dear Sisters, let’s avoid such conduct like a poison the infernal serpent wants to inject into the Company; let’s protect ourselves from it as from death and hell. For each of you to take for yourself the instructions given us there, you have to listen
humbly and simply and not behave like persons who go to a sermon with no devotion. They listen if the preacher speaks well. If he gives a reprimand for vices, instead of correcting themselves, they say, 'How well his remarks apply to Such and Such!' or 'He really told that one off!' and never do they apply anything to themselves. So they'll go to sermons all their lives without making any amendment and, unless God works a miracle, in the end they'll die miserably in their sins.

"A third means is to strive to remember well what you heard. It's said of the Blessed Virgin that she kept the words of her Son in her heart; she drank them in and afterward meditated on them, so that she lost nothing of what He said. Now, just imagine, dear Sisters, if the Blessed Virgin, who discussed and shared so much with God; to whom the sacred mysteries were revealed and who never lost sight of the presence of God; if, I say, with all these natural and supernatural lights, in which she certainly surpassed all other creatures, she still stored up carefully the sacred words of her Son, what should we not do to try to preserve in our hearts the eloquence of this sacred word! Balm, which is an extremely sweet and fragrant liquid, never loses its perfume, provided it's kept in a closed container, because, if it isn't tightly stoppered, the perfume evaporates and you'll no longer find anything in it.

"The fourth means to profit from the conferences is, as has already been said, to discuss them among yourselves. This is a very worthwhile means because, by these conversations, your hearts will be gradually imbued with what you say, you'll incite one another to practice them, and the Sisters with whom you speak will be edified and instructed, and will instruct others. In that way, you'll benefit and you'll help your neighbor to benefit. When opportunities present themselves, recall what you've heard. 'Mon Dieu! Sister, do you remember that Sister X said that at the conference?' When you visit one another, refresh each other's memory with what you recall.

\(^7\)Cf. Lk 2:51. (NAB)
“Dear Sisters, how beneficial this will be for you! It’s incredible; you have to experience it. When we go to give a mission in the country we sometimes meet fathers of families who are totally ignorant, or others who know just a little, and when we ask the latter, ‘How come you’re better instructed than others?’ they reply, ‘It’s because my son goes to school, Monsieur; he learns the catechism, and when he comes home he repeats it to us and, in that way we learn something.’ You see, Sisters, fathers learn from their children and are pleased to be taught by them. And why shouldn’t we be glad to learn what we don’t know?

“To all these means I’ll add another, dear Sisters, namely, to put into practice faithfully what we’ve heard, and to do it without delay because, when we put something off, we forget, we grow slack, and everything is lost. As soon as we’ve made a firm, strong resolution to make good use of the instructions we’ve heard, let’s show by our works that we’ve profited from them, and we’ll draw down the blessings of heaven for our renewed progress. On this topic Our Lord said, *Habenti dabitur*: God will give to the one who has made good use of what He has given Him. Nothing, dear Sisters, draws down God’s graces more to do good than to be faithful to this and to put it into practice once we know it; while, on the contrary, nothing keeps the soul back more than infidelity. Sisters, do you know how God acts toward a soul that spurns His graces? He withdraws them, then the soul falls into hardness of heart; after that, aversion; and, finally, into a state in which it’s no longer possible to do anything. The result is that the soul not only loses the grace offered to it—which is a great loss—but also the virtues it had, and remains deprived of all reinforcement, not knowing what to decide nor which way to turn. May it please God in His goodness to preserve the Company from this deplorable state and to make it faithful to the practice of doing good!

“I exhort you with all my heart, dear Sisters, by the sacred love of the Son of God, who takes His delight among you, who came into the world, worked, prayed, sweat, kept vigil, and died only to give

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*Cf. Mt 13:12; Mk 4:25.* (NAB)
us the example of what we should do, I exhort you, I repeat, by the
incredible love that God has for you, to set to work immediately to
put into practice what you’ve heard; and rest assured that this is one
of the most efficacious means you could find to benefit from the
blessing God presents to you. Believe me, Sisters, our happiness
depends absolutely on our fidelity in this matter because, by profiting
from what we’ve already done, we draw down a blessing on all
our actions; and, by losing no opportunity, we’ll grow from virtue
to virtue, like that beautiful dawn that goes on ever increasing from
morning until noon.

“I entreat Our Lord Jesus Christ, who made use of conferences
for the establishment, development, and perfection of His Church,
that the graces with which He will shower you may serve to increase
and perfect the virtue He wants to place in you. I entreat Him also
that the fidelity each of you will bring to these graces may always
draw fresh ones in order to work more and more for the relief of
your neighbor in the way He asks of you for His greater glory.
Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .”

37. - MENTAL PRAYER

May 31, 1648

“Sisters, the topic of this conference is mental prayer. The first
point concerns the reasons for never failing to make meditation
daily; the second deals with the thoughts God has given you on the
coming of the Holy Spirit. With regard to the first point, Sisters, you
have to consider the reasons why it’s good and even necessary for a
Daughter of Charity not to fail to make her meditation daily; the ad-
vantages that will accrue to her from it if she makes it; and the losses
she will experience if she doesn’t.

“Sister, would you please tell us your thoughts on this?”

Conference 37. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by
Sister Elisabeth Hellot.
"On the first point, it seemed to me that, after Holy Communion, prayer is the food of the soul; and as we need food for the body daily, so do we need spiritual food for the health of our soul. The second reason is that in prayer we learn God’s Will, we advance in perfection, we gather strength to resist temptations, and we are affirmed in our vocation; lastly, that’s where our soul has the happiness of speaking heart to heart with God. On the contrary, when we haven’t made our prayer, we become weak, and we don’t experience God’s presence during the day.

"On the second point, which is the coming of the Holy Spirit, I thought that, to be worthy to have the Holy Spirit come to us, we must be closely united among ourselves and have only one heart, so that we may represent better the union of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son, and rid all the powers of our souls of inordinate affections so that the Holy Spirit may find room to fill them with His gifts and graces. In addition, we must have deep humility and interior peace because the God of peace resides only in a peaceful place. We'll know that we’ve received Him when we find ourselves more loving and more open to the acquisition of virtue. I recognized that I’m far removed from these preparations, and I’ve taken the resolution to work at that, with the grace of the Holy Spirit."

"Please tell us your thoughts on this topic, Sister."

"Father, one reason not to fail to make our meditation daily is the need we have for strength to combat our natural inclination to evil, and the obligation we’re under to correspond to God’s plan for our sanctification, for which He gives us the means in prayer."

"And you, Sister, will you tell us what you thought?"

"On the first point I thought that Our Lord made use of prayer throughout His holy life and practiced it from childhood, for He often went apart from His relatives to pray in the Temple of Jerusalem. Another time, when He wanted to select His Apostles, He had recourse to prayer, and He continued this practice until His death on the Cross. Since the Son of God has shown us the example, we must imitate Him. Another reason is that prayer brings us closer to God and unites us to Him by the practice of the resolutions we make during it. A third reason is that a Daughter of Charity who doesn’t pray
every day couldn’t be pleasing to God nor persevere for long in her vocation; and she can’t be a true Daughter of Charity, since it’s in prayer that we find the strength to be sustained in the service of God and our neighbor.

“On the coming of the Holy Spirit, I thought that if we want to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit in prayer, we must have great love for this practice and be faithful to it daily until death, as the food of our soul and its daily bread. Reflecting that, after the Apostles had received the Holy Spirit they were completely changed and spoke new languages, I felt that I would recognize having received the Holy Spirit if, in my words or by my actions, I spoke a completely different language, refrained from the many useless words I so often say through flightiness, and stopped giving bad example to my Sisters.”

“Sister, would you please tell us what God has given you regarding this theme?”

“I thought on the first point that Our Lord said that His house was a house of prayer, and since He has given us the grace of calling us to His service, we must be faithful to prayer so as not to act contrary to what should be done in God’s house.

(2) “Since prayer is the food of the soul, if we fail to make it, our soul is in danger of growing weak, just as the body does when we don’t eat.

(3) “To make our meditation is to do what the angels and saints do in heaven; in prayer the soul speaks lovingly and familiarly with God, from which it will infallibly fall away if it neglects this holy exercise.

(4) “Prayer withdraws us from sin, for if we communicate daily with God, how could we develop a habit of sin, which God detests so intensely? If we do fall into sin God gives us in prayer the grace to recognize it, as well as the strength to rise from it. Consequently, it’s impossible for a soul, faithful and exact in the practice of prayer, not to advance in virtue.

(5) “God gives us daily in prayer sufficient grace to work at our advancement and helps us to see what is suitable for us to achieve it, or what we have to avoid.”
"For my meditation today, I thought on the words, 'When the day of Pentecost came,' and how faithful God is to His promises, without, however, changing the orders of His foreknowledge, as is apparent in this mystery, which was fulfilled only at the time God had ordained it, although it might have seemed that the Holy Spirit should have descended upon the Apostles as soon as Our Lord ascended into heaven, so as not to leave them without some consolation. And yet, it seemed afterward that the delay was very profitable to them in causing them to appreciate, through the inconveniences of the deprivation, the favor they were awaiting, and to prepare them for it. This made me resolve to love and adore that Divine Providence which orders all things for our good, and to entrust myself to its renewed concern.

(2) "I thought about the joy the Blessed Virgin experienced when she felt herself so filled with the sacred love of the Father and the Son, which had brought about in her the Mystery of the Incarnation, and the thanksgiving and offering of herself she made to God once again. I also considered the joy of the Apostles, who felt quite different from what they had felt previously, and also the courage that animated them, since, from that time on, they exercised their ministry fearlessly. I turned to the Blessed Virgin, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, to ask her to obtain from Him that He might take possession of my heart and enkindle in it His sacred love.

(3) "I thought of the great gift God made to the Church by the Holy Spirit, who is Love itself. He willed that, after receiving this Spirit it should begin to appear publicly, to teach us all that, as true children of the Church, we must be united by true, holy affection. I asked this Holy Spirit to bestow on me His fruits and gifts, to work in me the true effects of His love, and to destroy the self-love that until now has been my master, and which I have resolved to combat, aided by His grace and assistance."

A few other Sisters said substantially the same things, so we are omitting them. Because Most Honored Father was in a big hurry, he cut short the questions His Charity usually asks most of the Sisters,
and questioned Mademoiselle, who replied, "On the first point of our prayer, I thought that one reason we should never omit making our prayer is its excellence, since when we pray we are speaking to God. And I saw great advantages in this, since in prayer God helps us to realize His goodness in abasing himself to this degree and in raising us up as He does. Another reason is the recommendation the Son of God gave so many times, by word and example, of praying to God His Father, both in vocal prayer, which He himself taught us, and in mental prayer, reminding us that God wants to be served in spirit and in truth. A third reason is that, since prayer is a gift of God, we must do our utmost to obtain it, not only because of the great help we may gain from it, but also because of the esteem we must have for the Giver.

"The second point is on the thoughts God gave us in our prayer today. My mind was occupied with the promise the Son of God has made to those who love and keep His Commandments. I saw how both of these are just, and God produced in me acts of the will, giving me profound gratitude for having been honored with this freedom, seeing my absolute unworthiness in every sense. I thought that the effect of this promise was brought home fully to us today, the day the Holy Spirit was sent to the Church by the Father and the Son, for this surely makes it clear to us that the Holy Trinity dwells in us, and that it's on this day that the children of the Church became adopted children of God.

"This coming and indwelling of God in us is marked by a fullness of gifts and graces. I desired to consent to this and am determined to work harder than ever at removing the hindrances my senses and passions may place to it, so that I may participate in that fullness evident in the Apostles. Their understanding was enlightened and filled with the knowledge necessary for their vocation, their memory fully refreshed by the words and actions of the Son of God, and their will on fire with His love and love of their neighbor. The Holy Spirit, acting powerfully by this plenitude in them, helped them to tell and teach efficaciously the greatness and love of God. I greatly desired to glorify God in His wonderful works, to give myself to Him so that in and through me He might do His most holy
Will, though the truth makes me see my weaknesses and infidelities, which cause me to offend Him so often and to thwart His plans. And what I really fear is that all this might hinder the graces the goodness of God would pour upon the Community if I were different, for which I humbly ask His pardon, and because I was so bold (she knelt down) as to have chosen the topic of the conference without having your express permission, Most Honored Father."

Most Honored Father had her get up and began as follows: "The first reason—or one of them—given on the importance and great benefit of making your prayer every day is that Our Lord recommended it very often to His Apostles and disciples, when He taught them how they were to act after His death. 'Turn to my Father,' He told them, 'ask my Father; whatever you ask the Father in my name, will be granted you.' And what He says to His disciples, Sisters, He says to us. Shouldn't we have great respect for this recommendation of the Son of God, which is so beneficial to us, since it gives us the freedom to turn to God in prayer? Shouldn't we give ourselves to Him in order never to fail in it? You must take great care, Sisters, to avoid all the obstacles that may arise at the time of prayer, with which nature is sometimes pleased. When that happens, however, and you become aware of it, stir yourselves up by the recommendation Jesus Christ gave regarding it. 'My God, you recommended that I pray, and would I be so cowardly as to exempt myself from it? Yes! I'll go!' All of you will experience how powerful this motive is, Sisters, and the benefits that will come to you from it.

"To that I add another: it has been judged well for you to make it every day, and your Rules prescribe this. I will go further, Sisters; if you can, pray every hour, or even never stop praying at all, for meditation is so excellent that we can never make it too much; and the more we do, the more we want to make it, when we seek God there. Consequently, Sisters, because it's stated in your Rules that you're bound to pray, try as far as possible never to miss it. And if the medicine you have to distribute in the morning at the time of prayer hin-

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2Cf. Jn 14:13. (NAB)
ders you, find some other time, and arrange matters so as to present yourselves to God for that purpose.

"A second motive mentioned was the confidence that should animate us when we pray, based on the promises of the Son of God that it will have its reward. 'Ask,' He said, 'and you shall receive.' There are certain people, naturally timid and fearful, who dare not propose anything for fear of being rebuffed, or ask for anything for fear of being refused. Jesus Christ wanted to give every assurance that we'll be welcomed by His Father when we pray to Him. He wasn't satisfied with making a simple promise, although that was more than sufficient, but He said, 'Amen I say to you, that whatever you ask in my name will be granted to you.' In this confidence, then, dear Sisters, shouldn't we take every care not to lose the graces God in His goodness intends to give us in prayer, if we make it as it should be made?

"Another reason brought forward is that Our Lord himself was a man of the greatest prayer; and it was pointed out that from His early childhood He went apart from the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph to pray to God His Father. In the whole course of His laborious life, He was careful and very exact about praying. People saw Him deliberately go to Jerusalem; He went apart from His disciples to pray; and He went into the desert for no other purpose. O mon Dieu! How often did He not prostrate himself there face downward on the ground! With what humility did He present himself to God His Father, burdened with the sins of the world! Lastly, He prayed even when exhausted by the fasting to which He subjected himself. But His chief and constant exercise was prayer. On the night of His Passion, He again separated himself from His disciples to pray; and it is said that He went apart to the garden, where He often used to go to pray. He prayed there with such fervor and devotion that, as you know, His body sweat blood and water from the efforts He made. So, Sisters, I repeat what I've already said; I'm just saying the same thing over again because I'm in a hurry. By the first motive we see that Jesus Christ recommended that we make our prayer; by the second we see that He puts His faith in us and lovingly urges us to make it; and by the third, we have the example He gave us, for He was
never content with words. He acted, He did what He wanted us to do, and He never willed anything except for our greater good.

"From all I've just said, dear Sisters, you can see the importance of prayer, since it was recommended, taught, and practiced by the Son of God, and how useful it is to the soul. Moreover, it has been said, and rightly so, that what food is to the body, prayer is to the soul, and if someone was satisfied with taking one meal every three or four days, he'd soon grow weak and be in great danger of death; or, if he lived, he'd languish, incapable of doing anything useful, and in the end would become a carcass lacking strength or vigor. Consequently, it has been said, a soul that isn't nourished by prayer—or rarely so—becomes lukewarm, languid, without strength, courage, or virtue, a source of annoyance to others and unbearable to himself.

"It has been pointed out clearly that it’s by prayer that vocation is preserved, because it’s true, Sisters, that a Daughter of Charity can’t survive if she doesn’t pray. It’s impossible for her to persevere. She’ll last for a short time, but at length the world will get the upper hand. She’ll find her ministry too hard because she doesn’t take this holy refreshment. She’ll become listless and bored, and, in the end, she’ll leave. And why do you think so many have lost their vocation, Sisters? It’s because they neglected prayer.

"It was also said that prayer is the soul of our souls—that is, what the soul is to the body, prayer is to the soul. Now, the soul gives life to the body, causing it to move, walk, speak, and do all that’s necessary. If the body had no soul, it would be a contaminated corpse, fit only for burial. Now, Sisters, the soul without prayer is almost like that body without a soul in what concerns the service of God; it’s without feeling or movement, and has only worldly desires. I add to that, dear Sisters, that prayer is like a mirror in which the soul sees all its stains and disfigurements; it notes what makes it displeasing to God; it sees itself in Him; it arranges itself to be conformable to Him in all things. Fashionable ladies won’t leave home without looking at themselves in their mirror to see that nothing is out of place and nothing offends propriety. Some of them are even so vain as to carry mirrors at their belts so they can take an occasional
glance to see if anything has happened that needs adjustment. Now, Sisters, isn't it reasonable that, what fashionable people do to please the world, those who serve God should do to please God? They should never leave home without looking at themselves in their mirror. God wants those who serve Him to look at themselves, but in holy meditation, so that every day and often during the day, by means of interior glances and aspirations, they may see whatever in them may be displeasing to God and ask pardon for it and the grace to rid themselves of it.

"Someone also said that it’s in prayer that God lets us know what He wants us to do and to avoid; and that’s true, dear Sisters, for there’s no action in life that helps us to know ourselves better, nor shows God’s Will to us more clearly than prayer. When the holy Fathers speak of prayer, they are exultant; they say that it’s a Fountain of Youth in which the soul is rejuvenated. Philosophers say that among the secrets of nature there’s a spring called the Fountain of Youth, where old men who drink water from it become young again. Be that as it may, we know that there are other springs whose waters are very beneficial to one’s health. But prayer rejuvenates the soul far more truly than the Fountain of Youth mentioned by the philosophers rejuvenates the body. In prayer your soul, weakened by bad habits, becomes very dynamic; that’s where it recovers its sight, where previously it had become blind; ears once deaf to the voice of God are opened to good inspirations; and the heart receives renewed strength, feeling energized by a courage it hadn’t experienced before. That’s why a poor country woman, who comes to you lacking refinement, not knowing how to read, and unfamiliar with the mysteries of religion, changes radically in a short time and becomes reserved, recollected, and filled with love of God. And what else but prayer brings all that about? It’s a Fountain of Youth in which she has been rejuvenated; it’s from there that she has drawn the graces that are apparent in her, making her as you now see her.

"There are two sorts of prayer: mental and vocal. Vocal is made with words; mental is made without words, but with the heart and the mind. When Moses led the people of Israel into battle, while
they were fighting he stood before God with hands outstretched to heaven. As long as he did this the people defeated their enemies, but as soon as Moses stopped holding his hands uplifted, they began to lose. What wonderful power of mental prayer, Sisters, for that was what Moses was doing with his hands uplifted to heaven, without saying a word, and it was potent enough to win the battle for those for whom he was praying!

“Holy Scripture also tells us that one day Moses went before God, and didn’t say a word. And he heard the voice of God saying, ‘Moses, you’re driving me crazy; you’re forcing me to do what I don’t want to do. This people is ungrateful and rebellious to my law; I want to destroy them, and you want me to save them. Why do you force me? Go away, and let me do what I want.’ 3 Please see, Sisters, how constrained God feels by prayer—and by mental prayer—for Moses didn’t say a word, yet his prayer was heard so well that God said to him, ‘You’re driving me crazy; you want me to do what I don’t want to do.’

“Prayer, Sisters, is a lifting of the mind to God, by which the soul detaches itself from itself, as it were, to go to seek God in himself. It’s a conversation of the soul with God, a mutual communication in which God tells the soul interiorly what He wants it to know and do, and in which the soul says to its God what He himself helps it to know it should request. What great excellence, and one that should cause us to esteem and prefer it to everything else!

“Prayer is mental or vocal. Vocal prayer, made with words, is divided into three kinds: prayer of obligation, prayer of devotion, and sacramental prayer. Vocal prayer of obligation is the Office that priests have to say. Vocal prayer of devotion is what each individual makes according to the impulse God gives him or her, such as the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, the Stations of the Cross, litanies, Vespers, etc., which are said not by obligation but by devotion. Sacramental vocal prayer is the one that priests say during Holy Mass, as laid down by the holy Canons.

3Cf. Ex 32:9-10. (NAB)
“So much for vocal prayer, Sisters. Although said in words, it should never be made without raising the mind to God and with great attention to what is being said. Praying is natural; we see that with children, and their little prayers are so pleasing to God that some theologians say He takes immense pleasure in them. A great man, the late Bishop of Geneva, held children in such veneration that when he saw them he would guide their hand and have himself blessed by them. I mention this only in passing, because time presses, and this isn't the type of prayer we have to deal with now.

“Mental prayer is made in two ways: one by understanding, and the other by the will. Prayer of understanding occurs when, after hearing the reading, the mind is reawakened in the presence of God and then is occupied with seeking to know the meaning of the mystery proposed, in seeing the lesson proper to it, and in producing affections of seeking good or avoiding evil. And although the will produces these acts, this is still called prayer of understanding, because its chief function, which is the search, is done by the understanding, which is occupied primarily with the subject put before it. This is ordinarily called meditation. Everyone can make it, each according to his or her ability and the inspiration God gives.

“The other type of prayer is called contemplation. In this the soul, in the presence of God, does nothing but receive what He gives. It doesn’t act and, with no effort on the part of the soul, God himself inspires it with everything it may be seeking, and much more. Haven’t you ever experienced this sort of prayer, dear Sisters? I’m sure you’ve done so very often in your retreats, when you’ve been amazed that, with no contribution on your part, God himself filled your mind and imprinted on it knowledge that you never had.

“Now, in both these ways God imparts many excellent inspirations to His servants. In prayer He enlightens their understanding of many truths incomprehensible to everyone else but those who devote themselves to prayer; it’s there that He inflames the will; lastly, it’s in prayer that He takes total possession of hearts and souls. Now, you must know, dear Sisters, that, even though educated peo-
ple may have a greater disposition for making meditation, and many succeed in it and may have, of themselves, minds open to many inspirations, God’s conversations with humble souls are quite different. *Confiteor tibi, Pater*, etc., said Our Lord. ‘I thank you, Father, that You have hidden these things from the wise of this world, and have revealed them to the little and the humble.’

“Sisters, it’s into hearts without worldly knowledge, who seek God in himself, that He’s pleased to infuse the most excellent lights and the greatest graces. He reveals to those hearts what all the schools haven’t discovered, and unfolds for them mysteries of which the most learned see nothing. And, would you believe, dear Sisters, that we have experience of this among ourselves? I think I’ve told you this twice already, but I’ll tell you once more: in our house we have Repetition of Prayer, not every day but sometimes every two days, sometimes every three, as Providence allows. Now, by the grace of God the priests make it well and so do the seminarians—some better, some worse, according to what God communicates to them—but as for our poor Brothers, God’s promise of revealing himself to the humble and to little ones is verified in them, for we’re astounded at the inspirations God gives them; and it certainly seems that they come from Him alone because they have no education. It may be a poor shoemaker, a baker, or a carter, nevertheless they fill us with astonishment. We sometimes talk about it among ourselves, ashamed that we’re not as we see them to be. ‘Look at that poor Brother,’ we say to one another; ‘didn’t you remark the beautiful good thoughts God gave him? Isn’t it wonderful? For what he said wasn’t said because he learned it beforehand; he knows it from his time of prayer.’ What great, incomprehensible

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4 Cf. Lk 10:21. (NAB)
5 Repetition of prayer, a pious practice of the Congregation of the Mission. According to the *Regulae seminarii interni Congregationis Missionis* (Paris 1888), a novice/seminarian, at the request of the Superior or Novice Master/Director of the Internal Seminary, would stand and give an account of his morning meditation, a reflection, judgments, inspirations, and the resolutions resulting from pondering the topic assigned for meditation. Until the 1983 revision of the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission, this practice perdured not just in the seminary but in all the local communities. In some Provinces the custom still continues, particularly during retreats.
goodness of God, to take His delight in communicating with the simple and unlearned to let us see that all the knowledge in the world is only ignorance in comparison with what He shares with those who earnestly seek Him by way of holy prayer!

"Assuming this to be the case, dear Sisters, you and I must take the resolution never to omit making our prayer every day. I say every day, Sisters, but if it were possible, I'd say let's never leave it and spend no time without being in prayer; that is, without having our minds raised to God; for, strictly speaking, prayer is, as we've said, a lifting of the soul to God. 'But meditation keeps me from preparing this medicine, from delivering it, from going to see this patient or that Lady.' No matter, Sisters; your soul will never fail to be always in the presence of God, and will always direct some ardent desire toward Him. Sisters, if you only knew the pleasure God takes in seeing that a poor country woman, a humble Daughter of Charity, is turning lovingly to Him, you'd go to prayer with more confidence than I can encourage you to do. If you only knew the treasures and graces God has planned to share with you! If you only knew how much knowledge you'll draw from it, how much sweetness, how much love! You'll find it all there, dear Sisters, for it's the fountain and source of all knowledge. How is it that you see illiterate people speaking so well of God, unfolding the mysteries with more knowledge than a theologian? A theologian who has only his theological knowledge speaks of God absolutely in the way his field of learning has taught him, but a person of prayer speaks of Him in a very different way. The difference between the two, Sisters, arises from the fact that one speaks of Him through simple acquired knowledge, and the other through infused knowledge, filled with love, in such a way that, in this circumstance the theologian isn’t the most learned one. And he should be silent when a person of prayer is present, for the latter speaks of God very differently than he can do.

"We’ve seen Brother Antoine—poor Brother Antoine. You
knew him, Mademoiselle. Did you ever see anyone speak of God like that man did? As for me, I never saw anything like it, for ten words from his mouth made a greater impression on people’s hearts than any number of sermons. What he said was filled with an eloquence that communicated itself so gently to hearts, that people immediately assented to it. And where did he learn that? From some sermons he had heard and meditated on afterward; and God had communicated himself so amply to him that no one ever spoke better of God than he did, and all that through prayer. ‘Monsieur,’ you may say, ‘we see all that, but teach us. We see how excellent prayer is, how it unites us to God, strengthens us in our vocation, advances us in virtue, detaches us from ourselves, and helps us to love God and our neighbor; but we don’t know how to pray. We’re poor women who can scarcely read—some of us, at least. We certainly go to prayer, but we don’t understand anything about it, and sometimes we think it would be better if we weren’t there. Teach us.’

“Sisters, the disciples said to Our Lord, ‘Teach us how to pray.’”? And Our Lord said to them, ‘Say, Pater noster, qui es in coelis.’” And you, dear Sisters, ask me what to do because you think you’re doing nothing there. Above all else, Sisters, I have to tell you never to abandon it because you think you’re no good at it. Those of you who are newcomers, don’t be surprised to see one month, two months, three months, six months go by with no progress; No, no! even a year, two years, or three. But keep going to it, just as if you were doing great things there. Saint Teresa went twenty years without being able to pray. She couldn’t understand it. When she went to choir, she’d say, ‘My God, I’m going because the Rule dictates it, for I’ll do nothing there; since, however, it’s Your Will, I’ll go.’ During all those twenty years, though she experienced nothing but

also to princes and the powerful.” (A. M. de Franelieu, Frère Antoine [Grenoble, 1864].) In order to converse with him, the Queen had brought to Paris this illiterate man, whose sanctity everyone proclaimed. It was at that time that Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, and Father Portail had the good fortune of meeting him. The portrait of Brother Antoine was in one of the rooms of Saint-Lazare. He was not a member of the Congregation of the Mission and there is no indication that he belonged to any religious Community (cf. XII, Conf. 184).

7Cf. Lk 11:1. (NAB)
8Cf. Mt 6:9. (NAB)
distaste, she never once failed in this. And at the end of twenty years, God rewarded her perseverance by giving her such an outstanding gift of prayer that, since the time of the Apostles, no one ever rivaled Saint Teresa. How do you know, Sisters, whether God may want to make Saint Teresas of you? Do you know what reward He wants to give to your perseverance? When you go to prayer, you think you’ll do nothing there because you have no taste for it; but you must know, Sisters, that all the virtues are to be found in prayer: first, obedience, of which you make an act at the time prescribed by the Rule; humility, for, thinking you’ll make no headway in it will give you a lowly opinion of yourself; then faith, hope, and charity. In a word, Sisters, most of the virtues you need are encompassed in this act. And you’re always doing enough, provided you go to it in a spirit of obedience and humility.

“For all these reasons, which show us the blessing God gives to those who practice the exercise of holy prayer, whether they have a taste for it or are in a state of aridity there, you and I must now give ourselves to God never to omit it, no matter what may happen. If, at the Community hour for prayer, some business matters unexpectedly arise, find another time for it, and in some way or another make up for that lost time. If you only knew how easy it is to distinguish a person who prays from one who doesn’t, Sisters! It’s quite obvious. You see a Sister who is reserved in her words and actions; is prudent, recollected, affable, cheerful—but in a holy way—you can say, ‘There’s a Sister of prayer.’ On the contrary, one who doesn’t go to prayer—or rarely—and who is glad when the opportunity presents itself not to go, gives bad example, is not affable with either her Sisters or with the patients and is incorrigible in her habits. It’s easy to see that she doesn’t make her prayer. That’s why you must be extremely careful not to become lax, Sisters, for if today you find one excuse not to go, tomorrow you’ll find another, and so on after that; and you’ll end by giving it up entirely. Then it will be greatly feared that you may lose everything, for your ministries are difficult. If God doesn’t give you strength and grace often, it’s impossible to resist. Flesh and blood find no delight in them, and it’s chiefly in prayer that God gives you strength.
“So, Sisters, there you have the first means, which is never to omit your prayer. A second one is to ask God for the grace of being able to make your meditation, and to ask Him constantly for it. It’s an alms you’re asking of Him; if you keep at it, it’s impossible for Him to refuse you. Call on the Blessed Virgin, your patron saint, your Guardian Angel. Imagine that the whole heavenly court is present, and that, if God refuses you, He won’t refuse them. Sometimes the Blessed Virgin will make your prayer for you, sometimes your Guardian Angel, sometimes your patron saint; and in this way it will never go without being made, nor will you be without benefit from it.

“To make it easier for you, it will also be a good idea for you to read one point of the meditation the evening before, and reread it the following morning, even a couple of times. We do that at our house. It would also be well for you to keep handy some pictures of the mysteries on which you meditate. While looking at them, think, ‘What is that? What does that mean?’ And in that way your mind will be opened. A servant of God learned to meditate in this way. Looking at a picture of the Blessed Virgin, she would consider the eyes, and say, ‘O eyes of the Blessed Virgin, what did you do?’ And an interior voice replied, ‘I was recollected, and mortified myself in things that might have delighted me.’ ‘What else did you do?’ ‘I would see God in His creatures, and pass from there to the admiration of His goodness.’ And then she started over, ‘O eyes of the Blessed Virgin, what else did you do?’ ‘I took great pleasure in looking at my Son; and in looking at Him, I was raised to the love of God.’ ‘What else did you do?’ ‘I took great pleasure in looking at my neighbor, especially the poor.’ From all that, this holy soul learned everything she should do in imitation of the Blessed Virgin; for, when she had finished with the eyes, she went on to the mouth, the nose, the ears, the sense of touch. And in this way she learned so well how to control her senses that she attained a high degree of prayer and virtue.

“Another means—I’m speaking now to those who know how to read—is for each Sister to have her own book. It’s a good idea for each of you to have one, or that whoever reads should read sentence
by sentence, then pause at the end of the first sentence for as long as necessary, then move on to the second and pause there, then to the third, and so on. Your prayer time will pass very easily. If you don't find anything to retain your attention in the first sentence, go on to the second, or to another. The Queen uses this method. 'I didn't know how to pray,' she said. She has someone read to her, then she meditates on what has been read. Many great people are following her example and are making progress in prayer.

"Another means is mortification, Sisters, which will be an excellent preparation for your prayer. These are two sisters so closely united that one is never found without the other. Mortification goes first and prayer follows, so that, if you want to become Sisters of prayer—as you must be, dear Sisters—learn to mortify yourselves; mortify the external senses, the passions, the judgment, and your own will; and have no doubt that, if you stay on this road, you'll make great progress in prayer in a short time. God will take care of you; He’ll bear in mind the humility of His servants, for mortification springs from humility, and in this way He’ll share with you the secrets He has promised to reveal to the lowly and the humble. I thank Him with all my heart for having made us poor and in the number of those who, by their lowly condition, may hope to attain the knowledge of His greatness. I thank Him also for willing that the Company of the Daughters of Charity should be composed of poor, simple women, who may, nevertheless, hope to share His most secret mysteries.

I thank Him for this and entreat Him to be His own thanks for it, and I ask You, my Savior Jesus Christ, to pour forth abundantly on this Company the gift of prayer, so that, by knowing You, it may acquire Your love. Grant it to them, my God, You who, throughout Your life, were a man of prayer, who prayed constantly from the time you were a young child, and who, in the end, prepared Yourself by prayer to face death. Give us this sacred gift so that by it we may be able to defend ourselves against temptation and be faithful to the service You expect of us. I ask this of the Father, through the Son, in whose name, miserable sinner that I am, I pronounce the words of blessing. Benedictio Dei Patris. . ."
The conference on the spirit of the world was begun by M. Thibault on July 28, 1648, and completed by M. Vincent on August 25.

"The subject of the present conference, Sisters, is the spirit of the world. It's divided into three points. In the first we'll see the reasons why Daughters of Charity should give themselves to God to shun the spirit of the world; in the second, what the spirit of the world is and in what it consists; and in the third, the means each of us should take to shun the spirit of the world.

"Please tell us your thoughts on this, Sister."

"One of the reasons we have for shunning the spirit of the world is that Jesus Christ didn't pray for the world. Another reason is that Saint Paul states that, if we love the world, we'll perish with the world. A third reason is that, from all eternity, God planned to save us by ways quite contrary to those of the world, and if we follow the ways of the world, they'll turn us away from those of God.

"On the second point, the spirit of the world seemed to me to be an ambitious, irreligious spirit, having no other aim than self-gratification. One very efficacious means is the reception of the sacraments, which keeps us close to God and, consequently, detaches us from the spirit of the world. Another means is to reflect that our attire is poor and of a style far removed from that of the world; therefore, we must distance ourselves of the spirit of the world if we don't want to be hypocrites, dressing contrary to our
spirit. Poverty in regard to food is another means for avoiding the spirit of the world, and so is work, which, by keeping our mind occupied, will easily divert it from a worldly spirit."

"Those are good reasons, Sister, and excellent means to combat the spirit of the world; for it would really be ridiculous for women dressed like you, poorly nourished as you are, and carrying out the lowly, abject duties in which you are engaged, to maintain amid all that a spirit filled with the principles, maxims, and opinions of the world.

"And you, Sister, would you tell us another means for fighting against the spirit of the world?"

"Father, I think the practice of the Rules is a good means for ridding ourselves of the spirit of the world."

"You're right, Sister, and, provided you're faithful to them, nothing can keep a tighter rein on you against the spirit of the world because, by God's grace, they're drawn up in such a way that they have no part in it. And to help you to be more exact in observing them, it will be well, Sister, for you and all those who feel as you do to read them or have them read from time to time. Reading the Rules incites you to practice them. If a Sister has been lax in them, she's ashamed of this and makes up her mind to be more faithful.

"Do you have any other means to tell us, Sister?"

"It seems to me, Monsieur, that the holy exercise of the presence of God can be very helpful in detaching us from the spirit of the world."

"And you, Sister, have you thought about the topic of this conference? Would you tell us why a Daughter of Charity must give herself to God in a special way to resist the spirit of the world?"

"Because the spirit of the world is displeasing to God, especially in Communities."

"And do you know any means to do this, Sister?"

"It seems to me, Monsieur, that recalling the points of the conference will help us to resist the spirit of the world."

"That's an excellent means, Sister, especially striving to retain the sentiments God gave you during your meditation on this topic. Now, to facilitate for you the means of making this sort of prayer
readily, I’m going to say a few words on it. I think that your conferences, like ours, are usually divided into two points: (1) the motives and (2) the means. To enter into the first, we have to consider the benefits to a person who practices the virtue proposed, and, on the contrary, the harm there is in not observing it; as, for instance, in connection with today’s subject, to see how fitting it is for a Daughter of Charity, who has given herself to God to serve Him in the lowliest work there is, to distance herself from the spirit of the world and be filled with the spirit of God; and, on the contrary, the harm it would do both her and her neighbor if, having given herself to God in this way of life, she were still filled with the spirit of the world.

“Next, if we recognize that we’re tainted with this wretched spirit and are aware of the harm it does the soul, we’ll reflect on the best means to free ourselves of it. If, by the mercy of God, we’re not caught up in it, we’ll see what precautions we’ll have to take to prevent ourselves from falling into it. In this way, Sisters, you’ll be furnished with motives and means on the topics proposed to you.

“Please tell us, Sister, the thoughts God has given you on the subject at hand.”

“I thought, Monsieur, that a powerful motive for detaching ourselves from the spirit of the world is to reflect that God has called us to a vocation that is quite opposed to it. As means, it seems to me that humble obedience, the practice of mental prayer, and interior recollection will keep us far removed from the spirit of the world. But, on this point, Monsieur, a difficulty occurred to me, which is that we don’t always make our prayer because it frequently happens that, at the time we should be making it in the morning, we have to deliver the medicines, and in the evening, there are always drugs to be dispensed, with the result that entire days go by without our making it.”

“Sister, even though prayer is extremely necessary for a Daughter of Charity, nevertheless, I’ll tell you that, since your principal ministry is the service of your neighbor, when there’s question of helping him and reason to fear it may be detrimental to him if you put this off, then you are obliged to leave your prayer. Furthermore, if there were no other time to assist him but the time for Mass, you
should omit it—and I don't mean only on a working day, but even on a day of obligation—rather than leave him in danger, for assistance to the neighbor has been established by God himself and practiced by Our Lord Jesus Christ, but the obligation of hearing Mass is only of ecclesiastical institution. I'm glad to have the chance to tell you this, Sisters, so that, although you should be as punctual as possible for all your spiritual exercises, nevertheless, you may be sure that you must leave everything for the service of the poor. Still, Sisters, as far as you can, you must accommodate Martha to Mary, and arrange your duties in such a way that both prayer and work may be reconciled.

"Tell us another motive to oblige us to avoid the spirit of the world, Sister."

"Monsieur, I think that: (1) the Holy Spirit is not found where the spirit of the world is present; (2) modesty is incompatible with the spirit of the world, and (3) if we don't avoid the spirit of the world, we're in great danger of losing our vocation."

"I won't conclude this conference, Sisters, because M. Vincent, who was very anxious to hold it himself but was unable, will be glad to finish it. That's why we'll just add a little to what you've said. Moreover, it isn't for me, I who have very good reason to fear still being tainted by this spirit, to treat effectively the means of combating it; for, in order to speak well about the spirit of the world, one must be filled with the spirit of God. In addition, I wasn't prepared for this because I wasn't informed of it. Nevertheless, I'll still tell you the thoughts that occurred to me on this topic while you were speaking.

"The first one, which is very pressing and to which no objection can be raised, is that you are Christians, Sisters, and consequently obliged to wage war against the world by the promises you made to God at Baptism. When you were asked, 'Do you renounce the devil, the world, and its pomps?' you replied, 'I do renounce them.' And, although you didn't say the words yourselves, but by the mouths of your godfathers and godmothers, you must keep faith with God and carry out the promises made on your behalf. You wouldn't want to renounce the inviolable mark you received in this sacrament, nor
the grace and faith conferred on you at that time. So, you must keep the promises you made; otherwise, you would certainly be Christians, for the mark can't be removed, but, by not doing the works, it would be in name only. Please give that a little thought, Sisters. 'By a special grace of God, I am a Christian. Many others will be damned because they were not, but they would have been better than I, if God had granted them this favor. Would I want to renounce what I promised God? What a crime that would be, and what punishment would I not deserve!' There's no doubt that, if you take those ideas to heart, you'll preserve the spirit of God and eradicate the spirit of the world.

"You should know, Sisters, that everyone has his particular spirit. The spirit of a nobleman is different from that of a lawyer, a merchant, a cabinetmaker, or a farm worker. And the spirit of each consists in devoting himself to learning everything he must know for his profession. God has given us the grace of calling us to a vocation totally contrary and opposed to the spirit of the world; and if, instead of striving to know and seek the spirit of God, which is proper to us, we're satisfied with the spirit of the world, which is opposed to us, we'll be like a statesman who would have only the spirit of an artisan. To succeed in a state of life, one must have its spirit; otherwise, one ruins everything. Put a soldier in a lawyer's office and he'll be useless because that's not his spirit. Put a baker in a tailor's shop and he'll ruin everything because the spirit of a baker is one thing and that of a tailor is another.

"In the same way, to be a good Daughter of Charity, you must have the spirit of your vocation. When a Daughter of Charity doesn't have the spirit of her vocation, she does no good and doesn't succeed in anything; you see no charity in her, no recollection, no modesty; she gives bad example to those who see her, and you may read on her forehead: 'This Sister doesn't have the spirit of her vocation.'

"What is your intention, dear Sisters? I ask you this quite frankly, and you should put the same question to yourselves. When you committed yourself to this way of life, was it to live according to the world? If that's what you wanted, you shouldn't have left it. If
it was to change your way of life, you must change your spirit and adopt the one proper to the state of life you've embraced; otherwise, you'll never succeed. The world, as has been said, has maxims totally contrary to those of God; and to live according to the world is to live as an enemy of God. Holy Scripture is filled with the invectives God utters through His servants against the world and its spirit; and when the Son of God was on earth, He taught us by His example how to resist the spirit of the world. And how did He teach us? By poverty, humility, obedience, penance, hunger, thirst, and finally by His death, which the world procured for Him and to which He was condemned by the world and its maxims.

"Those who have the spirit of God, Sisters, do the works of God. God is holy, and they do very holy works. Eh bien! Don't you want to be daughters of God? Yes, no doubt you do; I can tell that from your expression, which is the witness of your heart. You are Daughters of Charity. God is charity, says Saint Paul; therefore, since you are Daughters of Charity, you are daughters of God. To be His true daughters you must do His works. Isn't this what you want? Yes, no doubt you do, and you desire with all your heart to strive to combat the spirit and maxims of the world because, if someone follows the maxims of God, she's a daughter of God. So, too, if someone follows the maxims of the devil, she's a daughter of the devil. And you don't want that; you want to wage war against it with all your might. And to do so properly, you must know, Sisters, what the spirit of the world is.

"According to Saint John, the spirit of the world consists in lust of the eyes, concupiscence of the flesh, and pride of life. These three things are the fatal, miserable sources from which flow all the other channels that lead the soul to its infallible loss. For a greater realization of their enormity, Sisters, pause and reflect a little on the spirit of Jesus Christ. He wasn't rich, as we see from what He said to those who wanted to follow Him: 'The birds have their nests and the foxes have holes, but I have no stone on which to lay my head.'

\[^{2}\text{Cf. 1 Jn 2:16. (D-RB) The New American Bible expresses these three vices as follows: 'Carnal allurements, enticements for the eye, the life of empty show.'}^{3}\text{Cf. Mt 8:20. (NAB)}\]
know that, as long as He remained with Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, He earned His living by the work of His hands, and from the day He began to preach, He lived on the charity of Mary Magdalen and the other devout women who followed Him, looking after His needs and those of His Apostles. Now, you see from this, Sisters, that, if wealth had been a means necessary to salvation, Our Lord wouldn't have lived in such poverty, and you can conclude that the spirit of the world, which hungers for and covets riches, leads to damnation.

"Sisters, if anyone among you should not love poverty, let her consider that of the Son of God; if someone else should love approval, let her glance at the life of Jesus Christ and see how He received it. When praised for His teaching and miracles, He referred all the glory to His Father; but His Father and He were one, and that was to teach us that we mustn't attribute anything to ourselves. The Christians of the primitive Church imitated the spirit of Our Lord so closely that wherever they went they were recognized by their poverty, modesty, words, and works.

"A great means to combat the spirit of the world, Sisters, is to think about those who have lived in the spirit of Jesus Christ. The lives of the saints are full of it; otherwise they'd never have become saints. Don't think that you have to be separated from the world to acquire it. The Apostles preserved it while living among the people, and communicated it to them by their conversation, for conversation is derived from the word *versatio*, which means the pouring out of the thoughts and feelings of one mind into that of another by mutual communication. Consequently, Sisters, to preserve the spirit of Jesus Christ, we must avoid worldly persons, who try to destroy it by their wiles, and never speak among yourselves of anything but what will lead you to love all that Our Lord has recommended.

"The last means, which you should use the most frequently, is to ask it often and confidently of God; for He'll never refuse you, Sisters. He has promised it to those who want to follow Him. You may sometimes remind Him of His promises, if you feel a great desire for this. *Eh quoi!* My God, I'm totally filled with the spirit of the world, and You have promised special assistance to those who
would follow You; would You refuse it to me to help me rid myself of an enemy who fights so boldly against Your glory, and who uses so many tricks to thwart my salvation? My God, I hope You'll give me all the assistance needed to bring him down. I desire this and ask You for it with all my heart, which I implore You to fill with the holy maxims You taught Your Apostles and those who, filled with Your true spirit, have happily overcome the spirit of the world. With you, Sisters, I pray earnestly for this spirit, both for you and for me, I who need it so much. In the hope of obtaining it, I will now pronounce the blessing. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . .”

**39. - THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD**

August 25, 1648

“This topic has already been dealt with, Sisters; consequently, since I have very little time, I’ll just touch on each point. The first point is why Daughters of Charity should give themselves to God to avoid the spirit of the world. Sister, please tell me the reasons that may prompt a Daughter of Charity to rid herself of the spirit of the world.”

“Because we cannot serve two masters.”

“That’s an excellent thought, Sisters, for our Sister means that, as long as a Daughter of Charity has her mind filled with the superficial things of the world, she’ll be inclined to follow it. It’s an infallible maxim of Jesus Christ that we cannot serve two masters; so much so that anyone filled with the spirit of the world can be sure that she can’t have that of God.

“And you, Sister, give us one reason—just one—for why Daughters of Charity must work to rid themselves of the spirit of the world.”

“Because the spirit of the world prevents us from devoting ourselves to God.”

*Conference 39.* - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Élisabeth Hellot.
“And you, Sister, why do you think you must rid yourself of the
spirit of the world?”

“Because it’s absolutely contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ, who
said himself that He was not of the world.”

“And you, Sister?”

“Because those who are of the world are abandoned by Jesus
Christ, who said that He didn’t pray for the world.”

“And you, Sister?”

“Because it has never been known that persons who succeeded
in serving God in Christian perfection had a share in the spirit of the
world.”

“And you, Sister?”

“Because Our Lord, in the person of His Apostles, taught all
those who would follow Him that they mustn’t be part of it, saying
to them, ‘You don’t belong to the world; if you did, the world would
love you; but you don’t, and that’s why the world hates you.’”\(^1\)

“And you, Sister?”

“Because the world may be very prejudicial to our salvation,
seeing that Jesus Christ, who is a lover of peace, commanded His
servants to dissociate themselves from the world.”

“Mademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts on this?”

“Father, the subject of the conference is flight from the world.
The first motive we have for avoiding the spirit of the world is that
it’s totally contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ; the second is that the
spirit of the world is filled with darkness and confusion, which pre­
vents us from knowing ourselves and what’s good; the third is that
the spirit of the world is nothing but vanity and falsehood, and aims
constantly to destroy the spirit of Jesus Christ.”

“By the grace of God, those are sufficient reasons to direct our
minds to rid themselves of the spirit of the world. That’s why, since
this matter has already been treated, I’m not going to spend much
time on it. Let’s now see in what the spirit of the world consists. In
what do you think the spirit of the world consists, Sister?”

\(^1\)Cf. Jn 15:19. (NAB)
"It seems to me, Father, that this spirit is an abyss of all sorts of wickedness, since the world is simply an assembly of the wicked; therefore, we can easily have the spirit of the world, even though we may be far removed from it physically, if our mind is occupied with thoughts of what's going on in the world and wants to be part of it."

"And you, Sister, will you tell us in what the spirit of the world consists?"

"I think, Father, that to imagine in what the spirit of the world consists, we must think about the spirit of Jesus Christ and all His maxims, and picture to ourselves the opposite of everything He teaches. For instance, Our Lord urges us to sell what we have, take up our cross, and follow Him; and the world looks on that as folly. Our Lord invites us to embrace contempt, humiliations, and sufferings; and the world rejects all that in order to seek honor and pleasure."

"And you, Mademoiselle?"

"It seems to me that the spirit of the world is to thwart all those who do good, to love riches and honor, to avoid all that's distasteful to nature, to give it whatever it wants by continually acquiescing in all the suggestions of the senses, and to reject any form of constraint, in such a way that the spirit of the world seems to induce those who follow it to form a god of their own, according to their sensual, earthly idea, forgetting the honor and obedience they owe to the one true God. I have to mention this truth with great shame, having learned it from my own weakness and from following my sensuous desires, which I haven't combated with the courage I should have had."

"Now, Sister, what means do you think should be adopted in order to reject the spirit of the world?"

"I think we have to ask God for it every day."

Another Sister said, "Consider in all our actions the spirit with which the Son of God performed His, so as to try to do ours in the same spirit."

"It seems to me," said another Sister, "that a good means is never to talk about what people of the world do, for fear that our mind may tend to become attached to it, which could cause our ruin."
"I think it’s good to be very recollected," added another Sister, "and not to linger with lay persons any longer than the time needed to transact our business with them."

"One means of shunning the spirit of the world," replied another Sister, "is to ask God humbly and constantly to help us realize what’s evil in it in order to have a great hatred of it."

Another Sister said, "Thank Our Lord every day for having placed us on the path that will distance us from it, and ask Him for the strength and help to rid ourselves of it once and for all."

"To be strongly attached to the spirit of Jesus Christ," added another Sister, "and to try to act in such a way that we do nothing that is not in conformity with it."

Several other Sisters spoke on all the points and said much the same as has already been included here. After that, Most Honored Father began as follows: "Well now, blessed be God, blessed be God, and may He be praised forever that, in His infinite goodness and mercy, He has deigned to make known to us that those who would serve Him in spirit and truth must be far removed from the spirit of the world! But when we speak of the spirit of the world, dear Sisters, you must know both what the world is and what its spirit is. The world, properly speaking, may be understood to be this great machine that makes up the universe, and its spirit, the spirit that moves and guides it. The world may also be understood to mean all people taken together, and its spirit would be that of all people in general. Again, the world may be taken to mean worldly people, persons addicted to pleasure, vanity, and greed, and the spirit that animates such persons is a spirit of perdition and damnation that revolts against God and leads the soul to total ruin. For that reason the Son of God didn’t pray for such people. He who came on earth only to save us, who gave His blood and His life for our redemption, found there some persons driven by such an evil spirit that they obliged Him not to pray for them.

"What a powerful reason, Sisters. 'Quoi! I, a Daughter of Charity, who had the intention of giving myself to God to serve Him and to work out my salvation, shall I find myself in such a state that the Son of God will abandon me and not pray for me! And to whom
shall I turn? Who will protect me if I'm deserted by my Lord Jesus Christ? How shall I dare to address the Eternal Father, if His Son abandons me?' And yet, Sisters, this will be only too true if you have any part in the spirit of the world and make no effort to free yourself.

" 'But, Monsieur,' you'll say to me, 'how can a Daughter of Charity have anything to do with the spirit of the world?' Oh, I'll tell you how! In the first place, the world—or the spirit of the world—is nothing other than lust of the eyes, by which is meant a love of riches and a desire to have what we see others possess; concupiscence of the flesh, which is a love of pleasure, whether of the sense of hearing, sight, taste, or touch—in a word, of anything that satisfies these senses—and pride of life, which is an attachment to honor and esteem, wanting people to have a high opinion of us, to speak well of us, and to think we’re doing a good job in a certain hospital, parish, country district, or wherever we may be ministering.

" 'But, Monsieur, is it possible that a poorly dressed Sister, with her work so mapped out for her that often she doesn’t have time to finish it, could be so involved with what you’ve just said?' I reply, Sisters, that, if we’re not on our guard, the world tries to have a hand in everything. That’s what led Saint Paul to say: ‘Let us do good, for fear that the world may seduce us.’ ²

"A Daughter of Charity, who must imitate the holy poverty of Jesus Christ, may have an immoderate, compelling desire to lack nothing for her comfort: to be well housed in well-furnished rooms and to have a nice bed; that’s an attachment to the good life, which proceeds from the spirit of the world and from lust of the eyes.

"Then there’s an attachment to honor. This Sister won’t care whether she’s well accommodated, but will love prestige, be pleased to be on good terms with the Ladies and with her Sisters who are near the Superioress, and to be considered attentive in her ministry, kind with the sick, and exact in her Rules. That’s pride of life.

²Cf. Gal 6:9. (NAB)
“A Sister who is displeased because she has cheap clothing or because her collar isn't nicely laundered or good enough, will be upset by this. She won't go willingly where she has work to do, will want shoes that are well made, and will be annoyed if they are low-heeled or mended badly. All that is the spirit of the world, Sisters! Please be careful.

“A Daughter of Charity has the spirit of the world if she likes to use refined language, to be singled out as someone who speaks well, and who, if there's a new, fashionable word, knows it and waits for the best opportunity to use it!

“When I point out to you all those desires proceeding from the spirit of the world, don't think it's my intention, dear Sisters, to have you fall into the opposite faults and that a properly furnished room should give way to untidiness; or love of honor to a way of acting that might give bad example to your neighbor; or instead of a neat, clean collar, a soiled, untidy one; or that you should use coarse, vulgar words instead of those affected ones that the French language adopts from time to time and which you don't need to make yourselves understood, because most often they're meaningless. No, you must always avoid extremes. You can have a tidy room; that's always a good thing, but don't be concerned if it's not so beautiful or the furniture is shabby. You have to do your best to see that your poor persons never need anything, but don't do it from a desire to have the Pastor and the Ladies hear of it and praise you. You must be exact about your Rules, but with the thought that you're pleasing God by following them and not in order to be held in higher regard by your Superioress and your Sisters. You must keep your linen and simple clothing clean, but if your collar is soiled or if Providence doesn't permit that it be well laundered, think nothing of it and act as if it were.

“A further sign of the spirit of the world, dear Sisters, is to keep anything for your private use, to put something by, to set aside some money for a time of need, to have certain comforts that you don't have in the house or which wouldn't be allowed if you requested them. How abominable and diabolical is the spirit of the world! By the grace of God, I don't know of any Sisters who might want to do
this. But, if there were any, mon Dieu! how contrary that would be to the spirit and holy maxims of the Son of God!

"It's also the spirit of the world to find it hard to be with our poor relations, to want people to think we've come from a better, more comfortable home than we actually have, and to be ashamed to say from whom we're descended. It's likewise the spirit of the world to want to be well housed and to have a well-aired and comfortable room in a fine house.

"Again, it's the spirit of the world to be unwilling to have certain Sisters as companions, not to adapt ourselves to their moods, or to consider them too unrefined. Alas! Sisters, we don't know what we want; we often have treasures without being aware of it. But all that is discovered afterward, when those Sisters have died and each of you comes to tell us what you know about them. Mon Dieu! Don't you remember, Sisters, the beautiful conference we had on Sister Louise,\(^3\) where we heard such wonderful things about her—things we had never dreamed of? I know some of you who, by God's grace, are far from having any of the signs we've given of this worldly spirit, and I'd like to hope from God's mercy that if this doesn’t apply to all, it does to most of you. I'm not very sure of this because I don't see you often on account of my other business affairs; it would certainly be one of my greatest and most tangible consolations. At any rate, I do know that, by God's grace, there are some who count nothing dearer than to find occasions to mortify themselves. I know there are some who work hard and courageously at ridding themselves of the natural aversions they may have for other personalities contrary to theirs. I know there are some who never complain of their companions, whoever they may be. I'm also aware, however, that several love their own ease, desire to be well housed and accommodated, and to have as a companion some Sister with an attractive personality. I'd like to hope that, with God's help, they'll be cured of all that.

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\(^3\)Sister Louise had been missioned to Saint-Jacques de la Boucherie in Paris. Saint Louise reported her death to Sister Barbe Angiboust in a letter of June 24 \[1648\] (cf. *Spiritual Writings*, L. 181B, p. 247). The conference Saint Vincent mentions here is not extant.
"It's also the mark of a worldly spirit to be preoccupied with eating, wanting the food to be good and well seasoned and that the meat not always be of the poorest grade. To complain that the meals haven't been prepared according to our liking is also a sign of a worldly spirit. 'This bread isn't good; it's impossible to eat it. This meat is so skimpy; it would make you die of hunger.' That's the spirit of the world, Sisters, the spirit of self-indulgence!

"To complain about your health is likewise a sign of the spirit of the world. 'We don't take care of the sick Sisters; they're left without any consolation; they don't have any delicacies; they're not given remedies.' If such thoughts occur, Sisters, it's the spirit of the world that's suggesting them because, by the grace of God, I know of no Community that's so well looked after as yours, and that, through the wise administration of the Sister in charge of you, the Motherhouse is able to provide for the needs of both the sick and the healthy. If there's nothing superfluous, you should praise God because to squander the good things He gives us, when there's no need or usefulness in doing so, is to misuse them.

"I'm sure that while I'm telling you this, Sisters, some of you are saying to yourselves, 'He's describing me; I recognize myself; I'm full of the spirit of the world.' On this point, I'd like to remark that there's a big difference between being tempted and yielding to it. Now, there's no one who doesn't feel the natural repugnance we all have toward inconveniences. But if the Sister who feels it controls herself and doesn't let it gain the upper hand, far from this repugnance being imputed to her as a sin, she uses it, on the contrary, as an opportunity for merit. These feelings may certainly come to you, Sisters, but if you resist them, don't dwell on them, and don't complain about them to others, they're nothing but tests of your fidelity to God.

"It's also the spirit of the world to want to be Sister Servant and to be in charge of the others, and to think that you're more capable of this office and will fulfill it better than another Sister. That's the spirit of the world, and may God in His infinite mercy be pleased to preserve you from it!
“So much for the second point; that brings us now to the remedies. ‘But, Monsieur,’ you’ll say to me, ‘how can I be on my guard at every moment and on every occasion to combat this spirit with which I’m filled? Frankly, I’d just as soon give it all up, and let matters take their course! I’ll never see the end of it. It’s a problem with too many ramifications.’ Don’t act like that, Sister! There’s a remedy for everything. Doctors cure indispositions by their opposites. They strive to find the cause of an illness, and if it comes from heat they cure it by cooling medications, and if from cold, by warmer remedies.

“For instance, a Sister loves nice things and is happy always to keep something in her own possession to be used, so she says, in time of need. This must be cured by some practice of poverty, being content when we lack something, not being in too great a hurry to have what we need for our convenience. It’s all right to request things, but if we feel that we’re too inclined to ask for what we can do without, we have to mortify ourselves in that. So, little by little, today in one thing, tomorrow in another, with God’s help and the trouble we take, we’ll acquire the habit of the virtue contrary to this vice.

“We’ve said that people have a certain natural inclination for honor. Perhaps we’re not concerned about it nor seek after it, but we’re glad to be respected because sometimes that gives us the opportunity to do more good and to procure some relief for the neighbor that he wouldn’t have otherwise. The remedy for this, Sisters, is to love the little humiliations Providence sends you or those encountered in the places where you are ministering. Love that, my dear Sisters, and consider it as certain that there’s no true glory except in the practice of true virtue, which comes to us from God. Consequently, it’s to Him we must attribute all the glory that reverts to us from it. Let’s always mistrust our own strength and believe that if God didn’t preserve us constantly, we’d have some irreparable falls.

“As for the other sign of the spirit of the world, which is pleasure, you must resist it by mortification of the senses. ‘But, Monsieur, I feel a constant penchant to look at things that satisfy me, or to listen to what pleases me. How can I conquer this tendency, which is natu-
ral to me and still deeply entrenched in me through force of habit?'
Take great care to rid yourself of that enemy, dear Sisters. Let no opportunity pass of attacking it. I feel inclined to look at something that pleases me; then I won’t look. I’m happy to talk with a certain person I like, who speaks so well, gives such excellent reasons, and says such lovely things; but that’s unnecessary for my growth, for it isn’t conducive to it, and I’m seeking only to gratify myself in it; I have to—and I want to—mortify myself in this. I take pleasure in the sense of taste, of touch. Oh, Sisters! slay those monsters by abstaining from even legitimate contacts. Along with the sense of taste, mortify the sense of touch by using rough linen and coarse cloth, and don’t give it any satisfaction.

“I’ve gone on inadvertently much longer than I thought, dear Sisters. I think those are some of the disorders that the spirit of the world can create among you. I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ, who came into this world to destroy it, to make known personally to each one of you all the circumstances in which you’ll need to fight it; to fill you with His own Divine Spirit, which is a deep spirit of charity, humility, and poverty, as opposed to the spirit of pride, covetousness, and avarice; and to give it to the Company in general and to each one in particular!

“In this confidence, I will now pronounce the words of blessing, which bring with them the Spirit of God. Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .”

40. - LOVE OF OUR VOCATION

December 25, 1648

Most Honored Father read the note and began in nearly the following words: “Sisters, the subject of this conference is the love we must have for our vocation. It’s divided into three points. The first
concerns the reasons for loving our vocation more and more; the second deals with what makes us grow cold or hinders us from loving it, and the third is the means we can use to love it ever more and more. This is a very important subject, Sisters, because any progress we make in virtue depends on the love we have for our vocation.

"Please tell us your thoughts on the first point, Sister, and the reasons that occurred to you."

"As a first reason, I thought that it's impossible for us to remain always in the same state. If, therefore, we don't advance in the love of our vocation, we grow cold and fall back. Another reason is that, because of the difficulties we encounter daily in it, we can't persevere very long in our vocation if we're not affirmed in this love, and if it doesn't outweigh the difficulty. A third reason is that, without this same love, we can't resist the temptations with which the world, the flesh, and the devil continually assault us."

A further reason, offered by another Sister, is that our vocation brings down God's blessing on all the rest of our actions and on our entire life.

Another reason is drawn from the graces God has given each one of us in particular—graces that can't be appreciated enough when we think of the dangers from which He has rescued some, the hardships from which He has delivered others, and the places from which He called us to bring us to this place to work out our salvation.

Another Sister put forward that our vocation is in keeping with the life the Son of God led on earth and the holy counsels He left us.

Another reason: Although our vocation is lowly and contemptible in people's eyes, it is, nevertheless, very lofty in the sight of God because its sole aim is to please Him in all we undertake.

Another reason: God himself has given us an attachment to our vocation, and we must endure all sorts of losses rather than consent to anything whatsoever that might lessen the love we must have for it.
Another reason: The care God takes of our Company should
give us the confidence that, as long as we have the happiness of be-
longing to it, He won’t allow us to perish.

Another reason is that, by the grace of God, we can note some
improvement in our lives and a change in our behavior, and so far
we haven’t seen any of our Sisters—although virtuous before enter-
ing the Company—die without having made great progress in per-
fection.

Mademoiselle, our Most Honored Superioress, commented that
we must love our vocation because it’s a mission given to us by
God.

Another reason: Its whole purpose is the practice of spiritual and
corporal charity, which should always maintain us in a most pure
manner in God, who binds us to His holy love.

Another reason: If we don’t love our vocation, it’s to be feared
that God may allow us to lose it altogether; should that happen,
we’ll be in great danger in regard to our salvation, which often de-
pends on our vocation.

Another reason: If we don’t love our vocation, wewon’t do any-
thing that merits for us the love of God, nor anything that can please
Him; we’ll often give scandal and bad example to our neighbor, and
we ourselves will never be content—and may God not abandon us
entirely and leave us in a state of hardness of heart.

On the second point, namely, what can distance us from the love
we must have for our vocation, the Sister who had given the first
reasons on the first point noted, “What distances us from the love of
our vocation is, first of all, yielding to the temptations I just men-
tioned. The first, which concerns the world, is absolutely dangerous
and capable of causing us to lose all the love we could have; it oc-
curs when we listen to the talk of the Sisters who might have no love
for their vocation.

“The second temptation comes from the flesh, which complains
constantly and desires to have all its comforts; in our vocation we
have to avoid this. The devil, by means of the temptations he creates
for us, incites us constantly to thoughts of pride and vainglory; and when they enter the mind of a Daughter of Charity, they take away all love for her vocation, which calls for a love of humility and lowliness.

"Another obstacle to love of our vocation is the spirit of the world, the desire to know what’s going on there, and the fear of not being esteemed by it. It may also happen that we stop loving our vocation because we fail to appreciate all that is proper to it, causing us to become negligent, then discouraged, and finally to fall into such a state that we’re in grave danger of losing it, if God doesn’t assist us by a very special grace.

"Another hindrance is not to be attached strongly enough to the belief that this is where God wants us, and where we should live and die. As a result, we set our sights on some other benefit—although often an imaginary one—and are inclined to listen to the first proposals coming to us from elsewhere; thus it happens that we become troubled by the slightest conflict contrary to our inclination.”

Another hindrance, brought forward by Mademoiselle, is the failure to appreciate our vocation and not consider it a very special grace of God.

Yet another is not to be on the alert against the first feelings of weariness we may experience, and this applies both to newcomers and to older Sisters, who, after rising from their original fall, have recovered their first fervor, by the grace of God. Another is voluntary neglect of the smallest points of the Rules. The greatest hindrance of all is not to tell our Superiors of the first feelings of distaste for our vocation and what has caused them.

On the third point, regarding the means that may help to increase in us the love of our vocation, the following was said:

"The first means is to ask God for it every day and to declare often that we don’t want to yield to temptations, from whatever source they come. Another means is to reflect that Our Lord says that He regards as done to himself whatever we do to the least of His brothers and sisters, and to remember that on Judgment Day God will re-
ward or punish us only for the works of mercy we’ve either done or omitted. This will suffice to give us a love for our vocation. Another means is to love persons who are poor as members of Jesus Christ, as He recommends us to do. Another is to throw ourselves at the foot of a crucifix when we begin to experience some temptation against our vocation, and to ask God earnestly for holy perseverance through the merits of His Son. Another means is to mistrust ourselves, which will cause us to turn often to God and to ask Him for holy perseverance.

“Another is to make use of the reasons already specified, which prompt us to love our vocation and to avoid what God has shown us to be contrary or harmful to this love. Another means, given by Mademoiselle, is to ask it earnestly of God. Another is to ask our Guardian Angel to obtain it for us and to help us by his wise counsel and holy guidance to do or not to do what is mentioned above to master ourselves in order to overcome our passions and mortify our senses.”

After listening with the greatest charity and patience to the Sisters, Most Honored Father began to speak as follows: “I thank God for all I’ve just heard, Sisters: the motives inducing you to love your holy vocation more and more, the hindrances that may arise and cause this love to grow cold, and the means that can help us to increase it more and more. To all these reasons, which are amply sufficient, I’ll add one, Sisters: the holiness of your vocation; for it hasn’t been instituted by human persons but is of divine institution. Saint Augustine gives us a sign by which we may know if a good work comes from God: good works whose authors can’t be found, says this great Doctor, most assuredly come from God. Now, no one can doubt that this work is good in itself, for it is such that I see nothing greater in the entire Church of God; I see nothing more lofty for Sisters. To be continually engaged in the service of your neighbor, O Dieu! what a work! And is there anything more noble than to cooperate with God in the salvation of souls, which you strive to do while administering remedies to them?
There can be no doubt whatever that it was God who established you. It wasn't Mlle Le Gras; she didn't think of it. As for me, alas! it never occurred to me. The first person to carry out these functions was a good country woman. She used to herd cows, and had taught herself to read while tending them, questioning passersby who seemed to know how to read. Then she studied on her own what they showed her, and so, by the grace of God, she taught herself.

Once she had learned, she felt urged to teach others and came to see me in . . . where I was giving a mission at the time. 'Monsieur,' she said to me, 'I've taught myself to read, in a certain sense. I've had a strong desire to teach other country girls who don't know how. Would that be a good thing?' ‘Certainly, certainly, my daughter,’ I said to her, 'I advise you to go ahead.' So she went to live in Villepreux, where she taught for a time.

The Ladies at Saint-Sauveur had a Confraternity of Charity in their parish; they were serving the sick themselves, carrying the soup pots, medicine, and everything else. Since most of them were of the upper class, were married, and had families, they were often inconvenienced by carrying this soup pot, became disheartened, and talked of finding some servants who would do it for them. When this good young woman heard of the project, she wanted to be part of it and was accepted by the Ladies. The Ladies in other parishes wanted to do the same and asked me if there was any way I could give them some of these women. Mlle Le Gras, to whom God had given the zeal she had all her life for His glory, was asked to take charge of them, to form them in holiness and in the manner of serving poor persons. So, we got a house for them.

And that's how the Company began, with no one planning it, for the good country woman who started it had no thought of it; so you see, Sisters, it's God himself who has brought you together in a very mysterious, excellent way, and not a single person has ever

1The name of this place was omitted. Tradition maintains that Marguerite Naseau met Saint Vincent while he was giving a mission in and around Villepreux. The fact that she went back to live there, as the conference states, seems to confirm this.
found fault with it. I'm still looking for someone to say, 'This isn’t a
good work.' Who then can doubt that God is the author of your
Company? Saint Paul says that every good thing comes from God;
and Saint Augustine states that every good work that has no au-
thor—that is, that no one can be found who planned it or first
brought it into being—comes infallibly from God. Who will assure
me that yours has any other author than God himself? You weren’t
instituted by Saint Francis, Sisters, nor by Saint Dominic, nor by
Saint Benedict, nor by Saint Bernard, nor by one of the other great
patriarchs, but by God himself.

"'Am I to be a member of a Company instituted by God himself
and not love it? If that isn’t sufficiently powerful, then what motive
do I need to make me love it? ' It certainly will be powerful enough
if you weigh it well, Sisters. When we find ourselves weary of life,
lack ardor, and are confronted with the other annoying encounters
in which God tests the fidelity of His servants, both men and
women, we can reflect, 'Quoi! I’m becoming less zealous, but I
know I’m in a vocation that God himself established! Can I have
any doubt?'

"I’m well aware, dear Sisters, that some among you, by the grace
of God, love their vocation so strongly that they’d prefer to be cruci-
fied, torn apart, and hacked into a thousand pieces rather than tolerate
anything contrary to it—and there are a good number of you, by
the mercy of God. This hasn’t been given to all, however, and there
may be others to whom their vocation isn’t so pleasing, who find its
practices more painful, who are less submissive, and to whom obe-
dience seems like a yoke that’s heavy and difficult to bear. Those
Sisters are subject to frequent upsets, and they upset others. Not, by
the grace of God, that I know of any, but there may be some and,
when that happens, dear Sisters, reflect a little, 'What do I have to
complain about? Am I not in a Company that God himself has
formed and fashioned by His all-powerful hand? And would I be so
unfaithful as not to love it?'

"And what could you love, Sisters, if you don’t love your voca-
tion, when considered in that light? Are you going to love your par-
ents, from whom God has taken you to place you in His holy service? Are you to love your friends, your attachments, your own satisfaction, and yourselves? No, Sisters, there’s nothing so lovable for you as your vocation, for the reason I’ve just given you, namely, that God himself is its author.

“The second reason mentioned is that God has taken you from your homes to bring you here by a very special grace—a grace so great, so outstanding, that we could never appreciate it enough. David, filled with gratitude and praise, exclaimed, ‘God has taken me from my father’s house to call me to him.’

2It must indeed be the goodness of God that attracted you, Sisters, for, I ask you, did the Sisters seek you out? Perhaps you saw them, but did they urge you to join them? Not at all. Did people pressure you about this? Just as little. Perhaps they told you that the Company existed, but God had to touch your hearts and give you the desire and courage to come here. What could have made you leave your home, your father and mother, your possessions—in the case of some—and your dreams of the joys and pleasures of this world? It took a divine power, Sisters. Human beings couldn’t have done it; nature is loath to do it, and everything is opposed to it. It must, therefore, be God. So, Sisters, this is a very powerful motive, and keeping it in mind can and should overcome all the obstacles that try to stand in the way of the love of your vocation. ‘Quoi! I’m becoming less zealous, no longer have my first fervor, and am letting myself be demoralized! I’m forgetting that it’s God who called me, and the great joy and consolation that gave me at the time!’ Be very much on your guard against this, dear Sisters, and if you feel your first fervor growing cold, try to revive it by recalling these reasons.

“Here now is the third reason or motive to induce us to advance in the love of our vocation, and that is its excellence and grandeur, for it’s such, dear Sisters, that I know of none greater in the entire Church. You declare that you’re devoting your life to the service of your neighbor for the love of God. Is there any act of love to surpass that? No, for it’s an acknowledged fact that the greatest proof of

\[\text{5Cf. Ps 78:70-71. (NAB)}\]
love is to give one’s life for what is loved. You are giving your entire life to the practice of charity and, therefore, you’re giving it for God. It follows that there’s no ministry on earth concerned with the service of God that’s greater than yours. I make exception of the nuns at the Hôtel-Dieu, who profess to do the same, and who work day and night for the service of God in the person of the poor. So, Sisters, I don’t see anyone to equal you, except those who do what you do. And then you’re going to love something contrary to your vocation that might tarnish its beauty? Far from that, Sisters, I hope you who already have this love will continue to grow in it, and that those who might not experience it will strive to acquire it; for, take my word, Sisters, our whole perfection depends on this. If a religious—male or female—a Carthusian, a Capuchin, a Missionary, doesn’t have the spirit and love of their vocation, everything they do is worthless and they spoil everything because the spirit of a Carthusian, a Capuchin, and a Missionary is different for each, and the spirit of a nun is different from that of a Daughter of Charity. To do things right, each one must work so diligently at acquiring his or her spirit that it’s impossible to confuse another with it; for however good and holy in itself a spirit may be in those who profess it, it would be harmful and contrary to the man or woman who should have a different one.

"I know that a good number of you have this spirit so well formed in you that nothing on earth could cause you to make the slightest change in it. Furthermore, this grace was so strong in most of our Sisters who have died that, had they lived in the days of Saint Jerome, he would have written their lives in such a favorable light that we’d be in admiration of them. What produced all that in them? It was the love of their vocation, whose spirit was so steadfast in them that they were faithful even to the smallest practices.

“So those are the three motives which, along with those you mentioned, Sisters, can inspire you to love your vocation: God is your founder; He himself has called you; and your vocation is the greatest in the Church of God, for you are martyrs; whoever gives his or her life for God is regarded as a martyr, and it’s certain that
your lives are shortened by your labors; consequently, you are martyrs.

"Let's see now what can draw us away from that. You've said some beautiful things, and I'll add that, first of all, it must be taken for granted that every mortal sin separates us from God and deprives us consequently of the love of our vocation. First, you have the pride that inclines you to want to have a high position, to be esteemed, to keep people from thinking we're of little account. Now I ask you, how could a person puffed up with presumption remain among the poor Daughters of Charity? She'll see herself disdained, set aside, with no claims to honor or to the hope of ever having any among persons of the world; and there are no posts of honor in our houses. 'Let him among you who wishes to be the greatest,' Our Lord said to His disciples, 'be the least.' Consequently, this accursed sin, which caused the angels to fall from heaven, will prevent Sisters prone to ambition from remaining any length of time in the Company.

"You also have avarice, which is opposed to holy poverty. If a Daughter of Charity were infected with this vice, then good-bye to her vocation; there's no need to say any more about it; it's all over. The desire to have something for yourself in case of need, or to keep something or other in reserve, Sisters, is to mistrust God's Providence and care. As soon as avarice has its clutches on a soul, good-bye to all virtue! Judas, who had received the grace of being called to be an Apostle and the gift of working miracles, and who, like the other Apostles, was destined for great sanctity, became a demon through avarice. See what this accursed sin really is, that it had the power to change an Apostle into a devil! So you can imagine what will happen if it were once to enter the soul of a Daughter of Charity.

"The third means that causes us to lose the love of our vocation is—I don't want to say impurity, oh no, never, by the grace of God has that even been mentioned—simply a certain unrestrained liberty. A Sister is quite pleased to meet men; she isn't disturbed in the

3Cf. Lk 9:47-48. (NAB)
least by listening to them; she replies to them and keeps up the conversation, even with confessors outside of the confessional; she passes the time speaking of matters that are neither urgent nor necessary, but simply for the sake of making conversation. Watch out for that, Sisters. I repeat, even with confessors, you see. Not, by the mercy of God, that I know of anyone who does this, no; but since these are things that could happen and would be very prejudicial, it’s well to be on the alert against them.

“It’s also very harmful to toy with bad thoughts and not to mention them to your confessor or Superioress; and if you’re not careful, you’ll be in grave danger of losing your vocation.

“Another thing that’s also damaging to the love of your vocation is self-indulgence in eating and drinking, dear Sisters: wanting to eat choice food, or to delight in having something different from the rest of the Community. This sin leads to I don’t know how many others. I don’t mean that you shouldn’t be fed properly; no, you have to live and, in order to do so, you have to have good, wholesome food, but no superfluities and no looking for something special.

“Envy also draws us away from our vocation. This sin is a very dangerous plague. To envy is to be displeased that another Sister does better than we do, that the Ladies take notice of her, that the poor are contented with her, and even that she’s faithful to her Rule and puts us to shame by her example, if we ourselves aren’t exact to it.

“Our perseverance, dear Sisters, has also to do battle with another sin, which I don’t say is mortal, except in certain circumstances, but which stems from mortal sin and in a lesser degree is a venial sin, and that is anger. A Sister may be so bad-tempered that everything offends her. If she’s accused of something, she’ll dispute it; if someone doesn’t answer her quickly enough—perhaps because the person didn’t hear her—she’ll get angry; if someone enlightens her on her doubt, that will displease her; if she’s left to her own devices, she’ll regard that as a reason for being discontented. This vice is very dangerous, Sisters, and I ask you to watch out for it, especially since it sometimes becomes a habit—a very
bad habit for anyone, but particularly for a servant of God, a Daughter of Charity who should always be amiable and gentle. It’s quite certain that the Sister who remains subject to it won’t stay in the Company, for she’ll always find something in it to vex her, and this vexation will some day reach the point where she’ll abandon everything.

“Another great obstacle is laziness, love of one’s own body, which causes so much harm. Laziness sometimes generates misunderstandings among the Sisters, because the Sister tainted by it will spare herself as much as possible, never lending a hand to the heavy work, being content to go out only in fine weather, often leaving everything to the last minute, then hurrying her companion in such a way that the latter can’t stand it any longer and will be forced to say so, which will then put her in a bad mood. She’ll refuse to get up in the morning, especially in cold weather. When she hears the clock strike, she curls up for another quarter of an hour, then for half an hour and, in the end, stays in bed until six o’clock. She’ll be pleased to sit close to the fire or, at any rate, not to move very far away from it. Mon Dieu! Sisters, what evils stem from that source! Rest assured that a Sister so contaminated by this won’t be concerned with loving her vocation.

“So there you have sins of every kind that contribute to lessening and destroying in us the love of our vocation, Sisters. In addition, there are the complaints of a companion who is dissatisfied or is little devoted to her vocation. Be very much on your guard against this, Sisters, for it’s one of the greatest hindrances to love of your vocation; it’s one of the most dangerous plagues that can infect Communities, and all the more to be feared the less careful you are about it.

“A Sister discontented with her vocation is easily annoyed at the slightest disagreeable experience. If the Superioress or the Sister Servant charitably calls her attention to some fault she’s committed, all is lost; she’s up in arms. What doesn’t she say? Now, won’t a poor Sister—either a newcomer or perhaps an older one who’s a little gullible and impressionable, and who gives a hearing to every-
thing that the other, bad-tempered one tries to report to her—be in
great danger, if she’s not aided by a special grace?

“Well now, dear Sisters, that’s enough for today. I’m sorry to
have kept you so long—you poor Sisters who had so much trouble
coming and will have just as much going home. *Mon Dieu!* how
many angels are now busy counting your footsteps! Those you’ve
taken to come here have already been marked off; so, too, will those
you will still take; for, says one of the saints, ‘All the steps taken by
the servants of Jesus Christ for His love are counted.’

“I’ll conclude briefly. Please God, we’ll deal with this topic on
another occasion when we have more time, and I think it will be
helpful to do it more often than we’ve done until now. That’s why
I’m going to give you succinctly only two or three means today. The
first will be holy humility, the virtue opposed to pride, which, as
we’ve already noted, leads to the loss of vocation for most Sis-
ters. . . .”4

41. - THE LOVE OF GOD

September 19, 1649

“Sisters, the subject of the present conference is the love of God,
which is found in today’s Gospel, where Our Lord, when asked by a
Doctor of the Law which was the greatest of all the commandments,
replied, ‘You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your
soul, and with all your mind, etc.’ 1 Our Lord allowed himself to be
asked this to have the opportunity to give us the instruction included
in today’s Gospel. In line with that, Mlle Le Gras judged it advi-
sable for us to study this topic, which is divided into three points. In
the first point we’ll see the reasons why the Daughters of Charity
are obliged—like all Christians, but in a more particular man-

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4The rest of this conference is missing.
Conference 41. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by
Sister Elisabeth Hellot.
1Cf. Mt 22:37. (NAB)
ner—to love God with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their understanding, etc. In the second point, we’ll see the signs by which we can know if we love God. The third point will be on the means of acquiring and increasing love in us; for it’s not enough to have it, but it must continue to grow. Well now, blessed be God, blessed be God forever!

“Sister, tell me the reasons why a Daughter of Charity is obliged to love God with all her heart.”

“Because He’s infinitely good.”

“Right, Sister. That’s a fine answer. You see, Sisters, our Sister says that we must love God because He’s infinitely good, and that’s a very pressing motive; for, since He’s infinitely good, He must be infinitely loved.

“But why must a Daughter of Charity love God more than anyone else?”

“As a Daughter of Charity, I feel infinitely obliged to love Him, Monsieur, when I think that His Goodness has withdrawn me from the corrupt mass of the world to place me in such a holy place, where all the works that are done are holy. I’m ashamed to have benefited so little from this until now. I asked Our Lord for the grace to be more attentive to it and have taken the resolution to work harder at it.”

“Do you see, Sisters, the second motive for loving God given by our Sister? The first is that God is infinitely good; that’s a general motive common to every person, each of whom feels personally the effects of God’s goodness. But one of the signs of this that she has seen in herself is that God has taken her out of the corrupt mass of the world and chosen her from among so many others He has left there, to bring her to such a holy place. The result is that the motive of her love, as a Daughter of Charity, is the thought of how deeply obliged she is to God for the benefit He has conferred on her in calling her into the Company; in other words, for her vocation.

“And how can a Daughter of Charity know if she really loves God, Sister?”

“It seems to me, Father, that she can know it if she feels a great desire to please Him.”
"That's truly a great sign, Sister; for, if she has a strong desire to please Him, she'll be careful not to offend Him and, on the contrary, will take care to do everything she knows is in conformity with His Will or desire. A person who wishes to please another tries to find out his feelings about things, to conform herself to them, to anticipate them, and she lets no opportunity pass of showing her a joyous, pleasant submission and respect. That's how she perceives and knows that she loves. In the same way, the person who perceives within herself this intention to please God, and is careful to neglect nothing that can give Him glory, can reasonably believe that she loves God. But how can this be seen by others, for often this interior intention to please God is known only by the soul that experiences it? It's a relationship between God and the soul. How can we recognize that a Daughter of Charity really loves God, Sister?"

"It seems to me, Father, that she loves Him if she keeps His commandments."

"You're right, Sister! that's the very sign Our Lord gave when He said: 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my commandments.' One of the most authentic signs that we love someone is to submit to his commands. If you see someone careful and exact in obeying every one of God's commandments, then you can say, 'There's a Sister who really loves God.'"

"And you, Sister, why do you think that a Sister from the Charity is obliged to love God?" After listening patiently to all the reasons spelled out to him by the Sister, M. Vincent summed them up as follow: "Our Sister says that she's seen many reasons, but that God's benefits to her in her vocation have especially touched her, considering that in this state of life we not only keep God's commandments but we also observe His counsels, and it's a vocation in which we profess to love God and our neighbor. That's very touching, dear Sisters, and our Sister was right in seeing in it a powerful motive to prompt her to love God.

"And how can we recognize that a Daughter of Charity loves God, Sister?" When the Sister had finished, M. Vincent added,
"Our Sister has just given us a great sign to know whether a Sister loves God: if, as she says, she's careful to keep her Rules. Truly, that's an excellent sign! It's what led one of the Popes to say—and I myself have seen that Pope; it was Clement VIII\(^3\)—'Bring me a religious who kept his Rule, and I won't need any miracles to canonize him; if I have evidence that he kept it, that's enough; I'll place him in the catalogue of the saints.' That's how much this holy Pope respected such a lofty, excellent matter as keeping one's Rule! So then, Sisters, our Sister had good reason to say of the person you see taking care to observe her Rules—not only the house rules, but also those for outside, namely, the care of the sick—that in this we'll know that she loves God. And who could doubt that this Sister loves God if we see her faithful to rising in the morning, making her prayer well, seeing that her patient has his medicine, that the soup is ready, and that everything is carried out properly; and if, after breaking her Rule through human frailty or perhaps from some apparent necessity, she immediately accuses herself of it and asks for a penance? You may be certain, Sisters, that someone who acts like that loves God.

"Tell me, Sister, how can a person who already has the love of God grow in holiness and advance in His love?" After the Sister had answered, M. Vincent added, "Our Sister is saying that one means of increasing and perfecting oneself in the love of God is to be submissive to God and our Superiors, and she speaks the truth. Submissive to God—what an excellent means to grow in His love! If I'm changed, if I'm moved about, it's God who permits it. I take it from His hand and I accept it for love of Him. Let the Superior do whatever he wants with me; I know that he's guided by the Spirit of God, and because I love God I submit to all his orders. What a lovely, excellent practice is the love of God! Our Sister said it well: it's the means of perfecting ourselves in it and of increasing it. The soul in this state is constantly making acts of love, and she does it from what's within her. It's the nature of our heart to love something. It must of necessity love God if it doesn't love the world, for it can't

\(^3\)Clement VIII (1592-1605).
exist without loving. To love the world, mon Dieu! what a misfortune! By God's grace, we renounced that at Baptism and later, when God in His infinite mercy called us to His service, so it's natural for us to love God. And all we have to do in order to love Him is simply what our Sister has just said.

"To this, Sisters, I’ll add that there’s no place on earth where you can work out your salvation more easily than in your Company; no, not one, provided you do what depends on you and in the way God asks of you. Tell me, please, can you attain a higher degree of virtue than that of our Sisters who have gone to God, have edified us so much, leaving us such a good reputation and such a great example of their holy lives? No, I don’t know anywhere you can give more to God, use your energies more freely for His love, and have greater means of growing and perfecting yourself in it than among yourselves, provided you do what you’re supposed to do.”

The Sister who spoke next gave four reasons, most of which had already been mentioned. “When you’re going to repeat what others have already stated,” noted M. Vincent, “it will suffice to say, ‘I had the same thought as Sister X.’ So you’re saying, Sister, that you’re obliged to love God because He’s infinitely good—and we’ve already mentioned that—and because He’s lovable. Now, good and lovable go together, Sister, and come to the same thing, so whoever says good says lovable, and whoever says that God is lovable presupposes that He’s good. You add, ‘Because He heard your prayers and redeemed you.’ These are two strong motives that we’ll reduce to one, namely, that He created you, and His infinite goodness drew you out of nothingness to make you a reasonable creature, capable of knowing and loving Him and of enjoying His glory for ever and ever. Now that’s a powerful motive! I’ll love God, yes, I’ll love Him, and I’m obliged to do so with good reason, since I am His creature and He is my Creator and Redeemer.”

M. Vincent questioned the Sister on these signs, and after she had spoken, he went on, “Our Sister says that we can see that a Sister loves God if she does all her actions to please Him, that is, if she isn’t concerned about what people will say; for, Sisters, there will always be some who find fault with what is done by God’s servants.
But what people say matters little to holy souls, provided their actions are pleasing to the Divine Majesty. What do you think you’re doing, Sisters, when you carry meals through the streets? You make many persons happy with that pot of soup; you delight good people, who see you on your way to work for God; you delight the poor, who are awaiting their food; and you delight God, who sees you and knows your desire to please Him by doing His work. A father who has a handsome, grown-up son is pleased to watch from a window as the boy walks boldly down the street, and this gives him unimaginable joy. In the same way, Sisters, God sees you, not through a window but everywhere, no matter where you may be, and He watches how you go off to render service to His poor members. If He sees you going about it in the right way with the sole desire of rendering Him service, it gives Him inexpressible joy. It’s His great pleasure, His joy, His delight. What a happiness, dear Sisters, to be able to give joy to our Creator!

After asking some questions on the means of loving God well, M. Vincent continued, “Sister is giving us an almost infallible means of loving God; she says that it’s to walk always in His presence. That’s very true; the more we see someone who is the epitome of good, the more we love him. Now, if we often imagine having God before our eyes, who is beauty and perfection personified, there’s no doubt that the longer we look at Him, the more we’ll love Him.”

Another Sister, questioned on the reasons for loving God, replied that she had thought of several reasons already mentioned, but felt especially grateful to God for having called her when she was so young. Most Honored Father noted this, and repeated it several times. She added that one recognized that a person loved God when she obeyed His commandments and that one means of acquiring this love was to be careful not to offend Him.

Another Sister said on the first point, “The first reason obliging us in a very special way to love God is that this love is the most excellent of all virtues, the one that confers weight and value on all the others, and that God in His goodness has chosen us to love Him by calling us to be Daughters of Charity.”
"The second motive is that, if we don't strive to acquire this holy love, we'll spend our lives in vain, and our works will be counted as nothing.

"The third is that, if we don't have the love of God, it will be very difficult for us to persevere in our vocation and to fulfill the obligation of our Rules and the service of the sick in the way we should.

"On the second point I thought that we'll know whether we love God if, for love of Him, we overcome the difficulties we meet, as well as all those things contrary to our senses, reason, and will, and if we take great care to please God and greatly fear offending Him.

"On the third point, I saw that one means of acquiring the love of God was to desire it with all our heart and to ask for it earnestly and perseveringly; and one means of increasing it was to make those acts frequently because we do more perfectly those things we practice more."

After mentioning several reasons already pointed out by others, another Sister added that we can see whether we love God if we are distressed when we offend Him, if we like to speak of Him and, in a word, if our only intention in all our actions is to please Him, principally in matters involving the service we must render to our neighbor, who is His image.

On the third point, she noted that one means of acquiring, and even of increasing, the love of God is the reception of the holy sacraments, especially Holy Eucharist. It's impossible for us to come close to fire without being warmed, provided it be with the necessary disposition, that is, with the desire to give ourselves entirely to God and to ask Him ardently to give us His love.

"I thank God with all my heart for the lights He's given you on the present subject, dear Sisters. They are such that theologians could scarcely say more. They might perhaps say more beautiful things, but not better ones.

"Among the reasons you cited—and they're all weighty, important, powerful, and urgent—I'll pause only on one, which seems to me the most moving, namely, that God has commanded us to do this. Wouldn't it be enough if He had permitted it? No, it wasn't enough for His love to permit us to do it; He had to oblige us by an
absolute command, involving the punishment of mortal sin for those who transgress it. If a peasant were summoned by a King to be his favorite, and the King commanded him to love him, how obligated he would feel to do so! 'Alas! Sire' he'd doubtless say, 'I'm not worthy of your consideration. I'm only a poor laborer.' 'No matter, I want you to love me.' How greatly the kindness of this King would oblige that poor man to love him, Sisters, and to love him with his whole heart! He'd think of nothing else than the favor bestowed on him by the King.

"Now, God, who is infinitely greater than all the Kings of the earth and in whose sight we're less than atoms, nevertheless values our love so highly that He wants to have it sole and entire. 'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole soul,' He says, 'with all your strength, with all your mind, with all your will.' You see, Sisters, He reserves nothing. Note that this is a commandment of sweetness and love, not one of difficulty or constraint. You'll understand this by the following consideration. If the Queen sent for one of you and said, 'Come, Sister X, I've heard about you. I've been told that you're a good Sister; that's why I sent for you to tell you that I want you to love me, but to love me dearly, and don't fail to do so.' Tell me, Sisters, what would you not do to show the Queen how grateful you were for this favor? Now, you're certain that God wants you to love Him; He's shown it by His express command and also, as has been said, by choosing you to be Daughters of Charity, which means daughters of the love of God or daughters called and chosen to love God.

"Another motive you gave is that God fulminates a curse against those who don't love Him. 'Let those who do not love God be anathema,' says Saint Paul. A curse on those who don't love God! Yes, Sisters, God attaches such great importance and has such a high opinion of our love that it's His absolute Will that we love Him, and if we don't, we're accursed. What threats these are!

"Here then are two motives that I bring forward, Sisters, so as not to repeat the ones you've mentioned: one is God's command that

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4Cf. 1 Cor 16:22. (NAB)
we love Him; the other is the curse with which He threatens those who won't do so.

"But,' someone will say to me, 'all right; we’re quite convinced that we must love God, but what does it mean to love? How can we do it?' To this, dear Sisters, I reply that to love is to wish a person well, to desire that everyone know his merits, have great respect for them, procure for him all the honor and satisfaction within our power, and wish that everyone would do the same and that the person we love may not meet with any misfortune. The more perfect love is, the more sublime and lofty is the good we want for the beloved. Now, as nothing is more perfect than God, it follows that the love we bear Him is a sound and healthy love, tending to want His greater glory and everything that may be for His honor.

"To understand this clearly, Sisters, you should know that there are two kinds of love: one is called affective, and the other, effective. Affective love proceeds from the heart. The person who loves is filled with warmth and affection, is continually aware of the presence of God, finds satisfaction in thinking about Him, and spends her life imperceptibly in such contemplation. Thanks to this love, she does, with no difficulty—and even with pleasure—the most difficult things, and is vigilant and careful concerning anything that can make her pleasing to God; lastly, she basks in this divine love and takes no pleasure in any other thoughts.

"Love is effective when we act for God without experiencing its warmth. This love isn’t perceptible to the soul; it doesn’t feel it, but it still produces its effect and completes its act. This difference, says the Blessed Bishop of Geneva, may be illustrated by the example of a father who has two sons. One is still young. The father hugs him, enjoys playing with him, is delighted to hear him babble, thinks about him when he doesn’t see him, feels deeply his little sorrows. If he goes out, he keeps thinking about this child; when he comes home, the first thing he does is to go to see him, and he loves him as Jacob loved his little Benjamin. The other son is a man of twenty-five or thirty years of age, already his own master, who goes

5Saint Francis de Sales, in his treatise On The Love of God.
where he pleases, comes home when he likes, but sees to the affairs
of the house; and it seems as if his father has no tenderness for him
and doesn’t love him. If there’s any hard work, it’s this son who
does it; if the father is a farm worker, it’s this son who will take care
of any concerns connected with work in the fields, and will lend a
hand with it; if the father is a merchant, this son will work in the
business; if the father is a lawyer, this son will manage the practice.
And yet it seems as if the father doesn’t love him.

“When, however, it comes to making provision for him, the fa­
ther shows clearly that he loves him more than his little boy, whom
he hugs so fondly, for he gives the elder the best part of his property
and advances him plenty of money. And we see, from the customs
of certain regions, that the eldest children get the best part of the
family possessions, while the younger ones have only a small por­
tion by law. So it would seem that, although the father has a more
tangible, tender love for the little one, he has a more effective love
for the older son.

“Now you see, dear Sisters, that’s how the Blessed Bishop of
Geneva explains these two loves. There are among you some Sis­
ters who really love God, who experience great sweetness in prayer,
great pleasure in all their spiritual exercises, great consolation in
frequenting the sacraments, and experience no inner conflict, be­
cause of their love of God, who enables them to accept with joy and
submission all that comes to them from His hand.

“There are others who don’t experience God at all. They never
have, they don’t know the meaning of relishing prayer, and they
feel like they lack devotion; yet, they don’t stop making their prayer
or practicing their Rules and the virtues, and they work hard, al­
though with repugnance. Do they stop loving God? No, certainly
not, for they do all that the others do and with a love that’s all the
stronger because they feel it less. This is effective love, which con­
tinues to be operative even though it’s not apparent. Some poor Sis­
ters become discouraged. They hear that a certain Sister is so
fervent, makes her prayer well, and has a deep love of God. They
experience none of that; they think all is lost, they don’t belong in
the Company because they’re not doing what the others are doing,
and that it’s better for them to leave, since they are there without the love of God.

“Now that’s a mistake, dear Sisters. If you’re living your vocation, you can be sure that you love God and that you love Him incomparably more perfectly than those who feel this love deeply but don’t do what you do. Note what I’ve just said, Sisters: if you’re living your vocation.

“I see some of you saying to me, ‘I’m doing nothing, Monsieur; I don’t see any progress; nothing that’s said or done moves me. I see Sisters so recollected at prayer, and I’m always distracted; if we have spiritual reading, they take so much pleasure in it, and I get bored. This seems to be a sign to me that God doesn’t want me here, since He doesn’t give me the spirit, as He does to others. I’m only a bad example here.’ That’s a deceit of the evil spirit, who strives to conceal from you the good you accomplish when you do what depends on you, dear Sisters, although you get no consolation from it.

“There are some who are troubled when they see others abandoning their vocation. ‘That Sister left; why should I stay any longer? I’m doing nothing here either. If she works out her salvation well elsewhere, so might I.’ And yet, although they are upset by these difficulties, they still do all that depends on them. Don’t worry, Sisters. God wills you to be in this state. You don’t lack His love since you are acting that way, and it’s one of the greatest proofs you could give Him.

“God’s commandment to love Him with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole mind, etc., doesn’t mean that He wants the heart and soul always to have a tangible experience of this love. That’s a grace His Goodness imparts to whomsoever He pleases. But He intends that all our actions, by an act of the will, be done for love of Him. When you entered the Company, you saw the obligations entailed; you gave yourselves to God to fulfill all of them in His love, and every day you repeat that act. Rest assured, Sisters, that, although you may not enjoy the consolation of feeling the warmth of this love, you can’t fail to have it, doing what you do for love of Him.”

“But how can we make a perpetual act of love, Monsieur?”
"You may be assured, Sisters, that this can easily be done by four means that I’m going to explain to you.

"The first means of being in a continual act of the love of God is not to tolerate any bad thoughts and to keep your mind free of them, for they’re very displeasing to God, who is all-pure and holy. If any such thought occurs to you, dismiss it as soon as you perceive it, reflecting that your heart belongs to God alone, who wants nothing soiled or contaminated. There’s an easy way to do this. When the clock strikes, remind yourselves that God is calling you and is saying to you, ‘My daughter, love Me; my daughter, time is passing and eternity is approaching; give Me your heart.’ This simple, interior act, Sisters, will put you into the presence of God, cleanse your heart, and help you to make an act of love.

"The second means—for it’s a question of establishing that all Daughters of Charity love God, and love Him always—the second means, I repeat, is never to say anything bad, never to complain, never to murmur, never to engage in conversation harmful to others, neither about those at home nor about those outside the house, and to speak well of God and our neighbor. In this way our hearts will be maintained in the love of God."

"But, do I have to be talking about God all the time, Monsieur?"

"No, no! But when you do speak of Him, let it be with respect and devotion. When you’re together in a place where you can talk, speak to one another of the good you’ve seen, say how good God is and how good it is to love Him, or discuss how to serve Him in order to edify those who listen to you, and even for your own edification; if they hear you talking like this, they won’t allow themselves to speak inappropriately.

"The other means of loving God is to be faithful in following His rules, which are continual acts of the love of God. As soon as you rise, give your heart to God to practice your Rule and His most holy Will in this; get dressed with the same thought in mind; go to prayer with this desire and sentiment. When you’re out of the house, serve the poor in the manner laid down by the Rule. Rest assured, Sisters, that if you don’t fail in this, you’re loving God and are making a continual act of love."
"The last means of loving God continually and forever is suffering: to bear with illnesses, if God sends them; to endure calumny, if we’re unjustly criticized; to suffer interiorly the trials God sends us to test our fidelity. Good Brother Antoine, a holy man and a great servant of God, whom we’ve seen here, had this practice. When he became ill, he would immediately say, ‘Welcome, Sister Sickness, since you come from God.’ If someone said to him: ‘Brother Antoine, people say you’re a hypocrite, a real impostor, and you yourself should practice what you preach.’ ‘Welcome, Sister Detraction.’ People would come and say to him: ‘Brother Antoine, many persons are annoyed with you; they say you’re a playboy and are deceiving people.’ ‘Welcome Sister Detraction.’ He’s the holiest man we’ve seen in our day. He considered everything that caused him pain and distress as being sent by God. Likewise, Sisters, when you’re told that people are dissatisfied with you, or some word or action is falsely attributed to you, say, ‘Welcome to what has come from my God.’ If you’re ill and this prevents you from performing your exercises of piety as you’d like, praise God, who allows it to happen. Do the same thing with any difficulty or opposition you may encounter, remembering, Sisters, that you can’t make a more pleasing sacrifice to God than by giving yourselves to Him to endure whatever He pleases to send you.

"So then, there are four means by which Daughters of Charity will be in a continual act of the love of God, if they practice them. The first—we’ve mentioned it already, but I’ll repeat it—is to accustom our heart to form good thoughts, and not allow it to be diverted from them by a thousand vain and useless fantasies or by unclean thoughts. By the grace of God, I don’t think you are plagued by them, but rather by thoughts of envy, murmuring, and secret discontent. Oh! how that would separate you from the love of God and give you ideas of abandoning your vocation and of failing God! Watch out, dear Sisters, for they’re very dangerous. If you experience them, try to reject them and take care not to consent to them.

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6Antoine Flandin-Maillet.
“Another way of showing God that we love Him is to endure insults, calumnies, and trials—sometimes very annoying ones—that we come up against in our vocation, and which the holy love of God will mitigate. In connection with this, Sisters, don’t be surprised when you hear (at these words M. Vincent’s tone of voice changed and tears came to his eyes), when you hear that a Sister has left, ungrateful for the graces God has granted her. Weep for her loss, lament the deplorable state into which she is plunged, and use this example to strengthen yourselves. ‘But, mon Dieu! she was a Sister who was doing so well! She gave so much promise! It surely is the fault of the Company and Superiors.’ Beware of coming to the point of doing that, Sisters.

“But I go beyond that, for I think I could perhaps leave as she did; I’m no better, I’m even more imperfect, I’ll never be able to last.’ Be very much on your guard against using such language, Sisters. That’s bargaining with God, bargaining with yourselves. Should that happen—or even something worse—don’t get upset or discuss it with one another, or start wondering about the reasons that led Sisters to leave—for reasons will never be wanting—but renew your act of the love of God and say in your heart, ‘My God, so it’s true that this Sister, whom You had so mercifully called, has abandoned Your service. Alas! What will become of us if You abandon us! If You didn’t support me, my God, I would have already done the same, but I trust that you’ll never desert me; and I, on my part, will do my utmost to be faithful to You. In the future I’ll avoid the company and private complicity that have done me so much harm, and will seek out those who are stronger so that I may profit by their good example and instructions.’ That, Sisters, is how you should act.

“Do you know what happens when a Prince revolts against his King, forms a faction, rebels, and takes up arms? As soon as this occurs, all the Princes who don’t belong to the faction go to the King and say, ‘Sire, we heard that a certain person has failed in the fidelity due to Your Majesty. We’ve come to declare that we have no part in this rebellion but are ready, on the contrary, to risk our lives...
in your service.’ Then each one renews his oath of fidelity. Those who are at a distance and can’t come send a representative.

“In the same way, dear Sisters, if you see someone, as I’ve just mentioned to you, who has failed in her promise regarding her vocation, rouse your heart to greater fidelity and say, ‘No, my God, even if all the Sisters should fail, with the help of Your grace, I’ll be steadfast.’

“Well, that’s enough for now; I don’t have much time and won’t delay any longer by explaining the other means to you, in the hope that the goodness of God, who has suggested them to you, will give you the grace to make use of them whenever and wherever you need them. Meanwhile I entreat Him with all my heart to animate all of you with His true and holy love, to give us the infallible marks of it, and to grant us the grace to grow in it ever more and more, so that, aided by this grace, we may begin in this world what we’ll be doing eternally in the next, to which we ask the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to lead us.”

42. - LOVE OF WORK

November 28, 1649

“Sisters, this conference deals with the importance for Daughters of Charity to work during the time they’re free either from the service of persons who are poor or from teaching children, in places where they’re not too busy. The first point concerns the reasons for working to earn part of their living; the second, the kind of work they should undertake; the third, what they should do so that God may be as pleased with this work as with their assistance to the sick and their other ministries.

“These are the three points we have to discuss, Sisters. Let’s look at the reasons why Daughters of Charity must keep busy in places where they can do so without detriment to the service of the sick

Conference 42. - MS. SV 9, pp. 191ff.