"Dear Sisters, the subject of today's conference is the Jubilee. It has three points: the first concerns our reasons for giving ourselves to God to gain the Jubilee properly; the second will explain what a Jubilee is and what is to be understood by the word 'Jubilee' because many people talk about a Jubilee without knowing what it really is; and the third point deals with what we must do to gain it well.

"Sister, tell us the reasons why we must give ourselves to God to gain the Jubilee well."

"First of all, Father, it seemed to me that God will be honored by it because, when we do a good work as it should be done, God is glorified. Another reason is that perhaps this is the last Jubilee in our lifetime."

"That's well said. Sister has given two reasons. The first is that God is honored by our good actions when they're well done. And since the Jubilee is a holy work, important to our salvation, we must give ourselves to God to make it well, in conformity with what a great saint said: 'Tell the just to do well whatever they do; whether they rest, or pray, or engage in conversation, they should do it as it should be done.' The second reason is that perhaps we may never see another one. Alas! I've seen many Jubilees and perhaps never gained a single one. Some Sisters may say that perhaps they'll never see another because the young may die soon and the older ones can't live much longer. That's why all of them should give themselves to God to make the Jubilee well.

"And you, Sister, did you know what the subject of the conference was?"

"Yes, I did, Father."

"Eh bien! Sister, what reasons do we have to give ourselves to God to make the Jubilee well?"

"Father, we have to give ourselves to God because without His grace we can do nothing."

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Conference 53. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Mathurine Guérin.
"That's well said: we can do nothing without His grace. And from now on we must give ourselves to God to say fervently the prayers that will be prescribed for us. And you, Sister, what reason do we have to give ourselves to God?"

"Father, I think we have to give ourselves to God because without Him we could do nothing."

"God bless you, Sister! And you, Sister Antoinette, do you know what the Jubilee is?"

"Father, I think it means that God opens His treasures to us to give us many graces."

"Very good! I'm going to explain to you what the Jubilee is, dear Sisters, and I ask you to retain it well so you can explain it to the Sisters who are absent and especially to the poor. The word 'Jubilee' means jubilation. Before the coming of Our Lord it occurred every fifty years. God commanded that during that year people shouldn't till the earth; they were to live on the goods stored up in the preceding year. No one was to work; everyone rested during the year of Jubilee.

"In the second place, property was restored to those who had mortgaged it; they were once more in possession of it and were released from all their debts. Slaves were liberated. So, everyone shared the benefits of the Jubilee during that year. In those days, Sisters, people used to be sold, but now they're no longer sold—at least not in Christian lands. So, the slaves who had been sold were emancipated and were no longer subject to those who held them captive. What a great source of joy and jubilation for such persons! I leave you to imagine what a consolation this was for everyone after so much misery! That's what the Jubilee led people to hope for: rest, the recovery of their property, and the emancipation of slaves.

"That Jubilee was temporal, dear Sisters, and a symbol of our spiritual Jubilee. Those who make their spiritual Jubilee properly receive the same spiritual graces; we're set free and enter once again into possession of the benefits we had lost by committing ourselves to the devil, the world, and the flesh. For example, we had pledged faith, hope, charity, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Those beautiful virtues are the treasures of Christians and are like
suns that shine on our souls and make us pleasing in God’s eyes. Now, all of that is lost by sin, and by the Jubilee we are released from all our debts; we’re freed from the captivity of the demon and of ourselves to be given the liberty of the children of God; we enjoy the peace of a clear conscience, and are freed from the pains of purgatory that we had deserved by our sins.

“The temporal Jubilee is related to earthly possessions and the spiritual Jubilee to those of grace. By the latter we enter once more into possession of all the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity. So, you see what great reason we have for rejoicing, dear Sisters, for having exchanged earthly goods for spiritual ones.

“Now, dear Sisters, let’s consider what a Jubilee is, strictly speaking. It’s full remission of sins and a release from the punishments for which we would have to make satisfaction in purgatory. We were deprived of our possessions and were slaves of sin; grace gives us back those goods that sin had taken from us. ‘But, Monsieur,’ you’ll say to me, ‘doesn’t confession do that?’

“You should know, dear Sisters, that there are two evils in sin: the evil of guilt and the evil of punishment. The guilt, Sisters, is the insult we make to God by turning our backs on Him; it makes us unworthy of ever seeing God. The punishment obliges us to suffer in this life or in purgatory. By guilt we turn our backs on God, by punishment we turn our face toward creatures, toward relatives, toward our country, and all other bad attachments. You have an example of this in David, who had sinned against God. The prophet Nathan said to him, ‘You have committed such a sin; well then, David, you have gravely offended the Divine Goodness. As for yourself, God has forgiven you, but your child won’t turn out as you think, for he shall die.’ On hearing this news from the prophet, David wept because he loved the child tenderly. You see, Sisters, God had forgiven David’s sin, but He still chastised him because of the punishment due to that sin. You see then that there are two things present in mortal sin: one that makes us turn our face away from God, and the other that makes us turn it toward creatures. You understand that clearly,

1 Cf. 2 Sm 12:13-14. (NAB)
Sisters. One is called the punishment of sin and the other the guilt of sin.

"Confession wipes away the guilt of the sin, so that if, before confession, you had your face turned toward creatures, you'll turn it back to God. The guilt of sin is therefore remitted, but not the punishment. The punishment is remitted in purgatory by fire. Because we've taken pleasure in creatures and given our hearts to them by loving them too much, this pleasure sends us to purgatory, which Saint Augustine says is a fire, greater and fiercer than we can imagine, and of which the element of fire is only a figure. 'You have sinned,' says Saint Paul, 'you will be purged, but purged as by fire; you will burn for that.' ²

"Why, dear Sisters, did Saint Magdalen do such great penance after the assurance she had that Our Lord had pardoned all her guilt? She continued to do great penance because she knew that the punishment due to her sins remained. She went off to a high mountain, ³ so steep and difficult that it takes several days to climb and descend it, and so cold that I myself, who was there in the month of August, had to wrap myself up because of the cold; but when we reached the foot of the mountain we found it was very, very hot there. So, Saint Mary Magdalen went up this mountain to weep over her sins, bearing in mind the pains of purgatory.

"You see from this, Sisters, that after confession we still have the obligation to do penance in this world or in purgatory for a long time. By the Jubilee, we're freed from those punishments, just as by confession we're released from the guilt of sin. Now, Sisters, that's what the Jubilee does for us, a complete remission of the punishment due to our sins. I'm going to give you a comparison. When a man has been condemned to death and petitions the King for a pardon, the King gives him back his life, for he's the master of our lives and can restore them to the guilty. So, this man will have the pardon of the King, who spares his life. He must, however, present his let-

² Cf. 1 Cor 3:15. (NAB)
³ In the canton of Var (France), in the Sainte-Baume Mountains, 921 meters high, is the celebrated grotto where, according to Provencal tradition, Saint Mary Magdalen is supposed to have spent the last thirty-three years of her life.
ters to the Parlement, which confirms the pardon and states that the criminal will enjoy the King's pardon, that is, his life will be saved. But he'll be condemned either to banishment or to the galleys for four or five years or pay a certain sum of money to the widow, if he's a murderer; for the law ordains that anyone who kills another person will die; a life must be given for a life. In short, the King restores his life to him, but he has to pay a penalty in reparation for the evil he's done; his life is spared him, but the punishment remains.

"In the same way, by confession we receive the pardon of the Prince, who is God; but we have to undergo the punishment that the sin entails. Do you grasp this clearly, Sisters? Therefore, we have to make satisfaction for our sins; and how do we make satisfaction to God? By the Jubilee, which is drawn from the treasures of the Church. What are these treasures? They're the merits of the life and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the merits of the Blessed Virgin and of the saints.

"The Blessed Virgin never sinned; she also suffered a great deal; where have all the merits of her sufferings gone? Into the treasures of the Church. The same applies to the tortures all the saints endured. Look at your patron Saint Laurence⁴ (you should have a great devotion to him because he loved the poor), how courageous he was to endure such a unique form of torture as to be burnt alive, roasted on a gridiron, so that the grease that ran down his body served to make the fire even hotter! He endured all that with such great pleasure and courage that he said to the tyrants, 'Turn me over on the other side; I'm cooked enough on this one.' So, Saint Laurence suffered far more than was necessary for his sins, and those merits have entered into the treasures of the Church.

"That's what these treasures contain, dear Sisters. And who can apply them? The Pope, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. General Councils can grant a Jubilee, too. Likewise Bishops can dispense these treasures in their dioceses by granting indulgences, but only for a hundred days. The Pope and General Councils can grant a plenary indulgence and a Jubilee. Who teaches us that? Holy Scripture

⁴Patron saint of the parish in which the Motherhouse of the Sisters was located at that time.
does, when Our Lord says to Saint Peter, ‘Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ Notice the power given by Our Lord to His Apostles, Sisters, and conjointly to their successors by these words: ‘Those whose sins you shall forgive (in the sacrament of Penance for the guilt, and by the Jubilee for the punishment), they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.’

“So that you’ll remember this well, dear Sisters, I’ll repeat it: our guilt is forgiven by the sacrament of Penance, and the punishment is remitted by the merits of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints, which are applied to us by the Jubilee. Those to whom God gives the power of applying these merits to us are the Popes. So, Sisters, these merits satisfy divine justice for us, and because you must know this thoroughly, I’ll now ask you some questions.

“Sister, what is the meaning of the word ‘Jubilee’?”

“Father, the Jubilee frees us from the punishments of purgatory after a good confession accompanied by sorrow for having offended God.”

“That’s right, Sister.”

“And you, Sister, what does ‘Jubilee’ mean?”

“It means joy, Father.”

“And in ancient times, Sister, was the Jubilee the same as it is now?”

“Father, the ancient Jubilee was temporal, to restore a person’s property to him; Our Lord changed those temporal favors into spiritual ones.”

“That’s well expressed. God bless you, Sister! You say that the temporal Jubilee has been changed into a spiritual one. You see, people in ancient times could hope for this Jubilee only every fifty years, and it was a great source of joy to them because their property was restored to them; during that year they rested and slaves were emancipated. Doesn’t this give us great cause for rejoicing? That Jubilee was a symbol of our spiritual Jubilee. If we’re under the

\(^5\) Cf. Mt 16:19. (NAB)
\(^6\) Cf. Jn 20:23. (NAB)
slavery of the evil spirit, we're set at liberty; if we've lost the benefits of grace, they are restored to us.

"And you, Sister, tell us, has this temporal Jubilee become a spiritual one, and do we receive the benefits we've lost?"

"Yes, Father."

"If we had been committed to the devil and had lost our benefits, which are faith, hope, and charity, do we recover them?"

"Yes, Father; and the remission of our sins is granted in regard to both the punishment and the guilt."

"What do we have to do to gain it?"

"We have to do what the Pope orders, Father."

"That's well put; we have to do what the Pope orders, and that is to go to confession and Holy Communion, visit certain churches, and say the prescribed prayers there. If a person is already in the state of grace, he or she may make the Stations before going to confession."

"How many evils are there in sin, Sister?"

"There are two, Father, the sin and the punishment."

"What is the guilt of sin, Sister?"

"It's what causes us to turn our backs on God, Monsieur; and the punishment is what attaches us to creatures."

"And you, Sister, are there two defects in sin?"

"Yes, Father, the guilt and the punishment. By the guilt of sin we turn our back on God, and the punishment causes us to turn our face to creatures. The guilt is effaced by confession, and the punishment by the Jubilee and indulgences."

"Sister, on what is the Jubilee based?"

"On the treasures of the Church, Father."

"What does 'treasures of the Church' mean?"

"They're the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints."

"Well now, that's well stated, those are the treasures of the Church. Who can dispense these treasures?"

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7Stations are those designated churches at which Jubilee indulgences may be gained during a Holy or Jubilee Year.
"The Pope alone can grant the Jubilee and the plenary indulgence; Bishops can grant an indulgence of only one hundred days."

"So what is the Jubilee?"

"It's an application of the merits of Jesus Christ that the Pope gives for the remission of the punishment due to our sins in this world and the next."

"And you, Sister, you're still very young, let's see what you know. How many evils are there in mortal sin?"

"There's the evil of guilt and the evil of punishment. Guilt is turning our back on God, and punishment is attaching ourselves to creatures."

"How is the guilt of sin effaced?"

"By confession, Father, and the punishment is effaced by the Jubilee."

"Tell me, Sister, from what source is the Jubilee drawn?"

"From the treasures of the Church."

"That's well said. Who can apply them?"

"The Pope and General Councils."

"Yes, the Pope and General Councils can grant the Jubilee and plenary indulgences. What's the meaning of Jubilee, Sister?"

"It means joy."

"Sister, has the Jubilee, which in ancient times was temporal, been changed into a spiritual one?"

"Yes, it has, Father."

"What does the Jubilee do for us, Sister?"

"It wipes away the punishment of purgatory, Father."

"See then, Sisters, if being released from debts isn't a great reason for rejoicing. In former times, people didn't work during this year of jubilation; everyone rested and enjoyed great tranquillity, and that was called the Great Sabbath.

"Well now, Sister, does someone who has gained the Jubilee have restored to her the benefits she had lost by sin?"

"Yes, she regains possession of the virtues she had lost."

"Sister, when a person goes to confession, are both her guilt and punishment remitted?"
“No, Father, only the guilt; the punishment is remitted by the Jubilee.”

“From where are those graces drawn?”

“From the treasures of the Church.”

“What is understood by treasures of the Church?”

“They are the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Who can apply them?”

“Our Holy Father the Pope 8 who, as Vicar of Jesus Christ, offers those same merits to God the Father for the sins that so many Christians commit every day.”

“Well now, God bless you! I’m deeply consoled, dear Sisters. When you go home, I think it will be well for you to discuss all that we’ve just said. You who live here will explain it to one another and especially to those who are absent. Make sure to remember that confession wipes away the guilt of sin and that the punishment is remitted by the Jubilee. We still have to say what must be done so that the Jubilee may be profitable to us and keep us from the fire of purgatory, in which we’ll perhaps be obliged to suffer for twenty or thirty years, even though we’ve made good confessions. What good reason we’ll have for rejoicing, dear Sisters, if we gain the Jubilee! But what must we do to gain it? I’m going to have the Bull read aloud for you, and then you’ll see the intention of our Holy Father the Pope and of the Archbishop. 9

“Brother,” said Most Honored Father to the Brother who accompanied him, “please read the Bull.”

After it had been read, M. Vincent went on, “So, there are four things, dear Sisters: we must be contrite, go to confession, receive Holy Communion, and visit four churches and say five Our Fathers and Hail Marys in each of them.”

“Father,” a Sister asked, “is it necessary to make a general confession?”

“It’s good to make one, Sister, but for you Sisters it’s not necessary. I simply suggest it to you. It would be well if you began and finished by going to Holy Communion, without, however, adding

8Innocent X (1644-55).
9Jean-François de Gondi (1623-54).
any special Communions to the ones the Rule allows you. We must also pray for our Holy Father the Pope, Sisters, for peace, for the uprooting of heresies, and for the exaltation of Holy Church, that God may be pleased to give her good priests, good nuns, and good Daughters of Charity; that is, Sisters, that all the present needs of the Church may be supplied. So, that was the Bull of our Holy Father the Pope; here now is the instruction from the Archbishop."

When the reading was finished, Most Honored Father said, "Those, Sisters, are the rules laid down by the Bull. You’ve just heard what they are and even what you have to do, namely, to be contrite, to be very sorry for having offended God, to go to confession and Communion, to visit the churches, and to say five Our Fathers and Hail Marys in each one. As for the Stations, those in good health will make them, but those who are aged or infirm, like Sister Jeanne at Saint-Martin, can be dispensed from them by their confessor, whom they’ll ask what to do in place of them.

"The rest of you, Sisters, can visit the churches while making your rounds visiting the poor. This is what Our Lord wants, especially since the service you render to persons who are poor is also rendered to Him.

"You’ll say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys for the intentions of our Holy Father the Pope, who has ordered us to pray for the uprooting of heresies, the exaltation of Holy Church, peace, all the needs of the present time, and those that can’t be specified. Go with great devotion, Sisters, with your eyes cast down and your minds occupied with good thoughts. The King himself makes his Stations on foot. The Queen does what she can. ‘I’m an old woman,’ she says, ‘I can’t go the whole way on foot.’ Lastly, dear Sisters, I’ve never seen so much devotion as at the present time. O my God, I desire that it may be efficacious in Your sight and I hope, from Your goodness, that You will give us interior peace.

"I almost forgot to tell you, dear Sisters, that in ancient times the Jubilee was celebrated every hundred years; then, when it became evident that people had to wait too long, the Jubilee took place ev-

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10A parish in Paris.
very fifty years, then every thirty-three years in honor of Our Lord's thirty-three years on earth. This period was subsequently reduced to twenty-five years because people don't live as long as they used to. There's no shortage. Furthermore, in times of great necessities, we have recourse to God by this means.

"So, make it with great devotion, after giving yourselves wholly to God, with the greatest possible desire to obtain from Him everything you need. This is the time for Daughters of Charity to ask God for the three beautiful virtues that make up their spirit: charity, humility, and simplicity. The charity you must have is charity toward God, toward your neighbor, and toward yourselves. You must begin with yourselves, loving one another tenderly. If a Sister wears the attire of a Daughter of Charity in the sight of God and the world, but doesn't have charity, that amounts to nothing. Humility consists in taking what is least and in looking upon yourself always as the last of all. The simplicity you must have is the kind you saw in our dear departed Sisters. You'll obtain the spirit of true charity from God by means of the Jubilee.

"Mlle Le Gras, please tell us what you think."

"It seems to me, Father, that Your Charity has said all that can be said about this. All I can add is that, beginning with the newest members, we must strive to make good use of this means that God uses to give us His grace. Another reason for giving ourselves truly to God is that, the punishment of our sins being remitted in general, His Goodness may grant us the grace not to fall into those same sins for the rest of our life. It seemed to me that, in order to be restored to grace, we must turn to God, since nothing on earth can give us this grace, if the Divine Goodness doesn't do it.

"With regard to the means, it seemed to me that we must have a strong desire to gain the Jubilee, considering how much we need it. Another is mistrust of ourselves. In my own case, I see that I'm powerless to make myself capable of this grace if God in His goodness doesn't supply for my defects."

"Well now, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us the grace not to offend Him and to remain steadfast in His love. As for me, the most wretched sinner of all, who need this grace more than anyone,
I won’t fail to pronounce the words of blessing over you, asking Him to give you at the same time the necessary dispositions for gaining the Jubilee well. *Benedictio Dei Patris. . . .”*

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54. - FIDELITY TO GOD

June 3, 1653

“The topic of this conference, dear Sisters, is the fidelity we owe to God all our lives. This subject is divided into three points: our reasons for being faithful to God; what it means to be faithful to God all our lives; and the means of acquiring and always preserving this fidelity to God. Without fidelity, we’re nothing but poor wretched creatures, wicked and ungrateful to God.

“The first point, then, concerns the reasons we have for being faithful to God. Is Sister Geneviève ¹ here? Sister, what reasons do we have for being faithful to God?”

“I’ve thought of several, Father, the first being that God, who has granted us the grace of being Christians, of calling us to His service, and of preserving us in it, would reserve a severe punishment for us, if we were unfaithful to Him. Another reason is that we honor God by this fidelity to Him.”

“God bless you, Sister! God bless you! Sister Jeanne, what reasons do we have for being faithful to God?”

“Father, it seems to me that since God is so good to us, we must be faithful to Him in gratitude for the graces He has granted us by

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¹ Probably Geneviève Poisson, who entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity before 1636 and was first placed at the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris. In July 1647 she took part in the installation of the foundlings in Bicêtre, where she devoted herself for several years. She showed great prudence and astuteness, especially during the first war of the Fronde (1648-49), when upheavals made it very difficult to obtain the means of subsistence for the house with its eleven hundred children, mostly under seven years of age, and twelve Sisters. In 1651 she participated in the Council as a senior Sister. On August 8, 1655 she signed the Act of Establishment of the Company (cf. XIIIb, 227). She was named Treasurer on May 22, 1657.
calling us to His service. We can show our fidelity to Him by being exact in keeping our Rules.”

“Can you hear what our Sister is saying, Sisters? I think it will be a good practice to begin today to speak out loud. I’m reminding you of a fault in which I myself often fail. Isn’t it true, Sisters, that frequently you don’t hear what I say?”

“Pardon me, Father,” replied a Sister, “but we hear you quite well.”

“If we really want our Sisters to hear what we’re saying, we’ll speak out loud; if we have charity for our Sisters, we’ll be glad for them to hear our thoughts; by speaking too softly, we’d deprive our Sisters of the good thoughts God has given us.

“And you, Sister, tell us the reasons that oblige us to be faithful to God.”

“Father, it’s because God is good and is our Father and always continues to do us good, like a good father toward a child he loves tenderly. The child, on his part, is obliged to love a father who is so good to him, and he’d be very unhappy if he didn’t.”

“God bless you, Sister! Our Sister says that we should be faithful to God, a God who is so good and who always continues to do us good. We would indeed be very unhappy if we weren’t faithful to Him, Sisters. Another reason is that God is our father, but in a very special manner; yes, God is the father of the Daughters of Charity in a special way, so they shouldn’t even inhale or exhale except to please Him. A Daughter of Charity is a tree that He has planted and should bear fruit only for God. How beautiful that is, Sisters! A wife takes great pains to please her husband. Everything she does is for that purpose. If she works to try to earn something, it’s for her husband. So, Sisters, your whole aim in everything you do must be to please your Spouse. Look at a poor girl working in a village, and all the care and trouble she takes to serve her master. She expects nothing in return but her wages, and for that reason she strives to win the favor of her master or mistress. A Daughter of Charity isn’t like that; she must desire no other reward for all her labors, both inside and outside the house, than to please God alone, who is the end for which she endures all her sufferings.
"Well now, sit down, Sister; God bless you! And you, Sister, stand up; what is fidelity?"

"It’s perseverance, Father."

"Well said, Sister. Sister mentioned something that’s very true: to be faithful is to persevere to the end in the service of God; for, without perseverance, all is lost. You can see this in a person who has served God for a year or two, Sisters; if she doesn’t persevere, what good is it? It’s good for nothing at all, no more than it would be any good for a Daughter of Charity to have spent ten, fifteen, twenty years, if you like, in the Company, if, after that, she grows weary and doesn’t persevere. What does all she has done profit her, if not for greater damnation? It’s not I who say this; it’s Saint Jerome: ‘We Christians,’ he says, ‘think very little of a person who gives himself to God in the beginning, if he does not persevere.’ The reason for this is that there are many to be found who began well and ended badly, as you see in the case of Judas, who did so well in the beginning of his apostolate and came to a very bad end. He merited to be chosen from among all the Apostles to be the steward of his Master’s household; he persevered for a time, and it’s even thought that he had worked miracles. After all that, a few days before Our Lord died, he was so wretched as to sell his good Master for ready money. That’s why, in punishment for his infidelity, God permitted that he should hang himself and burst open in the middle. Yet, he had begun well. Saint Paul, on the contrary, had begun badly; he wasn’t only wicked himself, but went about like a roaring lion persecuting God’s servants and hating them so violently that he’d have liked to exterminate them all, if he could have, as the Acts of the Apostles tell us. He thought he was rendering a service to God by doing all those wicked deeds. Despite all that, he was a great servant of God. Although he had begun badly, he ended well. So, our Sister was right to say that perseverance is essential and that, otherwise, it would profit us nothing to have begun well.

"Now, Sisters, I think it’s better not to ask any more questions for fear of inconveniencing Mlle Le Gras, who isn’t well. I’ll tell you my own little thoughts on this subject and then, if there’s time, I’ll question some others."
“Mademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts?”

“Father, among the many reasons we have for being faithful to God all our life, the first is the example His Goodness has given us in many instances. The most important is the fulfillment of the promise God made to us, after the Fall, of giving us His Son to redeem us. He didn’t fail to do so although, since then, the increase of our sins should have provoked His wrath not to grant us this mercy. We must, therefore, in gratitude for this grace, be faithful to God all our life. A second reason is what Our Lord told us with His own lips when He was on earth, promising a rich reward to those who are faithful to Him in little things. A third reason is that, if we aren’t faithful to God all our life, we’ll be eternally branded with the stamp of ingratitude, which we should greatly fear because this ingratitude is the height of all infidelities to God, and people are extremely blameworthy when some sign of this is discovered in them. A fourth reason for being faithful to God all our life is the love His Goodness continually shows us in the guidance of Divine Providence.

“We can be faithful to God in many ways. First, by being attentive to recognize the graces His Goodness grants us at almost every moment, and to esteem them, receiving them with gratitude for His greatness and with the feeling or thought of our own lowliness and unworthiness. Second, to consider why God gives us these graces. It can only be to manifest His glory and to unite us to Him, who is our last end; this should raise our hearts to love Him above all things. Perfect fidelity to God is to make good use of the graces He gives us and to love His most holy Will, even though our own will may often feel repugnance regarding what has to be done to carry it out.

“As for the means of acquiring the fidelity we owe to God, I thought I should think often of my need of it and my powerlessness to acquire it on my own, and to ask God often for it, and to ask my Guardian Angel to help me recognize every opportunity—great and small—that God will give me to be faithful to Him, considering them of equal importance, since they concern God’s desire to save me in order to glorify Him.
“Another means is to make good use of everything that happens, pleasant or unpleasant, reflecting that the good stewards of this world neglect nothing that may increase their temporal wealth and that the Christian should have a similar concern for every opportunity given him or her to increase the graces of love of God for all eternity. These thoughts made me very ashamed because all my life long I’ve resisted the practice of those real responsibilities and, by my bad example, have perhaps led others to act as I did.”

“That’s really good. God bless you, Mademoiselle!” The following is contained in the note of a Sister, who wrote out her thoughts: “The first reason that occurred to me, Father, is that infidelity is a very great sin in the sight of God. A second one is that, by our want of fidelity, we make ourselves unworthy of the other graces God might have wanted to give us, had we not abused the first ones. A third reason is that fidelity, like perseverance, crowns all our actions. Fidelity consists in being exact to what we’ve promised God and in carrying out everything He desires of us in our vocation, particularly in our ministry. The means of acquiring this fidelity are: to think highly of God’s graces, to thank Him often for them, to ask Him daily and earnestly for the grace of being faithful to Him until death, and to believe that it’s important to be faithful in the smallest matters so that we may thereby dispose ourselves to be so in greater ones. That’s what I asked of God, recognizing my great need of it.”

“Father,” said another Sister, “the first reason that obliges us to be faithful to God is His great goodness to us. The second is our own interest because, if we aspire to participate in the merits of Jesus Christ, it’s absolutely necessary for us to be faithful to God until death. I thought that to be faithful to God is to keep the promises we’ve made to Him. His Goodness gently urges us on to be faithful both in the observance of our Rules and in the occasions of doing good that arise, notwithstanding the dryness and repugnance that occur so often in His service. It seemed to me that the means of acquiring and preserving fidelity to God forever is to hope for it from Him alone, and to ask Him often for it. Another means is not to seek our own satisfaction in the things Divine Providence ordains we
should do because, once there were no more consolations, our courage and fidelity might also change."

"God bless you, dear Sisters! I'll add to all these thoughts the ones God has given me, poor and wretched though I be. Our first reason for giving ourselves to God wholeheartedly to be faithful to Him is that you've given yourselves to Him in the Company with the intention of living and dying in it. You promised this when you entered it, and some of you have even promised solemnly to do so. A second reason is that persons who are faithful in a few things receive from God the reward due to their fidelity. I'm not speaking of great, heroic actions; no, I don't intend to speak of ones like that, Sisters; I'm not talking about being faithful in such great things but I mean to speak about Sisters who are faithful in the least and smallest actions connected with the observance of Rule. It's to these persons that Our Lord made great promises: 'Those who are faithful in a few things, I will place over many'; 2 'You have been faithful to me in little things, I will place you over great ones.' 3 What happiness, dear Sisters, for the Daughter of Charity who will hear these words! O Seigneur! how will You treat a Daughter of Charity who doesn't neglect the slightest little Rule, who wants to omit nothing that is prescribed for her? Listen to what He says to such persons: 'You have been exact in small things, I am giving you the reward for great ones.' So then, dear Sisters, to be faithful in small things is everything. What does Our Lord promise, even in this world, to Sisters who do that? You won't remain where you are, He says. No, Sisters, He won't leave them in that state but will cause them to go higher, to go from virtue to virtue. If you had six degrees of merit, He'll give you many more. Quoi! my God, You'll thus increase Your graces so abundantly for a little fidelity in Your service! It's the Holy Spirit who says in Sacred Scripture that He won't leave such Daughters where they are but will cause them to go higher, that is, will help them to acquire greater perfection. Jésus, Sisters! how that should encourage us to great fidelity in all that we do. Think of a Sister who is faithful to rising at the sound of the bell to go to the

2Cf. Mt 25:21. (D-RB)
3Cf. Mt 25:23. (NAB)
chapel; she’s there only a little before the others, but God is pleased with that short time. Why? Because she’s been faithful in a small thing. That’s nothing, you’ll say to me; it doesn’t matter; she was faithful in a trifle. What a great consolation that is for you, Sisters!

“Our blessed Sisters who have died are now receiving the reward of their fidelity. When I hear the lives of the saints read at our house, Sisters, I say to myself, ‘That’s what our Sisters have done.’ As for me, I think that, if they did so much good, it was because of their great fidelity to God in the smallest details.

“After all these reasons, the last I have to mention, dear Sisters—although I have many others—is, that a crown of heavenly glory is promised to all who are faithful to God. Yes, Sister, it’s promised to all of you; it’s promised to M. Portail, to Mlle Le Gras, to myself, and, in a word, to all those who will be faithful. What a consolation for all of you, Sisters! But should there be someone among you who would turn her back on God and who lacked this fidelity, that crown wouldn’t be for her. So, fear losing this treasure, Sisters, and strive to make yourselves faithful to God in all things without exception, from the small ones to the great ones.

“‘But, Monsieur,’ you’ll say to me, ‘I’ve persevered for ten years in God’s service; I’ve worked for Him for such a long time; must I be faithful to the end in order to have the reward?’ Yes, Sisters, you must persevere, or you’ll lose everything through your own fault. If on the day of your death you’re found with a single mortal sin, all is lost, all the good you’ve done nursing your patients, the virtues you’ve practiced during your life—all that is lost for you, dear Sisters.

“Now please tell me, if a woman had been faithful to her husband for many years and in the end gave in and lost her honor, would people say that she was faithful? Not at all. And how would her husband deal with her? He’d repudiate her as being unfaithful.

“Now, dear Sisters, you have the happiness to be the spouses of Our Lord; if you were so unfortunate as to fail in your promises—I’m not referring to your body—oh no! I don’t mean that, but to your will; what would He say to His servants, He who is so good and who wants to be loved like a spouse? ‘I am a jealous God,’ He said by His prophet. Yes, Sisters, God is jealous of the love of His creatures,
whom He created to love Him. 'I am a jealous God,' He said, 'and I will punish to the fourth generation those who offend me by refusing to give me the love that is due me, and, on the contrary, I will bless even to the hundredth generation those who are faithful to me.'

A Sister who doesn’t reflect on the fidelity she owes to God begins by neglecting now one thing, now another, and then allows herself to go a little further; on another occasion she thinks it’s only a small matter, and in the end she gradually falls into a state of negligence.

‘But, Monsieur,’ someone will say to me, ‘if it should happen that at the end of five or six years I commit a sin, I’m unfaithful, I no longer love my vocation, I have no fervor in my prayers, nothing touches me, I don’t correct my faults and am always falling into the same ones; I’m utterly lost for I have no fidelity.’ No, dear Sisters, as long as a Sister has the will to amend and works at this with all her might, even though she may sometimes fall, wounded, she’s not unfaithful. However, I’m talking about only those Sisters who fall through weakness, for it’s quite another matter for those who fall through malice or willfully. ‘But,’ that Sister will say, ‘I had kept my Rule for such a long time, I was so attached to even the least of my spiritual practices, and now all that has grown cold.’ Is that Sister faithful? Yes, Sisters; when she rises at once after she has fallen, she’s faithful, notwithstanding her failings.

‘But, Monsieur,’ someone will say to me, ‘I have to tell you that for a year or perhaps six months, I was so fervent that I would fly, I’d go to serve the poor so willingly, I said such beautiful things to them, I had so much satisfaction in listening to spiritual reading, in speaking of God and in hearing others talk of Him, and everything seemed easy to me. But now things are quite the contrary, for I’ve lost all that; I have no more fervor; I no longer do anything except for form’s sake; spiritual reading and conferences don’t move me; if I go to serve poor persons, it’s only because I have to; if I’m told to do something, I do it only through obedience; if I have to go to Holy Communion I do it only because it’s stated in the Rule, for I really don’t feel like it. So often I gave such good example, but for the past year I’ve done

\[\text{Cf. Ex 20:5-6. (NAB)}\]
everything negligently, and I obey and carry out all the other things I have to do so grudgingly that it's sickening to see it. When I'm told to do something, I'd prefer to go for a walk. Consequently, I'm unfaithful. I no longer serve God cheerfully in my vocation. It's much better for me to leave than to deceive God and the world like that."

"That's what temptation suggests. Oh no, no, dear Sisters! you're not unfaithful because of that. You should know that Our Lord is pleased to lead us by those ways after He's strengthened us in His service. In the beginning, God ordinarily gives great delights and consolations to the souls He attracts to himself, but afterward He allows us to be deprived of them and even sometimes to fall into such discouragement that everything that's said or done to us causes us pain, and we take no pleasure in anything, neither in mental prayer, Communion, nor anything else in the world, not even in conversation. In the beginning, then, God gives us great consolations, but afterward it's just the opposite. Note that carefully, Sisters. Consider a Sister who is in a state of dryness; she has no taste for anything, everything displeases her. Is a work less good because you do it reluctantly or without consolation? Oh no, Sisters, on the contrary! it's all the better, since you do it purely for God. In the beginning, God gave you milk, as we do with children, for it is said in Saint Paul, 'I gave you milk but I will now give you more solid food.' He gave it to you formerly, dear Sisters, while you were infants, that is, weak in His love; for to babies we give milk and other foods suited to the weakness of their age; but when they have become adults, they're given hard bread. At the beginning of his conversion, Saint Paul received great consolations, and afterward had dreadful temptations. And did he forsake everything because of that, did he abandon his duties? Oh no! Was he less faithful because of all those temptations? Oh no! Now, dear Sisters, even though you're in a constant state of dryness and temptation, you are faithful, believe me, provided you don't fail to fulfill your obligations; yes, even though you do them without any feeling—like an animal, if you like—even though everything is repugnant to your nature and

\[\text{Cf. I Cor 3:2. (NAB)}\]
you often commit faults; nevertheless, provided you do your duty and raise yourselves up, you are faithful.

"When Our Lord was on the cross, in what distress was He? Didn't nature suffer great pangs because of its repugnance to death? Even though He was well aware that it was for our salvation and the glory of God His Father, He was still pierced with sorrows and afflicted with interior anguish to the point of crying out, ‘Father, Father, why have you abandoned me?’ 6 Eh bien! Sisters, don’t you see by this example that being disposed to such suffering doesn’t prevent us from being faithful to God, since Our Lord didn’t fail to remain faithful to God His Father? In the midst of those painful moments, didn’t He carry out the wonderful work of our redemption? So, be consoled when you have something to suffer, dear Sisters, knowing that, since you’re Daughters of Charity, you have the means of imitating Our Lord your Spouse, who suffered so greatly, and don’t think you’re unfaithful because you’re tempted. Be consoled, too, at your frequent lapses. If you humble yourselves for your falls, you’re not unfaithful. Provided you work at correcting yourselves, persevere, and don’t abandon your vocation, you have nothing to fear. However, a Sister who abandons her vocation, who despises her Rules and wants to please herself, indulging herself to her heart’s content, that Sister is unfaithful. But the one who does what she can, despite all her loathings, is faithful. And even if it seems to you that you’re bad Daughters of Charity and do nothing worthwhile, Sisters, don’t give up, even though you might think you’d do better elsewhere, for it may happen during these times of loathing and temptation, that you may want to go to some other house; that, however, is a deceit of the devil and a very obvious temptation.

"One day I went to see a great nobleman who had given himself to God in the priesthood. I found him saying his Office and I asked him, ‘Eh bien! Monsieur, are you beginning to taste a little of the happiness there is in serving God?’ ‘Monsieur,’ he replied, ‘I assure you that I find no consolation in it. I say my Office every day; I pray

6Cf. Mt 27:46. (NAB)
and carry out all my spiritual exercises without any satisfaction at all. But I wouldn’t want it otherwise if God didn’t will it. It doesn’t matter whether I go to God in dryness or lovingly, provided I go to Him faithfully.’

“Think about that, Sisters, and remember this example well, for it’s a beautiful one, given by a great nobleman who is still living. So, you see from that, dear Sisters, how differently God treats His servants. In the beginning, He gives them great consolations—at least to some—but afterward, for their own greater good, He permits them to be assailed by great temptations. He makes others walk on thorns. So, as long as you have the determination and the courage to raise yourselves up from your falls, you’ll be faithful, Sisters. These are the reasons you have for being faithful to God and the answer to the objections nature might raise. Well now, let’s give ourselves to God wholeheartedly to be faithful to Him all our lives.

“Let’s go on to the second point of our conference, dear Sisters, which is in what this fidelity consists. You’ll understand it by the comparison of a master who has a servant. The former says to the latter, ‘Go and do such or such a thing; but I want you to do it this way.’ And not only does the servant do what his master has ordered, but he does it in the way his master has told him, even though he isn’t seen by the master, and he doesn’t know whether he’ll be paid. Such a servant can be called faithful. If he does what his master ordered, but not in the way he was told, he does it according to his own inclination and whim; that servant isn’t faithful. If he receives a rebuke from his master, if he resents it, if he thinks he’s been given a disconcerting rebuke and leaves his master, then he’s a bad, unfaithful servant and mustn’t be surprised if his master gives him no reward, since he abandoned him.

“You can see clearly by this comparison that anyone who doesn’t persevere until the end receives no reward. Quoi! Sisters, you have the happiness to be God’s servants; you’ve left your parents, your possessions, and everything else for God; for you are His servants, if there are any in the Church. He called you to a way of life in which He has commanded you to do certain things, and He wants you to do them in the way He has prescribed. You do them in
the sweetness of consolations; but when temptation arises, you abandon everything. What infidelity that is! Well now, those Sisters among you who do what is in your Rules and are not satisfied with merely doing what the Master commands, but do it as God commands and in the right spirit, are faithful; have no doubt about it. But there are others who, when tempted, give up everything and think they’ll do better elsewhere. Should it happen that someone has thoughts of entering a religious Order or of getting married, and toys with the idea, it’s one thing if that occurs once, but if the same thoughts recur and she dwells on them as she did before, be greatly afraid for her, Sisters. Afterward, she’ll go off and tell her troubles to another Sister—but to whom? Not to her Superioress, still less to the Director, but to a Sister who she knows is discontented and of the same mind as herself. It’s to such a one she’ll turn to say how she feels and to complain if she’s displeased with her Superioress or her Sisters. And the other, who is already ill-disposed, will say to her, ‘Quoi! is it possible that you’ve been treated like that, Sister! How can anyone expect you to put up with that! It’s better to leave than always to be that uncomfortable. We could save ourselves elsewhere, and we’re damning ourselves here.’ That’s what the Sister in whom she confides will say to her; no need to worry that she’ll tell her troubles to her Superioress or to other Sisters she knows to be virtuous; she’ll make sure not to do that. You’ll never see a Sister who’s wearied with her vocation turn to a devoted and steadfast companion; they wouldn’t agree with her.

“A Sister who puts up with all her troubles without complaining or mentioning them to others, unless to her Superioress, and continues to do her duty, although she has no taste for it and is tempted by the devil, such a Sister is faithful. Fidelity consists in this: doing what God commands and in the way He commands, not telling your troubles either to your Sisters or to outsiders, for you mustn’t do that. So, Sisters, as long as you observe the Rules of the Motherhouse, rest assured that you’re faithful. Sisters who act otherwise than what is laid down in the Rule, and what the Superioress

7Fr. Portail.
tells them, are not faithful; they're in the Company in body only; the spirit isn't there. It's not enough, then, to do good; you must also do it in the way prescribed. And how happy will be those who persevere to the end in this fidelity!

"Those poor Sisters in Poland have great need of this fidelity and of reflecting that it's God who has called them. There they are, in a foreign country, by the guidance of Providence. What is God's plan, Sisters, if not that they might become apostles of Poland? And what graces has not God bestowed on those Sisters, whom He has destined for the service of the poor people of an entire kingdom? You're about to see.

"He gave one of them the strength to resist a temptation she had, and He did so because she was faithful. A proposal was made to her to remain with the Queen, who wanted to place her in a ministry that wouldn't take her away from the service of poor persons, but would keep her nearer Her Majesty than the works Sisters ordinarily do. And it was God's Will, in these circumstances, to give a Daughter of Charity the grace to refuse the Queen. Do you know how? By her tears, Sisters, by her tears. When the Queen saw her crying, she said, 'Eh quoi! Sister, don't you want to serve me!' 'Forgive me, Madame,' she said, 'but we have given ourselves to the poor,' showing by these few words that she loved nothing as much as the poverty of a Daughter of Charity, and by that this Sister showed that she understood clearly the grandeur of the service of the poor. What a grace God has given all of them to have witnessed this example, Sisters, and which He still gives them every day! I know more about this than you could imagine. Well now, blessed be God!

"Let's go on to the third point, which concerns the means of acquiring and of always preserving the fidelity we owe to God. As Mademoiselle has stated, we must, first of all, ask God often for this grace and be grateful for His favors. In speaking of this fidelity, Job says that we're under an obligation to God because He has made us rational creatures. Not only that, but He preserves us every moment in the state of existence He's given us. And you can say, Sisters, 'It's God who made me and who, at every moment, preserves me. He could have made me an animal, a demented person, or someone
with another disability, yet in His goodness He made me as I am, ca-
capable of meriting the possession of Him one day in paradise, which I hope to do with His grace. It was for that reason that, when I least thought of it, He came to seek me out and draw me to himself to be His spouse and to serve Him in the Company of the Daughters of Charity.'

"Furthermore, God died for us, and by His death He has given us His Blood, which He shed for love of us, and His glory, which He has promised us in eternity. Ah! Sisters, if there were no other reason than the thought that 'God died for us,' that would suffice to induce us to be faithful to Him. But even more, God goes on preparing crowns for us every day; yes, dear Sisters, there are crowns awaiting us.

"The second means is to do the opposite of Sisters who corrupt one another by their conversations and are so cowardly as to give in to their temptations. For what does a Sister do who fails to persevere? I've already said something about that. As soon as the temptation arises, she listens to it and reasons with it, thinking, 'Maybe I'd be better off in a certain religious Order or working as a servant; my mind would be more at rest.' She turns over these ideas in her mind, and afterward, if she knows a Sister who is ill-disposed and of the same mind as she is, she goes to tell her the reason for her discontent. The other will say, 'You're right, Sister. Quoi! you, to do such a thing! There's no way we can remain in such a state forever; we'd do better to go elsewhere, join some religious Order or get married; perhaps we'd save ourselves better there than by staying here with our minds always in a state of distraction. Marriage is holy; the Blessed Virgin was married; what harm would we be doing?' If the thought of marriage shocks her and the idea of a religious Order returns, she'll go find a religious she knows and say to him, 'Father, I'm a Daughter of Charity; I've been upset for some time now; I'm constantly mistreated; I can't stand it any longer; please advise me as to whether I can't leave and enter a religious Order.' That priest, who doesn't know you, nor what your vocation is, nor the good you do by serving in the Company the members of Jesus Christ, will ask you, 'Have you made a perpetual vow?' When you answer, 'No,'
he’ll continue: ‘Then go, Sister, you can do it because you’ve made no vow that might hold you back. Since you’ve suffered so long and this anxiety isn’t going away, then leave.’ That’s the advice he’ll give you; how could you expect anything else? He knows the Company only from what you’ve told him—which is inaccurate—and can talk to you only in accordance with his own spirit, which is that of a member of a religious Order, but this spirit isn’t suitable for you, however good it may be for those who have been called to it by God.

“So, remember what I’ve already told you on many occasions, Sisters: don’t take any advice from your confessors with regard to your conduct; you have to tell them your sins, not get spiritual direction from them. A layman who goes to confession is satisfied with telling his sins to the priest and nothing more. Do you think he asks for advice about his business? Oh no! that isn’t done. If he needs advice, he gets it from persons who understand business matters and not from his confessor.

“So, what is to be done when you have temptations, Sisters? Oh yes! you must have recourse to your Superiors at once. They are the ones to whom God gives the gift of advising you. Tell your sins to your confessors, but reveal your temptations to Mademoiselle, M. Portail, or myself; and state things as they are; make no excuses. You often see what is done to cure bodily ailments; nothing is concealed; the patient tells the physician everything to get some relief; he’s not satisfied with saying that he doesn’t feel well, but goes into detail: ‘Monsieur, I have a pain here and a pain there; and this still hurts me.’

‘Act in a similar way for your spiritual ailments, and you’ll get some relief. Listen to the advice given you as coming from God; and if your temptation recurs, again make known your troubles to the Director at the Motherhouse or to the Directress. Perhaps God will allow them to give you some advice that will console you; or, should He leave you with the temptation, it’s doubtless because He wants you to be tempted for your greater good. Be consoled, dear Sisters; I hope that as long as you act in this way you’ll remain faithful to God and pleasing to Our Lord.’
"Since, to receive the influences of the head, the members have to remain united to the body, likewise, dear Sisters, as long as you are united to your head, you'll share in the influences God communicates to the whole body; but if you go elsewhere you'll make yourselves unworthy of this benefit. If my arm were amputated, it would no longer share the influences of my body; thus, a Sister separated from the body of the Company no longer shares in what it does. As long as you remain united to your head, dear Sisters, you'll be faithful to your vocation, but if you go elsewhere, turning to some religious, you won't have the life of your spirit. Be consoled, then, dear Sisters, and be faithful in following your heads, who are your Superiors, and rest assured that you will have the crown. That's what I wish for all of you.

"And while I'm preparing to give you the blessing and am asking God to grant you and me, a wretched sinner, the grace to be faithful to Him, call to mind all the acts you've made while we were talking. I thank Him for having called you to be Daughters of Charity; in the name of Mademoiselle, M. Portail, and myself, I thank Him that we've been called to serve you. And while I pronounce the words of blessing, humble yourselves before God, and ask Him for the grace to make good use of all that we've just said. *Benedictio Dei Patris...*"

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55. - THE PRACTICE OF ASKING PERMISSION

July 27, 1653

"Dear Sisters, the subject of the present conference is divided into three points: first, the advantage of doing nothing without the permission of Superiors; second, the great troubles that will come to Daughters of Charity when they fail to ask permission; third, the principal faults that may be committed against this practice of doing nothing without permission; and fourth, the means to be taken to

*Conference 55. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Mathurine Guérin.*
observe this practice well, or to maintain ourselves in it when we have already begun it.

"This is one of the most important topics we’ve treated with you, dear Sisters. May the Savior of our souls grant you the grace to enter into these practices and to live in conformity with what you’re about to hear!

"Tell me, Sister, what advantage does a Daughter of Charity and the whole Company derive from the practice of doing nothing without the permission of its Superiors?"

"Father, I’m not smart enough to understand that, but it seemed to me that a Sister who is obedient must be assured of persevering in her vocation. And as the Son of God was obedient all His life until death, we must consider it a great honor to imitate Him in that. Furthermore, without obedience all we have is worry and unrest."

"Sister, there’s a difference between obedience and the subject now before us; we’re dealing with the question of doing nothing without permission. It’s up to you to ask permission. Obedience presupposes a command; it consists in doing what has been ordered; it begins with the person who gives the command, but the practice we’re now discussing begins with the person who asks the permission. You’ve stated very well, Sister, that an obedient Daughter will persevere in her vocation, for there’s no reason to hope that a Sister from the Charity can persevere without obedience. Here it’s a question of giving the reasons why a Daughter of Charity should always ask permission of her Superiors.

"You, Sister, what have you to say about it?"

"Father, obedience will bring us great peace of mind because, when we’ve asked permission, we know that it’s God’s Will that we do such or such a thing."

"God bless you, Sister! Note that, Sisters, remember it well. Sister has said that to do nothing without obedience is to do the Will of God, and she added that this practice always makes us happy. No one in the world is as happy as those who live under obedience, and I see only remorse of conscience in those who fail in obedience. So, there are two things that submission brings us: great peace of mind and the grace to do God’s Will. Now, you see, dear Sisters, to do the
Will of God is to begin our paradise in this world. Give me a person, give me a Sister, who does God’s Will all her life; she begins her paradise here on earth, for she has no other will than the Will of God, and that is sharing in the happiness of the blessed.

“What advantages come from obedience, Sister?”

“I couldn’t add anything to what our Sisters have already said, Father; but it also seems to me that this gives great consolation to Superiors.”

“Well, Sister! so you think it’s a great satisfaction for Superiors to see that their subjects are obedient?”

“Yes, Father, I see that both Superiors and subjects receive great consolation from it.”

“Do you want to live like that, Sister, and does it seem to you that it would be a great benefit to see the entire Company observe this practice—which I think it does, by the grace of God?”

“Yes, Father, that gives great consolation.”

“Ah yes, Sisters! One of my greatest consolations is to know that the Company does nothing without permission, and that’s the reward God gives—if He gives any in this world—to Superiors. I’ve had this reward sometimes. I shouldn’t speak about myself, poor sinner and wretched man that I am. I was once a country Pastor\(^1\) (a pretty miserable Pastor!). I had such good people, who were so obedient in doing what I asked of them that, when I told them they should come to confession on the first Sunday of the month, they didn’t fail to do it. They came to confession, and I saw from day to day the progress these souls were making. That gave me so much consolation, and I was so pleased with it, that I used to say to myself, ‘Mon Dieu! how happy you are to have such good people!’ And I would add, ‘I don’t think the Pope himself is as happy as a Pastor in the midst of such good-hearted people.’ And one day Cardinal de Retz\(^2\) asked me, ‘Eh bien! Monsieur, how are you?’ I said to him, ‘Your Eminence, I can’t tell you how happy I am.’ ‘Why?’ he asked. ‘Because I have such good people, so obedient to all that I tell them that it seems to me that neither the Holy Father nor you,

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\(^1\)In Clichy, in the environs of Paris.

\(^2\)Henri de Gondi, Bishop of Paris (1598-1622) and the first Cardinal de Retz.
Eminence, are as happy as I am.' Yes, Sisters, when a man sees his flock advancing in the way of obedience, he's wonderfully consoled.

"Sister," said M. Vincent, "what advantages come from obedience?"

"It seems to me, Father, that the virtue of obedience is never alone, for as a rule it's accompanied by many other virtues, especially humility, the love of God, and many others."

"That's well stated, Sister; obedience is never alone, for along with it you'll find the fear of God, love of the neighbor and of our vocation, and all the other virtues. Don't you see, on the contrary, the truth of this, dear Sisters? Give me a Sister who isn't obedient. Observe her closely. You'll find that she's wanting in everything and has no virtue—no love of God, since this love isn't strong enough to make her ask permission for what has to be done. Lastly, as our Sister has said, being obedient is an important sign, and a very clear one, of great virtue. On the other hand, disobedience is the sign of a lack of virtue.

"Sister, would a layperson be scandalized if he asked a Sister to go to a particular place, to do a certain thing for him, and she replied, 'I'd really like to do it, Monsieur, but I can't do it without permission'? And if someone gave you some linen, a prayer book, or such-like things, do you think he'd be offended if you didn't accept it without permission?"

"No, Father, on the contrary, it would give him good example."

"And if someone were to give you some shoes, a rosary, or something else, do you think you should accept them?"

"No, I don't, Father."

"If you were urged to accept, you should say, 'Monsieur, I don't take anything without permission.' Do you think that would disedify him? On the contrary, people would be filled with admiration to see poor Sisters living like that because there's something divine in it. Believe me, dear Sisters, if anything keeps the Company together, it's the fact that our dear Sisters who are in heaven were faithful to this practice. If a Sister says, 'I don't always need to ask
permission when I accept this or that; it’s only a trifle; do you think she’s doing the Will of God and can persevere in her vocation?"

“No, Father, on the contrary, that’s a great way to lose it.”

“Right you are, Sister. The Company is like the sea, which can’t retain a dead body; it has to cast it up because it can’t tolerate corruption. If, in a Company, someone wants to live her own life, that is, to follow her own will, she’s dead and the Company can’t tolerate her; God and the angel of the Company cast her out; that’s the touchstone.

“Do you agree with that? If a Sister receives and reads a letter without giving it to her Superioress, or sends one without permission, do you think she’s content?”

“No, Father.”

“Oh! certainly not, Sisters! And you, Sister, do you think laypersons are scandalized if they see a Daughter of Charity who is unwilling to accept or do anything without permission of her Superiors?”

“No, Father; on the contrary, they’re edified by it.”

“Sisters, is that the way you see it?” All the Sisters stood up and answered, “Yes, Father.”

“If you do, are you willing that we give ourselves to God, both you and I, to do nothing without the permission of our Superiors? And don’t you acknowledge that Sisters who are unwilling to do anything without permission give good example to the whole Company and greatly console their Superiors?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Don’t you want to act in that way?”

“Yes, Father.”

“God bless you, Sisters!

“So those are two of our points. We still have to consider the faults a person can commit against this practice. Sister, what are the principal faults we can commit against this practice?”

“It seems to me, as our Sisters have said, Father, that we can fail in everything.”

“You see, Sisters, there are some things for which you don’t need to ask permission; these are the ones prescribed by the Rules;
for everything else you should ask permission because the Rule itself forbids you to do anything without permission. Everything you do to carry out your Rules is done with permission, whether you rise in the morning or go to your meals or the examination of conscience. God calls you there, and when you go you’re acting through obedience. For example, take the bell that rings and says to you, ‘Get up, Sisters.’ By that, God’s Will is made known to you. The Sisters who rise are doing God’s Will, but the ones who stay in bed, even though the Rule is calling them, must have permission. If they foresee on the previous evening that they need to rest, they must ask Mademoiselle’s permission; and in that way they obey by staying in bed. The Sisters in the parishes have to go to the Sister Servant and say, ‘Sister, may I please stay in bed a little longer?’ If it’s the Sister Servant, she’ll say to her companion, ‘Sister, I think I need to rest,’ and the Sister will reply, ‘All right, Sister.’

“Tell me, Sister, does a Sister who needs to eat something outside of mealtime and does so without permission go against God’s Will?”

“Yes, she does, Father. The Sister who was on mission with me used to say it was a sin against the virtue of temperance; when she thought I needed something, she encouraged me to eat, but she herself, in similar circumstances, was unwilling to take anything.”

“That’s really beautiful. What a good Sister Servant! But, Sister, are you obeying when you eat something after asking permission?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Does a Sister do wrong if, in order to give herself greater freedom to talk, won’t go to the first sitting for meals? For you’re all supposed to be there except the Officers, who can’t be present because of their duties.”

“Yes, Father, she disobeys the Rule; and the freedom she wants to take is an additional wrong.”

“But, Sister, if, for some reason she doesn’t go, after having asked the permission, does she do the Will of God?”

“Yes, she does, Father.”

“So then, according to our Sister, three things may be done contrary to the Rule: not to rise at the sound of the bell, to eat outside of
mealtimes, and to be unwilling to go to the first sitting for meals. Well now, Sister, I ask you, would a Sister who wanted to buy something, such as a prayer book, a rosary, and the like, without permission, be acting contrary to the Rule?"

"Yes, Father."

"And if someone gave her a present, should she accept it without permission?"

"No, Father."

"Could she do so with permission?"

"Yes, Father. One time I accepted without permission a book from a good Pastor, who gave it to me. However, I did tell my Sister. I won't do it again, Father."

"No, Sister, don't do it again. Think how much you would have edified that good Pastor if you had declined to accept his book and told him you had to have permission. Anyone who saw you acting like that would be converted if she were bad, and reach the sixth degree of virtue if she had reached five already.

"Sister, would it be wrong to give away your money, if you had any?"

"Yes, it would, Father."

"And you, Sister, is it a fault to receive or to give away money from a relative or acquaintance?"

"Yes, Father."

"Oh yes, Sisters! for poverty dictates that we shouldn't have anything contrary to the Rule."

The Sister who had spoken previously stood up and said, "Father, when I was in the country, people sometimes used to give us grain."

"But, did you need it, Sister?"

"Yes, Father, we didn't have any."

"In that case, Sister, you acted correctly; but if you had some, you'd have done wrong by taking it."

"Father, when one of the Ladies comes back from a journey, she may say, 'Sister, here's a rosary I've brought you; please accept it.' Since she's not poor but a lady, would it be wrong to take it?"
"Yes, it would, Sister; you mustn’t take it, and don’t be afraid of offending her; on the contrary, people will have a high opinion of you because they trust you; they give you money to be distributed to the poor. These Ladies will have greater confidence in you; they’ll say, ‘How could these Sisters take something from the poor, since they’re unwilling to accept anything without permission.’

"And you, Sister, does a Sister who receives and opens letters without the permission of her Superiors act contrary to obedience?"

"Yes, she does, Monsieur."

"So, it’s wrong to write or to receive letters without showing them?"

"I think so, Father."

"Give yourselves to God for that, for it’s the gate of perdition for Daughters of Charity, especially because, if you don’t show your letters, that’s a sign they contain some complaint or something you don’t want to be seen; consequently, something that’s not good. O Sauveur! how many men I have in our house who have kept letters for two or three days rather than open them!

"Sister, is it right to pay a visit, now to one relation, now to another, and to ask them to pay you a return visit?"

"No, it isn’t, Father."

"I don’t think that ever happens here, Sisters. If it did, you’d be despised by the persons you might visit in that way.

"And you, Sister, does a Sister who buys dainty shoes, or has someone make her a quilted bodice, or buys gloves, and lets her hair show, act in conformity with obedience?"

"No, Father."

"Those Sisters who would like to have dainty shoes or a quilted bodice already have one foot out of the Company, Sisters. Don’t desire to have anything the others don’t have; for, if you have something that’s not in common usage in the Motherhouse, you make yourselves conspicuous.

"And you, Sister, if a Sister learns to read or write or to do blood-letting without permission, is she going against God’s Will?"

"Yes, Father, she is."
“Yes, Sister, she’s acting contrary to the Will of God, who doesn’t want a Sister to take it upon herself to do anything whatsoever contrary to obedience, but rather to act in conformity with what she is told to do.

“You see, dear Sisters, you can’t all be alike; some are suitable for nursing the sick, others for schools. It’s up to Superiors to decide what you’re suited for. All of you aren’t qualified to let blood, for there are some whose hands are too clumsy. Everyone’s fingers aren’t the same, so you can’t all do the same thing.

“It’s said in Saint Paul, ‘Some prophesy, others are Apostles or evangelize,’ \(^3\) and God is pleased to see this variety both in spiritual and in temporal things. So, Sisters, be satisfied with your ministries, and may no one take on anything except by obedience. If a Sister who is apt for teaching wanted to learn how to let blood, perhaps she wouldn’t be suitable for that and might spoil everything. Please God that, for having let blood without knowing how, you haven’t harmed anyone, caused any serious accidents, or killed someone!

“Does a Sister who would like to change her confessor, perform acts of mortification and penance, or recite the Office of the Blessed Virgin sin against obedience?”

“Yes she does, Father, for she’s ruining herself.”

“Don’t do it, Sisters! Nothing should be done without the permission of the confessor who will be sent here or of Mademoiselle. God bless you!

“Sister, suppose a Sister requests something of Superiors but doesn’t get it. She goes away angry and says to herself, ‘I’ll never ask for anything again; I’ve been refused; I don’t intend to ask for anything again.’ What sort of spirit animates her, Sister?”

“The spirit of pride.”

“You’re quite right: the spirit of arrogance. Such a diabolical word, the daughter of pride, should never be spoken. God grant that it may never be heard among you! If your request is refused, it’s because it’s not good for you, or it’s to test you. That’s why you must

\(^3\)Cf. Eph 4:11. (NAB)
continue to ask. How do you know whether you’ll be given permission tomorrow for what you’ve been refused today?

“Should you go to Holy Communion without permission?” No, you mustn’t do that. May you forego it on your own? You mustn’t do that either. What should you do to request that and to get permission to take the discipline? I certainly approve of all of you having a discipline, but I also approve of your not using it without permission.

“But you may say to me, ‘Monsieur, you’re telling us many things about this—many, many things; but won’t our Superiors be weary of our asking permission for so many things?’ No, Sisters, you’ll never weary your Superiors; on the contrary, they’ll be greatly consoled to see a Sister who does nothing without permission. As for your Rules, you have permission to follow them, and there’s no need to ask permission for what is contained in them; but you do have to ask for anything else. When Sisters in a parish hear that a sermon is being preached in some place of devotion, they may not go there without permission from the Sister Servant. The Sister Servant herself must ask her Sister’s permission. For matters of greater importance, the parish Sisters must come to ask Mademoiselle’s permission, and Sisters in the rural areas must write for it.

“You’ll say to me, ‘Supposing I ask a general permission for all the necessary things, Monsieur?’ You have to be very careful not to do that, and we have to take care not to grant it, because you wouldn’t have the merit that’s found in asking for each permission individually.

“I also have to tell you that some Sisters worm out permissions. These are the small-minded people who are perturbed and anxious if no attention is paid to them. It’s wrong to force a permission. Always ask with indifference, and never insist if you see that it’s difficult to grant it to you. Say to yourselves, ‘If I’m granted it, fine; but if I’m refused, perhaps it will be to humble me.’ God said to Moses, ‘It’s true that you gave them permission, but it was because of the

*As noted previously, present-day practice in the Church differs from what Saint Vincent says here about Communion (cf. Conf. 35, n. 2).*
hardness of their hearts." In the same way, a Sister is sometimes given permission when it's clear that she's incapable of being guided by the voice of reason.

"You'll ask me, 'Can't a confessor in the parish where I live give me permission to perform some act of penance?' No, he can't. His jurisdiction doesn't extend to that; he has power only to hear your confession; as for Communion, he can give you permission to receive it or he can forbid you to do so.

"Well now, what will we do to practice this well, dear Sisters? If you ever had an important conference, it's this one. I'm well aware that most of you observe this practice, but I ask all of you to do so; if you do, you will all be carrying out God's Will on earth as the angels do it in heaven, and you'll enjoy unimaginable peace and tranquility of mind. The senior Sisters especially should give the example in this; for, if they allow themselves to act without permission, the younger ones will imitate them, thinking that there's no harm in it. If, on the contrary, they're faithful to asking permission, they'll edify the younger ones and their neighbor and will experience great consolation, instead of the strange, inconceivable distress they'd have of failing in this and giving disedification.

"Supposing that's the case, the first means to be taken is to reflect often, 'I'm beginning a happy life, which I'll continue in heaven.' As a second means, get in the habit of mortifying yourselves. You mortify yourselves by not doing your own will, which might want to go sometimes here, sometimes there. You have to overcome such inclinations and be firmly attached to obedience. In the third place, ask God constantly for this grace. There's nothing easier than to ask permission for what you want to do. Politeness alone demands that.

"Well now, mon Sauveur! these are more or less the means you must take to ground yourselves solidly in this practice, dear Sisters. I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to let you see and know that this is one of the most important conferences we've ever had. I ask His Divine Goodness to establish us firmly in this practice, as He did for our

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Cf. Mt 19:7-8. (NAB)
dear Sisters who are now in the state of the blessed. Let's endeavor to imitate them, particularly in this practice, by which the whole Company will be very edified.

"O Savior of our souls, You who have listened to what has been said and who were yourself so obedient as to prefer death to disobedience, may it please Your Divine Goodness, by the obedience of which You gave us the example when You were on earth, to grant us the obedience we need in order not to do anything contrary to the glory of God! And because we need His grace, dear Sisters, I ask you to offer God your next Communion to obtain from Him the grace never to do anything contrary to this practice. In this way you'll have no reason to envy the Carmelites, because you'll be as happy as they are and will give as much honor to God in the state to which you've been called as they do in theirs.

"Mademoiselle, would you please tell us your thoughts?"

"Father, I have nothing to add to what Your Charity has said, except that I've always observed that all this is very true and that all those who have left the Company did so because of no other reason than an attachment to their own will and to all those characteristics."

"So, you're saying, Mademoiselle, that Sisters who have left the Company and lost their vocation did so because they followed their own will and didn't do what we just mentioned. You speak volumes in those few words. Remember well what Mademoiselle has just said, Sisters; it's very important; and don't act like those who have left, but enter into this practice of obedience with the assurance that it's the work of salvation that will lead you into the eternal sanctuaries. Please be very devoted to saying these words frequently, Fiat voluntas tua," during prayer, when you hear the word of God, as a testimony that you're subject to His Will in all things."

Then Most Honored Father knelt down and added, "Dear Sisters, this is the prayer I am addressing to Our Lord, and I ask Him once again that, as I am pronouncing the words of blessing, He may make us capable of doing His holy Will—both you and me, a miser-

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6"Your will be done."
able sinner, who have never done anything but my own will—and that He may pour into your hearts the grace of never doing anything without permission either of the Rule or of Superiors. I ask Him for this with all my heart. *Benedictio Dei Patris.* . . ."

56. - TO THE SISTERS WHO WERE SENT TO NANTES

November 12, 1653

On Wednesday, November 12, 1653, the three Sisters mentioned earlier left Paris for Nantes, and this is the exhortation given them by Most Honored Father.

"Dear Sisters, God has chosen you to go to the Nantes Hospital, and you must give yourselves entirely to Our Lord, since He has chosen you from among all the others. You have three reasons for giving yourselves to God to carry out well your ministry there.

"The first reason, dear Sisters, is the general reason that obliges each and every one of us to renounce ourselves to do the Will of Our Lord with the result that we'll never do our own.

"The second is that you’re going to a large hospital, where there’s more work to be done than in some other place. It’s not like being in a parish in Paris, where you have to care for only a small number of patients, nor like country places, where you have only to visit and instruct the poor. Things are quite different there, and that’s why you must give yourselves to God so that He will grant you the graces you need.

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1Marie-Marthe Trumeau, a native of Poissy (Yvelines), had been sent to Angers in March 1640; she returned to Paris in June 1647 after becoming seriously ill in Angers. In 1648 she was serving the poor in Saint-Paul parish. In 1653 she was named Sister Servant in Nantes, where she remained for two years (cf. V,43, n. 6). She was sent to La Fère on July 31, 1656, and from there to Cahors in September 1658.

Of the other two Sisters little is known. Anne de Vaux, born in Ardivilliers in 1629, entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity in December 1651. As mentioned here, she went to Nantes; in 1672 she was at the Motherhouse. Madeleine Micquel was in Nantes (1653-60).
“The third reason I felt necessary to mention, dear Sisters, is that, by the instigation of the evil spirit, there is division in that hospital. Yes, Sisters, the devil has been powerful enough to use his wiles to sow discord among our Sisters, and you will remedy this by the union and harmony that will exist among you. Don’t be surprised that the devil has caused this bitter battle, for he usually aims his resentment especially at God’s servants, both men and women; he attacks the holiest Companies with the hatred he bears them. He doesn’t worry much about certain individuals, because they’re already his, but the houses consecrated to the service of God and united by the bond of charity, Sisters, that’s where he sows discord. So, Sisters, you are going to remedy the disorders this evil spirit has caused in this hospital.

“And what will you do to achieve this? Sisters, it’s essential for you to know that the higher the state of a person, the greater virtue she must show. The title of Daughter of Charity that you bear obliges you to the highest perfection to which a person can aspire; therefore, people expect it of you. Moreover, you’ve been chosen to go to the assistance of persons who have been wounded. You know that when people go to war they take up arms; they fight one another; some are killed, others wounded; some are conquerors, the others conquered. Our poor Sisters have been wounded in the war our enemy has waged against them. Don’t despise them on that account. They’re very virtuous, but this divisive enemy has waged a cruel battle against them with the permission of God, who has willed to give us good reason to humble ourselves by showing us that no one is exempt, and to teach us that He doesn’t always send afflictions as a punishment, but to test His servants. One day the devil threatened Saint Francis: ‘Your religious,’ he said to him, ‘are at peace just now; but a day will come when I’ll test them properly, and that will be when persons of rank enter the Order.’ And that’s what he did, Sisters. So, don’t be surprised if the demon has attacked our Sisters, since he certainly dared to do the same in Our Lord’s own company.

“I had to warn you about these things, dear Sisters, so that you might arm yourselves with the virtues needed to bring down this en-
emy and this spirit of division. Those who go to war carry weapons. Your weapons are humility, gentleness, and condescension. When you have these virtues, you'll be armed from head to toe, prepared to do battle with the enemy. Condescension is a powerful means of preserving union among persons who have given themselves to God; all of you must have this virtue, dear Sisters, and renounce your own will as often as your Sisters hold opinions different from yours; for a Daughter of Charity must be ready to do or not to do whatever the Sister Servant orders or forbids her to do. I say the Sister Servant, because you should pay no heed to what another Sister says, when her advice tends to the contrary. For, if people were willing to listen to everyone, they'd do nothing worthwhile. Do what the Sister Servant says and never what Jacquette, Marie, or anyone else may say, once the Sister Servant has given an order. That's the true means of being united, as true servants of God must be. Otherwise, everything is in a state of disorder. One has one opinion; another has another. Not that we should spurn the advice of our Sisters; oh no! but those who give it must be indifferent as to whether their advice is followed or not.

"The Bishop of Geneva used to say, 'I prefer to do the will of others than to make someone else comply with mine; and I'd rather adapt my will to that of a hundred persons than to force that of a single person to agree with mine.' See how well this blessed man teaches us the practice of condescension, Sisters, and how necessary it is among you. A great saint used to say that to attain perfection we must lay aside our own will and that nothing else is needed to reach perfection. These are the arms with which we send you off, dear Sisters, to vindicate our Sisters by the good example you'll give. Everyone expects that of you, and the fragrance emanating from those beautiful virtues will have as a result that you will not bear the name of Daughters of Charity in vain.

"You'll be dealing with the Fathers of the Poor there, and in general with all those who have any responsibility concerning the poor. You'll pay them all possible honor and respect. A few priests

\*\*Title used for the Administrators of the hospital in Nantes.
are in residence at the hospital. It’s a little difficult to tell you how to act toward them because they may want to have different food than the Fathers of the Poor allow. They’re complaining that the Sisters don’t feed them as they desire. That’s a little awkward, Sisters, and is the source of part of the trouble and disorder. But, no matter what is said to you, and even though the priests may want to have different and better food than the Fathers of the Poor allow, don’t give in, stand fast and do nothing contrary to the orders of Superiors. Try to condescend to those boarders and to satisfy them verbally as best you can. If the Fathers of the Poor say to you, ‘Such a thing must be done,’ and the priests want you to do otherwise, you should do what the Fathers wish.

“There’s also the Bishop of Nantes. He is saying that you’re nuns because someone told him that you make vows. If he speaks to you about them, tell him you’re not nuns. Sister Jeanne, who is the Sister Servant, said to him, ‘Excellency, the vows we take don’t make us nuns, because they’re simple vows that may be taken anywhere, even in the world.’

“As a matter of fact, people can’t say that the Daughters of Charity are nuns, because they couldn’t be Daughters of Charity if they were, since a person must be cloistered in order to be a nun. The Daughters of Charity can never be nuns, and woe betide anyone who speaks of making them nuns!

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“So go then, dear Sisters; work hard for Our Lord, hold our dear Sisters in high regard and respect them, and be very careful not to have a poor opinion of any of them. In a word, let it be evident that you have the true spirit that God wants you to have. *Benedictio Dei Patris*. . . .”

57. HOW TO ACT WHEN AWAY FROM THE MOTHERHOUSE

January 1, 1654

“Dear Sisters, the subject of this conference is divided into three points. The first deals with the reasons why Daughters of Charity should know clearly how to act when they’re outside the Motherhouse, both with regard to those under whom they work and with one another, in hospitals as well as in the villages and in the parishes of Paris; the second point concerns the faults Daughters of Charity may commit in ministries outside the house; and the third concerns the means they can use to act as true Daughters of Charity, when they’re engaged in the service of poor persons in hospitals, as well as in the villages and the parishes of Paris.

“Ultimately, dear Sisters, and in a word, we’re talking about how Daughters of Charity should act outside the Motherhouse, at the Foundling Hospital, at the Nom-de-Jésus,1 with the galley con-

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1The Nom-de-Jésus [Name of Jesus] Hospice, whose foundation was made by an anonymous rich merchant of Paris. Saint Vincent accepted the work on condition that the Superior General of the Priests of the Mission, together with the laymen from Paris whom he would employ, would have the spiritual and temporal direction of the hospital, with authority to admit and discharge poor persons. The contract was accepted on October 29, 1653, approved by the Vicars-General on March 15, 1654, and ratified in the Parlement by letters patent in November. (Cf. Arch. Nat., M53.) The work was already in operation in March 1653. Twenty male and twenty female artisans, because of old age or infirmity, could no longer earn their living, were provided with looms and tools to occupy their time. Men and women were housed in separate wings; although they came together in the same chapel for Mass, they were not permitted to see or speak to one another. The Daughters of Charity served them and a Priest of the Mission acted as chaplain. Saint Vincent often used to go to visit and instruct them. (Cf. XIIIa, 173-79, and Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. XLV, pp. 211-13.) The Nom-de-Jésus later became the municipal health center (1802-16); the site is now occupied by the offices of the Gare de l’Est.
victors, etc. To tell the truth, this is a very broad topic. It's impossible
to touch on everything, for it would be necessary to say how you
should act with parish priests, the Ladies, and other persons with
whom you minister. Today we'll talk in a general manner about a
few of the more important points.

"Sister, is it important to know clearly how to act when outside
the Motherhouse?"

"Yes, Father, for if we don't, serious disorders may arise; we
might say and do things quite contrary to the spirit of the Company.
It may also happen that, through our own fault, because of igno-
rance of our obligations, poor persons may not be provided with all
that they need."

"And you, Sister, what did you think on the subject of this con-
ference?"

"Father, we can't have the spirit of the Company or perform our
actions in conformity with it, if we don't know what it is."

"Now, Sister, it's your turn to tell us your thoughts."

"Father, it seems to me that, in order to fulfill our obligations, we
have to be very careful to recall the instructions we're given at the
Motherhouse and be exact in observing them; if we fail in this, I
think we are offending God."

M. Vincent asked another Sister if it's necessary to know how to
act at the Foundling Hospital, the Nom-de-Jésus, and other places.
"Yes, Father," she replied, "because we can't have the spirit of the
Company if we don't know what our Rules teach us; and in order to
keep them we must follow exactly the advice our Superiors give
us."

"God bless you, Sister! You see, Sisters, I'm sure everyone
knows how important it is for a Sister to be well informed about
what she must do when she is sent somewhere. The Ladies expect it;
they're relieved when they see a Sister well instructed in every-
thing; poor persons also are happy about this, better taught, and
better served. That's why you have to be so careful, Sisters, because
it's very important for each and every one of you here to be well in-
formed of everything you're obliged to know, and for you to take
great care to remember all that you'll be told. And because you
can't stay here very long, you have to be more attentive to what is
told you during the short time you're here.

"At Sainte-Marie the Sisters spend seven years in the novitiate,
even though they may be faultless, in order to be well instructed
about what God is asking of them. But you are like ripe fruit be-
cause you don't have the time you need to be instructed. How is it
then that, with so little experience, you do so much good, unless it's
because God's grace is so great, the Company is just starting and,
consequently, has—and should have—much greater fervor than at
another time? You'll do incomparably more now than fifty years
from now because grace is given abundantly in beginnings. In the
early Church the fervor and charity of the first Christians were ad-
mirable; they had but one heart and one will; and with that fervor
they worked wonders, converted souls, and encouraged one an-
other to endure all kinds of torments, even martyrdom. That's the
fervor of beginners who want to serve God wholeheartedly.
They're strong and courageous in doing all that's pleasing to God.
When wine is put into a cask, it foams and bubbles and is so strong
that it would burst the barrel if air weren't introduced into it. In the
same way, at the beginning of the Company, with the abundant
grace found in it, you'll do more in three months than you would in
six years at another time.

"I'm going to talk to you about this, dear Sisters. I know quite
well that if I questioned you, you'd tell me some beautiful things,
but time is pressing us; therefore, I'll tell you succinctly what you
should do. One of the main things is to know your Rules well.
That's a general principle. Coming down to particulars, Sister Ser-
vants must take great care to know all that concerns their office; the
Sister here who is in charge of instructing you will take the time to
explain this to you; otherwise, you'll make some big mistakes. The
second means is to edify everyone and to be very cordial with one
another so that, even though you're not together, some being in the
rural areas, others in parishes, people will see that there's only one
heart among you. Let there be no division, but the same affection,

\(^2\)The Visitation Monastery.
the same esteem of virtue, the same horror of evil. You see, Sisters, you have to work especially at that; otherwise, you'd always be starting over and would never have any rest or peace among yourselves.

"Why is that? I'm going to tell you why. It's because we change every day, and our poor nature is never in the same state. Job says that man is never in the same state. He's like a wheel that's forever turning and never stops. You see from this how important it is for you to practice mortification while you're here in this house. You should have great regard for it in all your actions because of the inconstancy of our nature, which sometimes wants one thing and sometimes another; is mortified now and, in a moment, is immortified. We mustn't trust ourselves because we're constantly changing; that's why we need to reflect often on ourselves in order to make amends for the failings our corrupt nature causes us to commit. Just as a clock has to be wound every day to rectify any loss of time, we must always start over in practicing mortification of our passions because we always need to be working on ourselves from one minute to the next.

"Suppose you're with a Sister; no matter how fervent she is, the devil and nature will still tempt her, with the result that sometimes she'll seem to you to be in a bad mood. But don't think she's imperfect on that account, and don't have a poor opinion of her because that comes from the corrupt nature of our first father. Oh no! Sisters, don't allow an unkind thought to enter your head about such a Sister. Should it happen that you feel some aversion or disdain for her, squelch that thought at once and say to yourself, 'Wicked thought, against whom do you have it? Quoi! against your Sister, against the spouse of Jesus Christ, against the life of your life! I'll do the opposite of what this bad thought suggests, by going to embrace this Sister and being cordial to her. If I've said an unkind word to her, I'll ask her forgiveness, saying, "please forgive me, Sister; With God's grace, I hope I'll never do that again, and I ask you to bear with me."' Don't be surprised if that's repugnant to nature, on account of the pain there is in humbling ourselves and because the devil butts in, doing his utmost to dissuade us from doing it.
"Be very courageous, Sisters, and act like the children of Israel who were building the Lord's temple. In one hand, they held the stones, and in the other a sword to defend themselves against their enemies. So, you see, dear Sisters, you must do likewise because, at the same time we're working at the edifice of our perfection, the devil and nature are opposing it and waging a powerful war against us. You have to take up the sword of mortification, the discipline, fasting, and write to Superiors when you're living far away. If you do this, Sisters, what will happen? You'll live everywhere as in paradise, for you'll be in God, and you'll have paradise on earth. On the contrary, if you don't, you'll be living, if not in a hell, at least in a purgatory. So, Sisters, those are two means: the first is to have good knowledge of your Rules and the second is to have great forbearance with one another.

"The third means is to win the love of everyone by the example of your good life. The fine reputation you have has led to your being asked for in several places. And why is that? Because they've seen a little of the flower of your charity. I've received another letter from a Bishop, who is asking for you. If it's like this now, Sisters, what will it be when you have improved? O mon Dieu! let's humble ourselves profoundly for that, and if people want you so much now, while you're still imperfect, how much more will you be in demand when God has given you the grace to attain greater perfection!

"The fourth means is to give yourselves to God so as never to find fault with the overall administration of the Company or the particular guidance of the Sister Servant, but to act like a child who appreciates everything its father does and says. The son of a plowman thinks his father and mother are the most capable people nature can produce. If the Sister Servant does or says something that doesn't please us, don't think on that account that she's not doing a good job. It's not your place to criticize what she does; you have to believe that what she does is good; for you see, Sisters, there's a grace for that duty, and there's a special angel concerned with it. God gives sufficient graces to those He calls to it. Don't think that responsible positions are always given to the most capable or virtuous. You must believe that a Sister Servant has been given to you by
God, because entire nights are spent before God to see who will be placed in those duties. And if sometimes we change one Sister, sometimes another, dear Sisters, it’s to give practice to some in leadership and to others in obedience. So consider that it’s God who does things this way, for all order comes from Him, and whoever resists order resists God.

"‘But it seems to me that there’s a better way to do it.’ That’s what you think! And who are you? Is it for you to find fault with what your Superiors do, you who don’t have the grace of God for that? Rest assured that God will bless you, dear Sisters, if you use the means I’ve just given you.

“Another evil that may arise among you is attachment to confessors; that’s why change is necessary, for otherwise a certain spiritual friendship may spring up, which comes from the penitent’s esteem for the confessor and his esteem for the penitent, and both are pleased with this little reciprocal affection. It’s very difficult for a confessor, who sees his penitent making progress and benefiting from his advice, not to receive some satisfaction from it. But what happens? The confessor may say, ‘I’m really consoled at seeing the progress you’re making in virtue,’ and the Sister will reply, ‘Father, I haven’t found any confessor in whom I have such confidence. Your words put me so much at ease that I have no trouble following your advice.’ And those honeyed words shoot an arrow into the heart, causing a scandalous breach in it. As soon as they are spoken, all is lost. In the end a great commotion is created by such familiarities. Alas! dear Sisters, this happens only too often, even in religious Orders.

“So, tell your sins to the confessors and waste no time in conversation with them after confession. Don’t say to them, ‘I’ll see you and will tell you more about this in private, Monsieur.’

“If he goes to see you and asks you what you’re doing, cut the conversation short and show that you’re not pleased with that. If you find that it will be difficult for you to go to another confessor and that you continue to be troubled by this affection, you should be alarmed, Sisters, and let Mademoiselle, M. Portail, or myself know about it, stating quite simply how you feel: ‘Please change my con-
fessor, because I think I'm too attached to him.' If you're living far away, you must write; even if you're in Toulouse, where people are asking for you, you should write. The reason why you're changed is so you won't become attached to anything. When this isn't done, what happens? One Sister wants to go to one confessor and the other to another. They lose God's peace; they fall into the worst and most dangerous state of disunion that can occur. Do you know which fractures are the most difficult to heal, dear Sisters? Fractures at the joint. Now, the joint of the Daughters of Charity is the person who is supposed to unite them to one another and all of them to God, namely, their confessor. If they break this bond and want to change, if, following their own whims, one wants to go to this confessor and another to that one, there will be constant division, a complete break. When a Sister, to gratify herself, wants to have a man who charms her by his qualities and pleases her, what a source of great disorder she is, Sisters! That's why I ask that, whenever Mademoiselle sees this, she should change the Sister and, like Our Lord today, feast of the Circumcision, cut off and remove her.

"A fifth means to bind and unite you closely together is, dear Sisters, when you're in a parish or out in the country, not to take advice from anyone except those given you for that purpose. Mentioning your aversion for your Sisters or your Sister Servant, or telling your temptations to anyone but those appointed for that is never permitted. Oh no! you may never do that. No, dear Sisters, tell your troubles only to those to whom you should tell them.

"Wouldn't it be permissible to mention them to some kind Lady?" Be very much on your guard against that, Sisters, for, not having had the spirit of your Company, how can she give you the proper advice? What she'll tell you will be inappropriate. Never tell your troubles to the Ladies; if you do, even should you be as strong as Samson, one of two evils will occur: either you'll lose your vocation or you'll give scandal. This Lady will tell another—and don't be surprised at that, for if you yourselves were unable to keep your secret, how can you expect someone else to do so? That's the myrrh you can offer to God: mortify yourselves by telling your troubles only to those to whom you should tell them.
"But if you send me to Toulouse, to Poland, or to other distant places, how can we write? If we do, we’ll have to wait a long time for the reply. What shall I do then? Sisters, there will always be someone to advise you; we appoint someone for that purpose everywhere, but never consult anyone other than him.

"We still have to talk about how to behave in order to edify the neighbor, and about many other things; please God, we’ll discuss them at another time. May Our Lord grant us the grace to really put into practice all that we’ve just said!"

Mademoiselle knelt down and said, "Father, I very humbly entreat you, for the love of God, in the name of all our Sisters, to ask the Divine Goodness to pardon all our faults and the bad use we’ve made of the admonitions Your Charity has given us, and me especially, who should give good example to our Sisters by putting them into practice myself, for which I most humbly ask their pardon."

"Very well, Mademoiselle! Unworthy though I am, I ask Our Lord Jesus Christ to pardon our Sisters for the bad use they’ve made of the instructions they’ve received and for all their infidelities in the practice of these instructions. And because I’ve been very negligent about giving you the necessary reminders, or haven’t given them as I should have or in the spirit in which I ought, and because Mademoiselle perhaps feels guilty, we ask you, dear Sisters, to forgive both of us for the faults we’ve committed in your regard. I ask Our Lord in His mercy to forgive all of us in general and, at the same time I pronounce the words of blessing over you, to grant you the grace to enter fully into the practice of what has been said. Benedictio Dei Patris. . . ."

58. - SECRET PRIDE

March 15, 1654

"Dear Sisters, the subject of this conference is secret pride, not pride generally speaking, but secret pride. It’s divided into three

Conference 58. - Archives of the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity; notebook written by Sister Mathurine Guérin.
points. The first concerns the reasons we have for being on the alert against secret pride; second, the signs by which we can know if we have this secret pride in us; and third, the means of keeping it from entering our hearts, or of driving it out if it’s already there. Tell us, Sister, the reasons we have for knowing whether we have this secret pride in us.”

“One reason that obliges us to do this, Father, is that this pride is very displeasing to God; humility, on the contrary, is very pleasing to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave us an example of it himself throughout His life, and willed that His Mother should be the most humble of all creatures. It seemed to me that we have secret pride when we look down on others, have a better opinion of ourselves than of them, and are pleased that others have a good opinion of us.”

“Sister, even were there no other reason than the one you just mentioned, namely, that Our Lord came to combat this vice and to overthrow it by actions contrary to it, that’s a powerful motive to make us avoid it.

“Well now, Sister, did you think that Daughters of Charity can have secret pride?”

“Yes, Father, it seems to me that they can have a good opinion of themselves, murmur against the actions of others, ignore them, criticize what their neighbor is doing, and many other things.”

“You’re quite right, Sister. And yet vainglory shouldn’t have any place among you because pride usually comes from the noble birth and social status of individuals, and, for the most part, you are poor country girls, children of plowmen like myself. All of us are of very little account. As for your attire, your headdress and the rest, there’s no room for being vain about them. With regard to intelligence, alas! most of you are from the country and can’t have very lofty minds. As for food, poor people eat almost the same things you do: a little beef or something similar. There’s no room there for self-esteem or presumption. And for your conversations, you mix only with persons who are poor and are their servants; there’s certainly nothing in that to make you proud.

“So, it’s not that kind of pride that will come among you. But there are two kinds of pride: one stems from occupations; it’s the
pride of persons who strut about because of their duties and are vain about them. A Sister who would set off in the morning to visit the poor, doing so only to please a Lady and to be thought well of by her, would commit an act of pride. The other sort of pride resides just as well in a grey dress as under more elegant ones, and that's the pride we're talking about, for it can exist in you. We know it by its effects.

"It's the cause of all the sins we commit, just as humility is the origin of all the good we do. There's no evil that doesn't begin with hidden pride. If a Sister says something in praise of herself, if she's disobedient, if she's on bad terms with her Sister, if she wants to be Sister Servant, all that is hidden pride. So, the first reason why we must avoid this vice is that it's the cause of all evils.

"The second is that God grants nothing to those affected by it; for, no matter what prayers they say or what good they do, God doesn't answer their prayers. It is written that 'God resists the proud and gives His grace to the humble.' ¹ Ponder those words: 'God resists the proud,' and say, 'Quoi! I have this pride, and God says that He won't grant anything to such persons; I want to try to get away from that.'

"The third reason is that God permits souls tainted by it to fall into serious sins: impurity and loss of vocation—yes, Sisters, loss of vocation. Hasn't God said, 'You esteem yourselves highly and raise yourselves up; you shall fall'? ² If a Sister is well thought of in a parish, if she imagines she's more adept at pleasing a confessor or a Lady, it's to be feared that she may ultimately fall and lose her vocation.

"The fourth evil is that pride spoils all the good we do and causes such disorder in our actions that they're displeasing to God. That's what usually happens to vain, proud souls. The good works they do are completely spoiled. Whether it be by an individual Sister or the whole Company, everything that's done will be spoiled.

"The fifth reason is that secret pride is a sign of damnation, just as humility is a sign of predestination. Now, isn't there reason to

¹Cf. Jas 4:6. (NAB)
²Cf. Mt 23:12. (NAB)
fear when our salvation is in danger? You can see how very im­portant it is to ask God to give us the grace of ridding us of this poison. O Savior, deliver us, and deliver me, I who am perhaps more guilty of this vice than anyone else.

"You’ve told us many things," you’ll say to me, "but how will I be able to know if I have this secret pride, Monsieur? Perhaps I’ll become humble when I know it."

"The first sign, dear Sisters, is if we think too highly of ourselves and of what we do, if we want others to have a good opinion of us, and want our confessors and the Ladies of Charity to esteem us. There are two things, then: having a good opinion of ourselves, and wanting our Superiors, companions, and others to esteem us and say, ‘There’s a fine Sister who’s doing good work.’ But how do we know if we have a good opinion of ourselves, and if we’re pleased when others think highly of us? We know it when we’re pleased that people praise us, or are satisfied when someone is pleased with us.

"The third sign is to do something apart from obedience, for dis­obedience is a sign of arrogance. Mademoiselle or the confessor will prescribe something, and a Sister will pay no attention to it. That’s a sign of secret pride.

"The fourth sign is when we say something in praise of our­selves. We don’t say it openly, but we boast openly, ‘I’ve done this or that.’ Just as fever manifests itself by a high temperature, so pride manifests itself by the tongue. We’re so pleased to relate what we’ve done! We introduce it in a roundabout way so it doesn’t seem like we’re looking for praise.

"The fifth sign, dear Sisters, is when actions are deliberately performed to gain the good graces of a Superior or another Sister. Visiting the sick in order to please a Lady of Charity or anyone else, or doing our utmost to acquire esteem, all that is a sign of secret pride. We must really be on our guard against that.

"The sixth sign is to quarrel with our Sisters and to be unwilling to yield, and the seventh sign is stubbornness. One Sister wants something to be done one way; the other wants it done differently. Each will hold to her own opinion. The advice of her Sister Servant,
her confessor, the Director, or her Superioress will be incapable of making her give in because she’s confirmed in her own decision. It’s firmly entrenched in her brain; it’s impossible to make her budge an inch. That’s a sign of secret pride and a diabolical characteristic because only demons remain fixed in their obstinacy. So, it’s a devilish spirit, so firmly established in evil that the demon remains in it forever. Such a person sometimes feels remorse, but she doesn’t have the strength to follow the impulse; she’d like to do it, but cannot.

“The eighth sign is singularity, even in devotional matters, such as wanting to go to Communion more frequently than others, to have a rosary, to wear a nicer collar, to draw attention to herself by her headdress or her attire. All that, Sisters, is a sign of pride. Be very careful of that; avoid any singularity.

“Another sign is to be ambitious for more honorable offices or duties, leading one to want to become a Sister Servant. If a Sister who has this desire is sent to a parish, she can’t submit to her Sister; she thinks she’s more capable, would be a better leader, has greater experience, is more prayerful, and should, therefore, be the Sister Servant. If she has thoughts like this and doesn’t reject them immediately, but entertains them, that’s a diabolical spirit; yes, to presume that we do better than others is a diabolical spirit.

“So, Sisters, those are the signs by which we can know if we have this secret pride; for you see, this vice is all the more to be feared because it’s secret and unknown.

“But how can we rid ourselves of it? It’s all the more difficult because we’re unaware of it and are blind about ourselves; and when we’re told that we have it, we don’t want to believe it. Note carefully that we can know it only by its effects. What makes it more dangerous is that it never appears except under the semblance of good. For instance, if a Sister asks to receive Holy Communion more often than her Sister, her confessor, who is inexperienced, will think she’s led to this by a great love of God and great tenderness toward Our Lord. He’ll say to her, ‘Go to Holy Communion, Sister.’ Who won’t believe that it’s not for a greater good? And yet it’s pride.
"There's no pride without disobedience. For example, you fail to make your prayer. Why? You'll say, 'I was detained; I was writing a letter to a relative, or I went to see a Lady or a poor person, or I didn't want to hurt my Sister, who also failed to make her prayer, so as not to seem better than she.' Well now! who wouldn't think that all these things are apparently good? What makes this sin incurable then—or almost incurable—is that it's always committed under the guise of something good.

"'But, Monsieur,' you'll ask me, 'I admit that I'm guilty; I'm pleased when I'm praised; I'm disobedient; and to appear steadfast, I've said things in praise of myself to a Sister who seemed more lax. What's to be done about that?'

"Let me give you two or three pieces of advice, dear Sisters. The first is to try to discover if you have this pride. If you see that you do, declare before God that you want to strive with all your heart to acquire holy humility, and ask Him to grant us this grace.

"The second is to examine your actions every day and often reflect: 'Haven't I been pleased when people praised me? If I have, I'll be more careful on another occasion; I'll recall the humiliation of Our Lord Jesus Christ before Pilate; I'll cast myself at the foot of Your Holy Cross.' Ask yourselves whether you've been disobedient or stubborn, even with the confessor, whom you sometimes question and resist, or with Superiors, or the Superioress. 'Haven't I had some proud thoughts or the desire to be the Sister Servant?' If you recognize such a desire, break it off and say, 'My Lord, I renounce that with all my heart, and I prefer to be a simple Sister from the Charity all my life rather than to be a Sister Servant.'

"Ask yourselves also whether you're on bad terms with any of your Sisters, whether you're unwilling to give in to others, whether you dispute everything that's said. The Sister who wants to become humble must yield in everything except what conscience does not allow.

"If a Sister intended to break a Rule, if, for example, she were to say to her Sister Servant, 'Four o'clock is very early to get up; we should rise later'; or if, when it's time to go to Mass, she objected: 'We have too much to do today, Sister'; in those instances the Sister
Servant must remain firm and not give in. But, in matters of indifference, the Sister who wants to belong to God will yield in everything. So, it's advisable to examine your conscience every day and, if you find that you've failed, to ask pardon of God and the grace to correct yourselves.

"The third means, dear Sisters, is to ask your confessor, Director, or Superioress, 'Do I have any hidden pride?' If the answer is yes, then believe it, even if you yourselves don't recognize it, because we are blind. A physician who is ill doesn't diagnose himself, he calls in another doctor. Even when he's well, he does the same. In like manner, a person suffering from secret pride doesn't know herself. God allows the devil to blindfold her so she doesn't see this vice, doesn't speak about it, doesn't accuse herself of it. How then will she get rid of it if no one tells her about it? Ask your confessor, 'Monsieur, do you think I have some secret pride? I beg you to let me know.' And you'll have to believe him.

"If you do have hidden pride, what should you do? Ask God for the weapons to fight it because it's our greatest enemy; it's the cause of all evil and the ruin of all that's good; it makes us enemies of God, who resists the proud and gives His grace to the humble. That's why you should say every day in your prayers, 'O Savior, deliver me from secret pride, from too much self-esteem, from the desire that others think well of me.' In addition, have great devotion to Our Lord; to the Blessed Virgin, who tells us that God looked upon her because she was humble; to the saints; and to your Guardian Angel—all of whom have given us examples of humility.

"In the third place, perform some acts of humility every day. I don't mean external acts, although they're good, such as kissing the feet of others, but acts of the heart. Let's say to ourselves interiorly that we're nothing, that we're sinners; let's not desire to be known or esteemed, like Our Lord who led a hidden life; when people saw Him, they said of Him, 'Isn't this the carpenter's son?' To imitate that humility of Jesus we must love the hidden life as He did, consider ourselves among the least in the Company, acknowledge that

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3Cf. Mt 13:55. (NAB)
we’re wretched, without intelligence or power, believe that, if there’s any evil, we’re the cause of it, and attribute what is good to others. If you follow this advice, dear Sisters, to what degree of grace will you not attain? God himself says, ‘On whom do you think I turn my eyes if not on the one who hides herself? She is my spouse, my beloved, in whom I take my delight.’

“What pleasures, what interior delights are received by a soul who is hidden in this way from others and happy to be known by God alone! Only those who experience it can say.

“So there, dear Sisters, is the enemy unmasked; I’ve shown him to you; be very vigilant and make good resolutions beginning right now. If you’re faithful to them, the Company will be the Company of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and you will acquire the title of His spousers.”

Most Honored Father then knelt down and offered the following prayer to God, after telling us to recite it with him: “Lord, what I have just heard makes me see how important it is to recognize the great evils this pride brings to a soul. But how can I know it unless You yourself give me the grace to do so? And if You do not give me inspiration and impulses, how can I rid myself of it? You ask each of us for our goodwill to cooperate with Your graces. Lord, behold us prostrate at Your feet; we offer our wills to You and declare that we no longer want people to esteem us. You gave the Blessed Virgin an abundance of profound humility; through her we ask You to give us a share in it. You were so humble that You willed to be regarded as a sinner and to be nailed to a cross. You willed not only to be humble during Your life but also after death so that Your children might follow You. It is therefore from You, my Savior, that we ask the grace to strive for the acquisition of this virtue, as you desire of us.

“Holy Virgin, you who share so fully in this holy humility, help us; obtain this virtue for us from your dear Son for the whole Company and for all our dear Sisters who are far from here. This is the prayer I offer you with all my heart. *Benedictio Dei Patris,...*
"Dear Sisters, the subject of this conference is the preservation of the Company. It’s divided into three points. The first concerns the reasons why Sisters should give themselves to God to live in such a manner that their Company may last for many years or, to put it better, that it may subsist happily, continue, and be preserved forever; in the second point we’ll deal with what can ruin it and, in the third, the means for preventing it from being ruined.

"Sister, what reasons do Daughters of Charity have to give themselves to God to live in such a way that the Lord’s work may not perish in your hands?"

"Father, I haven’t thought about it yet, but it seems to me that it’s very necessary to give ourselves to God for that purpose so that He may do, in and through us, His most holy Will, without which we can do nothing."

"And you, Sister, what reason do you have for that?"

"The first one is that we must abandon ourselves to the Providence of God and trust completely in it. A second reason is that God is the author of this Company, which He has formed for himself. It seems to me, Father, that there’s no need for any other reason to prompt us to desire the preservation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity."

"God bless you, Sister! Sister states that one reason is to put our trust in the Providence of God, and that’s very true. She proposes as a second reason that the Company has been instituted by God. As a matter of fact, it’s a rule laid down by Saint Augustine that what human persons haven’t done comes from God. Now, dear Sisters, the fact is that no one on earth can say, ‘I did that.’ Mademoiselle can’t say it, neither can M. Portail, nor anyone else. No, Sisters, no one can say, ‘I’m the one who did this work.’"

"‘How can that be, Monsieur,’ you’ll object to me. ‘If what you say is true, then who is the workman? Did it do itself?’ No, it didn’t,...

but it’s not the work of human persons, because no one had ever thought of the Company of Charity. From this you can conclude with Saint Augustine that what has not been done by human persons has God for its author.

"O Savior, You then are the one who created this great work, from which You draw such great benefits; may You be forever blessed for it! How happy you are, Sisters, to be called to such a holy ministry! That’s a strong motive for living so perfectly that this Company will not decline. Another reason is the great blessings God has imparted to the Company, for we have to acknowledge that He has blessed it in the sight of everyone. Isn’t it a great blessing that He brought to it so many good souls, now in heaven, who lived like angels and whom we can call saints, seeing the life they led? Mon Dieu! dear Sisters, what a blessing is the example they’ve left us!

“Recently I related at a meeting of very devout and virtuous Ladies what we were saying a few days before about Sister Andrée¹ and the words she uttered before she died. It was at a conference like this one. I told them Sister Andrée’s reply to a question I put to her: ‘I have no anxiety, no remorse,’ she said, ‘except for having taken too much pleasure in serving the poor.’ And when I asked her, ‘Eh quoi! Sister, is there nothing in the past that causes you any fear?’ she replied, ‘No, Monsieur, nothing at all, other than that I had too much satisfaction when I used to go through those villages to see those good people; I used to fly, I was so overjoyed to serve them.’ When I told them this, one of those good Ladies, clapping her hands before all of them, couldn’t refrain from exclaiming that she had never heard anyone say something like that. She must have had deep feelings of admiration not to have been able to contain herself and to manifest these external signs. Has anything like it ever been seen? Isn’t great purity needed to be in such a disposition? Must she not have led a saintly life to have had no remorse of conscience at a moment when the saints themselves have been assailed by it? Could such a perfect state be found in a religious Order? Not that I’m try-

¹Perhaps Andrée Guilmine who died before 1655. Born in Saché, near Tours, she entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity around 1641-42.
ing to compare the poor Daughters of Charity with nuns, who are so far above them; no! God forbid! but I will say that I’ve never seen a more perfect state. From that we have to conclude that the Company, in which there have been, and still are, so many excellent souls—for I do believe there are some who are very perfect—is a work of God. I know some Sisters who would rather die than fail in fidelity to God; one of these is the Sister whom the Queen of Poland² wanted to keep with her. I told you this before, but I can’t refrain from saying it again; perhaps all of you weren’t there. However that may be, that Sister didn’t appreciate the Queen’s offer and her heart was stricken by it. ‘Sister,’ Her Majesty said to her, ‘I love you and that’s why I want to keep you with me; are you really unwilling to serve me?’ Since the Sister remained silent, the Queen added, ‘Eh quoi! Sister, you’re not giving me a single word in reply! I’m inviting you to remain with me and you have nothing to say.’ ‘Alas! Madame, I belong to the poor; I gave myself to God for that purpose; you’ll find plenty of worthy people to serve Your Majesty; allow me to do the work to which God has called me.’

‘O Savior of our souls, what a grace was needed to prompt that Sister to give such a reply, and what a blessing You have bestowed on a Company in which there are souls so attached to Your service! Isn’t that beautiful, Sisters? Is that the work of a human person? Oh no! not at all, by no means. Consequently, we have to say that God has given great graces to the Sisters in this house whom He has called. She’s not the only one; there are many others. Quoi! to prefer the poor to Queens, the poor dress of a Daughter of Charity to taffeta—for one goes with the other—the conversation of poor Daughters of Charity to that of Ladies, a poor life to the riches of the Court. That certainly isn’t the work of creatures but of God. He himself is the one who does these works; He uses you as instruments to show how much He wants to make use of you. Add to that the service you render to poor persons wherever our Sisters are present, so many souls who have gone to God and whom you have helped by your instructions and assistance both corporally and spir-

—538—

²Louise-Marie de Gonzague.
itually, and so many sick poor whom you are now helping and serv-

ing; for, in the parishes of Paris alone, to say nothing of those in the
country and in hospitals, there are as many of them as at the
Hôtel-Dieu. Who would believe that of poor creatures such as you,
if he wasn’t aware of the blessing Our Lord imparts to the whole
Company? Our Sister was right in saying that God is the author of it.

“No other motive is needed to encourage you to improve and to
strengthen your vocation. This is a work that God has placed in your
hands. He will ask you for an account of it. Isn’t that just, Sisters?
It’s a treasure you have in your care and whose loss you must pre-
vent. Say to yourselves, ‘God has called me to His service for this
work; He has placed it as a deposit in my hands; I want to preserve it
carefully. If I were responsible for a foundling, I wouldn’t let it per-
ish in my hands. If I’m so careful about something that concerns
only the life of the body, what must I not do for the preservation of
the Company, which is concerned with both the life of the body and
the life of the soul!’ If we had a thousand lives, dear Sisters, we
should devote all of them to striving for the development of this
work. What a misfortune if the Company were to decline through
our fault! Our Lord, turning toward the city of Jerusalem, wept and
sorrowfully lamented its destruction. 3 Who could witness the de-
struction of this Company, dear Sisters, without bursting into tears?
We would die of regret if that were to happen!

“That’s the subject of the second point, namely, what can de-
stroy the Company of Charity, that is, what can oblige God to take
His grace from us because of the bad use we’ve made of it and to
look upon us as persons who have been excommunicated and are
unworthy to occupy this place.

“Sister, in your opinion, what else could bring about the ruin of
the Company of Charity?”

“It seems to me, Father, that this would happen if we were to lis-
ten to temptations against our vocation.”

“Sister is right. Temptation will never be lacking to souls who
are trying to serve God; it wasn’t lacking even to the Apostles and to

3Cf. Lk 19:41-44, (NAB)
Our Lord; all those who try to live a holy life will suffer persecution, that is, will be tempted and afflicted. Now, if a Daughter of Charity doesn’t resist temptation, if, for example, she wants to have something that would allow her more freedom or something similar, and takes pleasure in this, she’ll say to the others, ‘If only we had this or that! Our life is too hard!’ If all of them listen to this temptation, what will they do? They’ll murmur, complain about Superiors, and say they don’t have what they want. That’s the harm that will be done to those who don’t resist from the very beginning.

“Be aware, Sisters, that it’s nothing to be attacked by one, two, or even several temptations; no, that’s nothing if, from the beginning, we reject them, after recognizing that the devil is putting these wicked thoughts into our minds. You should say, ‘Lord, I know there will never be a Daughter of Charity who isn’t tempted.’ No, dear Sisters, there are none and there never will be any. All good people must resign themselves to being tempted. No tree is free from worms; likewise, there’s no Daughter of Charity who doesn’t have temptations against her vocation, but you must resist them courageously and never listen to them, no matter how good they may appear; for whatever good they may offer you, Sisters, they’re basilisks that put up lovely pretenses in order to seduce you.

“Tell us, Sister, what could bring about the ruin of the Company?”

“Father, I think it would be a disregard for the graces God has given us; all those who have left us went away because they didn’t know the value of their call to the Company and didn’t esteem their vocation sufficiently.”

“What you say is so true, Sister; God bless you! Mon Dieu! Sisters, the cause of all our misfortunes, of the sins we commit, of our disregard for the Rules, in a word, of all the evil we do is that we don’t appreciate the gifts of God. Our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, ‘O mulier, O woman, if you knew the gift of God, if you knew the power of the water I give!’ So too, Sisters, if we only knew the worth of this grace! O Sister! if you only recognized your good

\[\text{Cf. Jn 4:10. (NAB)}\]
fortune! If you could only form some idea of the greatness of your ministry! How well that Sister knew it who declined the honor of serving the Queen of Poland! Oh yes! she understood clearly what a happiness it is to serve the members of Our Lord; and all our other Sisters have shown on similar occasions how highly they esteemed their vocation.

"Who wouldn't esteem this vocation! Quoi! to do what God did when He was on earth! You'd have to be very insensitive! Let's ask this grace of God so that, knowing our happiness, we may not spurn it. I think that all of you love your vocation, but there may be some who don't appreciate this grace properly and aren't sufficiently steadfast in the endeavor God has given them the grace to undertake. Let each of you ask herself, 'Am I growing weary of my Rules and the instructions of my Superiors? Shall I be so cowardly as to throw away my vocation for the few vain hopes this temptation presents to me?' And if we see that we're determined to be faithful to God, disdaining all the honors and pleasures that may present themselves, we must thank God for this and give Him all the glory for it. If, on the other hand, we are fainthearted in these dispositions, we must ask pardon of His Divine Goodness and say, 'My Savior, forgive me the sins that have brought me to such a sad state; forgive me, Lord, the infidelities that are the cause of my misfortune.'

"Sisters, if I were to ask you, 'Do you want to leave the Company? You'll have a little property and freedom; you won't be obliged to such submission; you'll be better fed,' you'd say to me, 'Shame on you, Monsieur! What are you saying to me? Quoi! are you suggesting that I abandon my God, who has given me so many graces, for a fleeting pleasure! For we can call fleeting that which passes away with time. Oh! I'll do no such thing.' I think, Sisters, that many of you would answer me this way. Give the same reply to temptations.

"Sister, how could the Company of the Daughters of Charity be destroyed?"

"Father, I think that what can ruin it and cause the Sisters to leave is the failure to mention our temptations to Superiors; and the means of preventing this is to have great freedom in telling them our
troubles. In my own case, whenever God has given me this grace, I've been extremely happy about it."

"God bless you, Sister! You're quite right. That's the source of the ruin of the Company, namely, keeping our temptations in our hearts, and being unwilling to tell our Superiors about them but telling them to one another. A Sister whose mind is ill at ease will unburden herself to another with the same malady and, instead of helping, consoling, and comforting one another, they'll harm one another. From these two the contagion will spread quickly to the others. And that's how the ruin of the Company will come about. That's why, Sisters, rest assured that you can't persevere if you don't tell your troubles to those who can console you.

"Sister, please tell us what is capable of leading Daughters of Charity astray and, consequently, of ruining the Company."

"Father, I think it's the company of laypersons because we learn their manner of acting, and then we inadvertently behave like them."

"Sister, what you say is so true and important! It's certain, Sisters, that anyone who mingles with worldly-minded people becomes worldly; just as, on the contrary, those who find themselves in good company benefit from it. When you see a Daughter of Charity enjoying herself in society, that's not a good sign. When a parish Sister is pleased that the Ladies think highly of her and say, 'She's a very good Sister; she takes excellent care of the poor,' she takes a liking to those persons, who praise and applaud her. Be careful, Sisters, that people's attachment to you may not be caused by your attachment to them.

"'If I were of the world,' said the Savior of the world, 'it would love me, but because I am not of the world it hates me because it finds nothing of its own in me.' 5 Consequently, dear Sisters, when you see that you're loved by people in the world, conclude from it that you are of the world, since it loves only its own; for, as soon as you feel pleased at receiving the praises people give you, say, 'I don't have the spirit Our Lord wants me to have.'

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5Cf. Jn 17:14. (NAB)
"What do you think the spirit of the world is? It's to love esteem, honor, and praise; it's to disdain Sisters who are exact and obedient. As soon as a Sister loves those who have the spirit of the world and takes pleasure in their company, you can say, 'This Sister is in grave danger of losing her vocation.' Not that you should disdain the Ladies. Oh no! they should be respected and honored because of the means they give you of serving the poor, as well as for the authority they have over you, for they take the place of a mother toward you in all that concerns the poor; but you shouldn't take pleasure in their company or remain a long time with them, if necessity doesn't oblige you to do so; above all, never let yourselves go so far as to tell them your troubles, your aversions, or your complaints against your Sisters. You see from this how dangerous the company of laypersons is for you; therefore, you must avoid it as much as possible; for they can be the cause of your losing your fervor in your vocation. Sister was right in saying that this would be a great danger for the Company.

"And you, Sister, what could ruin the Company?"

"The Company, Father, would be ruined if the Sisters weren't faithful to keeping their Rules."

"That's well said, Sister; especially since a lack of fidelity in keeping your Rules shows a contempt for holy things, for your Rules are holy and tend to what is holy; they help you either to serve poor persons well or to improve yourselves. So, when you neglect or despise them, people can say goodbye to the Company, and although it may not be completely destroyed, all that will be visible will be the bark of the tree, and nothing more; it will be like dead trees that have nothing underneath the green bark. Sisters, what a great evil is the failure to keep the Rules! To neglect them, not to take them into account, and to disregard the means God uses to save us merit a severe punishment. Quoi! To turn up your nose at the means of salvation and not to think highly of the graces God gives us! Has He given us any greater grace than to make known His holy Will to us by our Rules?

"God gave His law to the people of Israel and said, 'Keep this law faithfully and don't neglect a single point of it, for as soon as
you infringe upon it, you can expect all sorts of evils and miseries.

So, Sisters, rest assured that you'll be blessed by God as long as you're faithful to the practice of your Rules, but as soon as you break them, you'll be filled with spiritual wretchedness, temptations, repugnance, and loathing.

"But, Monsieur," you'll say to me, "someone comes to look for me at the time to go to prayer; what should I do then in order to be faithful to my Rules?" Sisters, you have no obligation more important than the service of the sick, and you certainly don't break your Rules by going to nurse the patients. But as soon as you have finished what called you to them, return to your prayer; for you see, Sisters, you must be zealous about observing all your Rules, even the smallest; and when the service of the sick obliges you to alter your schedule, you must try to make up that time. Mademoiselle, I think it would be well to have the Rules read aloud so that the Sisters may see and learn what they are.”

"Father, we do that every month for those who are here but, if it pleases Your Charity, I think it would be essential to bring the Sisters in the parishes here every month, and for fear that this might inconvenience the Ladies or give them reason for saying that the Sisters come here too often—for Your Charity has led us to hope for a conference every month—it would be well, if you see fit, for some of them to come one day and the others on another day."

"That sounds like a good idea to me, Mademoiselle. M. Portail, are you of the same opinion?"

"Yes, Monsieur, I think that’s very necessary."

"Yes, Sisters, that will be very helpful. The Capuchins read their Rules every week, not to learn them, for they know them well, but to refresh their memory and spur them on to practice them. So then, you’ll come here to hear the Rules read, with the desire to observe them. But before settling that, and how and when it shall be done, we’ll reflect on it before God; for that’s how our Rules were drawn up, after asking for His inspiration."

"Please tell us your thoughts, Mademoiselle."

"Monsieur, the first reason we have for giving ourselves to God to obtain from His Goodness that the Company may last for long
years to come—forever, if possible—is the conviction we must have that God himself willed this establishment and willed it in the form in which it exists. Now, God doesn't will that His creatures destroy what He has made. Another reason is that those who would contravene God's plan by the destruction of the Company would be the cause of the loss of many souls and would prevent many poor persons from being assisted, and this infidelity would put their eternal salvation in danger. What might also contribute to the ruin of the Company is, first, to want to change the customs because that would be, in a certain sense, to prefer our own judgment to the guidance of God, who knows well enough its future needs."

"Mademoiselle, please stop there; that idea needs to be explained. It's very important—if there's anything important—not to change anything. What was said before is good, but this is even better; it's the touchstone. Some misguided person might say, 'It's all very well not to change anything, but how is that to be done?' One Sister will think, 'It would be much more modest if we had our faces veiled. Quoi! to be seen unveiled!' Another will judge it well to admit young women of high rank; that would make the Company attractive. And once these upper-class young women were in the Company, the plain, simple sort of life that's led in it would have to be changed; it would have to be a little more accommodating. They'd find the Company rustic; they'd have to be seen a little more in public to please Mlle X who doesn't like such simplicity. Ah, cursed state! Wretched self-satisfaction! Perdition! As soon as you get to that point, Sisters, as soon as you begin to dress a little more fashionably, someone will say, 'We must be better housed; when people come here, it's mortifying to have them see such cheap things.'

"Others will say, 'Quoi! Monsieur, to oblige us not to have anything of our own is very hard.' When you reach that stage it's a diabolical temptation, it's perdition. You see, Sisters, you must avoid as representatives of Satan all those who want you to make changes because by that means they are aspiring to nothing else than the ruin of the Company. Ah, Sisters! be afraid when you hear a Sister say, 'This should be done like that; it would be better and more conve-
nient.' A Sister who loves her vocation and hears such language must flee; she can believe that anyone who wants to change what God has done is a very wicked person, who deserves to burn in hell.

"When it's Superiors who think it advisable to make a change, you must believe that it's God; God, who used them to establish the Order, uses them again when changes are to be made. That's why you must never criticize. But if a private individual tries to interfere and to change something, you mustn't tolerate it! Judas's malady began with that: he wanted to change Our Lord's maxims for the use of the money entrusted to him. There's no need to say anything more to persuade you to take the resolution never to change anything. If someone suggests a change to you, don't listen to him. Say, 'That man hasn't been called by God to direct the Company; therefore, I'm not obliged to follow his advice.'

"I recall, in this connection, the story of Rechab. He was a good man. It's said of him that, thinking that the use of wine was harmful to a person’s life, he never drank any, and neither did his children. When someone said something to them about this, they would say, 'My father didn't drink it; and we don't want to drink it either.' His children's children observed this custom from father to son for three hundred years. See how Rechab's good example was followed for so long by his children's children. They used to say, 'Our forefathers didn't drink wine and they continued to live; why shouldn't we do as they did?' See from this example how you should act, Sisters.

"When someone talks to you about making changes, you should reply, 'What are you saying, Sister? We've been brought up like that; we've always kept to this way of life. O Sauveur, I don't want to change anything.' If there are two persons who think this way, there will be two more in favor of a change. What will happen? The first two will win over two others, whom they'll persuade to stand fast; the other two will agree with one another, and there you have division. When people see that, everything will fall into disorder; all will be lost and the ruin of the Company will be at hand.

\[6\text{Cf. Jer 35:1-10. (NAB)}\]
“Dear Sisters, take the resolution, beginning right now, not to change anything, neither in Mademoiselle’s lifetime nor after her death, nor after mine, but to preserve inviolably the excellent customs that have prevailed, and still do, in this house, and hold firmly to that. Why desire any other way of life than the one with which God inspired your Superiors, and which is in conformity with that of Jesus Christ? If the Daughters of Charity observe their little Regulations faithfully, they’ll be imitating the Sisters His Goodness chose at the beginning of this Company. Such excellent souls, and how well they knew how to use those practices and good customs!

“This is one of the most excellent states of life I’ve ever seen, dear Sisters; don’t look for one that’s more perfect. If you want to be great saints, you’ll find the means in your spiritual exercises. How many perfect souls we’ve had in the Company! They’re now in heaven, and by the mercy of God there are still some on earth.

“Well, now, it’s getting late. I think it would be advisable to postpone this to some other time. What do you think, Mademoiselle? Would it be better if we put it off until some other time?”

“Father, I think we really should do that, if Your Charity thinks it advisable.”

“Then let’s postpone it because, you see, this is a matter of great importance; when there’s question of preserving a Company, neither time nor trouble should be spared. Do you know, Sisters, how long Noah took to build the ark and to make it as perfect as it should be? One hundred years. O Savior of our souls! O my dear Sisters! If so much time was required to build the ark, in which only eight persons were saved from the deluge, how much do you think is needed to strengthen and preserve this Company, which such a large number of souls will enter and will save themselves from the deluge of the world!

“When a city is besieged, the Governor and those responsible for defending it keep guard, see where danger may be lurking, and reinforce the weak places. If some gate isn’t secure—and even if it is—they still post a sentry. See what vigilance is used for what concerns the body, dear Sisters, once people know where the dangers
are. God inspired you to make such an important remark, Mademoiselle; may He be blessed for it!

"Let's now see where the enemy could make a breach; let's ask ourselves where he might be able to get in, let's build a wall there and mount our cannon; in a word, let's look for the means of thwarting him; for, once this enemy of our souls succeeds in penetrating the Company, what would he not do to ruin and overturn it?"

Most Honored Father then said three times, pausing each time and raising his eyes heavenward, "Ah, Sisters! Ah, Sisters! Ah, Sisters!" then he added, "Well now, mon Sauveur, that's enough. May Our Lord Jesus Christ give us a good understanding of the importance of what has been said in order to put it into practice so that, by our sins and infidelities, we may not cause the ruin of this beautiful Company, which He himself has formed as He wished it. We ask this grace of You, Lord, through the merits of Your Holy Mother and by the service You want to obtain from this Company. My Savior, You who are the light of the world, grant us the grace we need to recognize the wiles by which the enemy tries to seduce the souls of those who give themselves to You, in order to keep him from entering and overturning the work of Your hands. Benedictio Dei Patris..."

60. - ENVY

June 24, 1654

"The subject of this conference, dear Sisters, is envy or jealousy. It is divided into three points: first, the great evils that will befall the Company in general and each Sister in particular if envy and jealousy prevail in it; second, the various ways of sinning by envy or jealousy, and third, some means to be taken so as not to fall into them.

"Sister, would you please tell us your thoughts on this subject?"
"I thought, Father, that envy was dangerous and the source of great evils, since it caused the death of Our Lord, but if, instead of this bad envy, we had a great desire for what is good and perfect, then it would be a good kind of envy."

"In that case, Sister, you are including two kinds of envy: a good one and a bad one. The one that tends toward evil is for worldly persons but not for the servants of God. The other is recommended by Saint Paul who says, 'Be jealous, but of virtue and not to prevent it from producing the effects it is wont to do, but rather to acquire it.'

"Our Sister has remarked another form of it. It's the envy that causes a Sister to be sad and upset at the well-being of her Sisters because another is better fed, better maintained, better clothed than she, and is held in higher esteem and appreciation by Superiors. Those are the effects of this accursed envy, which causes great disorder in the souls affected by it. Well now, Sister, you say that it must be detested because it brought about the death of Our Lord. When the Pharisees saw that the people were following Him and leaving them behind, they began to have feelings of envy against Him and, from that time on, sought how to take His life. Envy must have had great power to bring about the death of an incarnate God. Mon Dieu! Sisters, it was envy that led Judas to sell Our Lord. We can say that it has great power once it is embedded in the mind, since it led to the death of the author of life itself.

"And you, Sister, what harm do you think envy does to a Sister?"

"First of all, Father, it takes away peace of conscience; this is a very great evil, especially since, when we're not at peace interiorly, there's nothing but trouble and sadness. Another thing is that envy may be the cause of loss of vocation, for when sadness takes hold of us we feel nothing but disgust, everything distresses us and, in the end, that could lead us out of the Company. It seems to me that one means of preventing envy is to reject such thoughts as soon as we're aware of them."

"God bless you, Sister! And you, Sister, what evils would envy and jealousy bring about in the Company?"
Father, it can cause great disorders and even the loss of vocation; for, as soon as we imagine that others are preferred to us, we grow sad and discouraged, and that's the end of us.

"Ah! how right you are, Sister, in saying that's the end of us when we reach that stage. So you think envy is powerful enough to lead to the loss of vocation?"

"Yes, Father, because we become jealous when we see that our Sister is better loved, more cherished and esteemed, more virtuous; and so we grow weary and want to abandon everything. I think the remedy for that is to reflect that she's more deserving of it than we are; if she's more esteemed than we and placed in more lofty ministries, it's because she's better qualified for them than we are."

"You see, Sisters, when a Sister spends more time with Superiors, when she talks to them more often, and it seems to you that she's better loved than the others, you're mistaken. 'But she's always talking to Mademoiselle or the Sister Servant!' Do you think, Sisters, that she's more highly regarded because of that? No, no, it's not that they have greater esteem for her. A father who has two sons, one grown up and the other little, hardly ever speaks to the older one, but he hugs the little one, talks to him, and plays with him. Do you think this father loves that little boy more than the older one because he talks to him so often? No, without a doubt he loves the other one more; and when he makes his will he'll leave more to the older boy than to the little one. So, when the Superiress talks to a Sister more often, it's not a sign that she's better loved than the others. If she shows her more affection and tenderness, perhaps it's because that Sister is distressed, demoralized, and beset with troubles, and therefore needs the gentleness and kindness shown in that circumstance. We have to sympathize with her. Our Lord himself demands it.

"Do you remember, dear Sisters, what is said about the prodigal son? The prodigal asks his father for his fortune, leaves home, and goes off to spend it. After he has dissipated everything, to the point of being forced to live on the food that's given to pigs, he makes up his mind to go back home. As soon as the father sees him, he begins to rejoice, 'Ah!' he says, 'it's my son! I'll entertain him; I'll give
him a banquet; I'll have the fatted calf killed; he shall be given fine
clothes, and people will rejoice at my child's return!' Eh bien! Sis-
ters, see how this father hugs the poor dejected fellow; he embraces
him and gives a great banquet; in a word, the whole house is filled
with joy. Is it because he loves him more than the elder son, who has
given him nothing but satisfaction? No, but it is because he's more
worthy of compassion on account of his misery.

"When the elder son came in from the fields and saw the stringed
instruments and all the preparations going on in the house, he was
saddened. 'Look at this!' he says, 'this is how my father treats my
brother, who never gave him anything but grief, and he's never
shown such affection for me, even though I've tried to obey him in
everything. Is that the reward he gives him? It looks as if he's giving
him a wedding feast.' It was envy that made the elder brother talk
like that; he thought his brother was being preferred to him. Al­
though the father might seem to love the prodigal more than the
other one, it's certain that he loved the older son much more, and
with good reason.

"You see from this example, Sisters, that if greater affection is
shown to some than to others, it's not because they're loved more.
You're quite mistaken, and please don't think that it's for that rea-
son. When you see a Sister with the Superioress more often, you
should think that there's some reason for it; maybe she's an Officer
who needs advice about something she has to do, or a Sister who has
a problem and is being consoled. So, think again, Sisters, and never
allow yourselves to give in to such thoughts because it would be a
mistake to believe that Superiors loved one Sister more than an-
other; this is a snare the evil spirit uses to trip you up.

"Sister, is there any reason to fear that envy may infect the Com-
pany; and what harm could it cause the Sisters?"

"It seems to me, Father, that envy begets jealousy; the result is
that we envy everything others have, and are annoyed when we see
that they're better off than we are."

"That's well said: envy begets jealousy; well said, Sister. God
bless you! Listen to what she's saying, Sisters: if envy fills a Sister's
mind, it begets jealousy, jealousy begets division, and then all is
lost; it's the source of all the evils that occur in a house. I don't think I've ever seen disorder arise in any religious Order except through envy or jealousy. Now, if envy is to be feared anywhere, it's among you, all the more so since it's like the corruption of the Company. When fruit is spoiled and rotten, it's no longer good for anything; in the same way, if envy takes hold among you, your Company will soon go to rack and ruin. Ah, Sisters! could a greater misfortune befall the Daughters of Charity than jealousy, since it's the cause of disunion? What good is there where there's division? Rest assured, then, that as soon as there's envy in your Company, it's finished; you're Daughters of Charity in name only, you don't have its interior signs. That's why you can say, Sisters, that as soon as we see that vice embedded in this poor house, it's time for the funeral of our poor Company; it no longer exists; it's dead. And how is that? Because you're Daughters of Charity, daughters of the love of God and of your neighbor; and the opposite of charity is envy. A Sister who has this spirit, instead of being the daughter of God that she was, becomes a daughter of the demon, a daughter of perdition. What a misfortune to become the daughter of the devil! You see, the executioner of the Daughters of Charity is envy, which causes us to be angry when we see our Sister better cared for during her illness, or sought after in a parish because she does so much good, or better dressed than we are. For that's what envy does. As soon as a Sister reaches that point, say, 'She's no longer a Daughter of Charity; she's divested of the interior habit, which is the love of God and of the neighbor.' Ah! but we have our attire! Poor Sister, it's not the dress that makes you a Daughter of Charity; it's the interior habit of the soul.

"So, envy concerns external goods. It also concerns reputation. A Sister is sick at heart because such a one is more highly esteemed, or is being considered for some duty or other, or has the reputation of walking in the presence of God, or gives good example to all those who are with her. The demon makes us envy all that. I have to say that so far we have reason to praise God. I've seen very few who have given me any disedification in the city. I can think of only one Sister, who went on her way swinging something she was carrying
in her hand. That’s all I’ll mention here. Perhaps she was planning to offer it to someone. If she’s here, let her ask pardon of God for this fault and for the bad example she gave by her thoughtlessness.

“Watch out for that, Sisters; evil thoughts are a worm that gnaws the heart, takes away peace, and causes us pain, not only to see others being esteemed, but also for the interior gifts of the soul and that such a Sister is humble and is considered a saint. The devil makes us envious of all that.

“You see, dear Sisters, you must detest envy, not only because Holy Scripture shows us that it had the power to cause the death of Our Lord, but also because it brought sin into the world. Accordingly, we can say that all the evils occurring in a Company are caused by envy; have no doubt about it, as also that all the sins in the world originated with envy.

“Sister, do you think envy can destroy the Company?”

“I do, Father, because it divides those who let themselves be carried away by it and, when there’s no longer union among us, the Company will soon be brought low.”

“Yes, Sisters, because you are daughters of love; and envy is totally contrary to charity. It’s like fire and water, opposed to one other. And just as there’s great incompatibility between these two elements, it’s the same for envy and charity. Now, just as water extinguishes fire, envy extinguishes and kills charity. And when people see envy in the Company, they’ll despise you, and rightly so, saying, ‘Quoi! are these the Sisters of whom we’ve heard so much? Shame on them; they’re not fit to distribute the alms of respectable people; persons who do so should be charitable.’

“That’s how envy can destroy the Company of the Daughters of Charity. And how many has it upset? Because of it, several have disbanded and disappeared, and a short while ago two Companies in Paris were suppressed because of the envy in them. An entire Order, called Scuola Pia, has been overturned, except for one house,

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1The Order of Poor Clerks Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools (commonly known as Piarists or Scolopi) founded by Saint Joseph Calasanz (1556-1648) in 1597, was recognized as a formal religious Congregation in 1617, and in 1621 was given the full privileges of a Religious Order. It was suppressed by Pope Innocent X on March 16, 1646, as the result of calumnious charges made against their founder by two of his religious; Pope Alexander VII
which they still have in a certain kingdom. These are powerful motives to induce you to abhor this cursed sin, dear Sisters. Let's now see how we can sin by envy."

One Sister replied that it's self-love that causes us to sin by envy; that excessive love for ourselves causes us to be upset when others are preferred to us; that we can sin in this by thought, believing that we certainly are as deserving of being given a particular duty as the person in it, who doesn't have much knowledge or experience. We can also sin by word, saying that some are preferred to others and receive more support, etc.

"God bless you, Sister! You say that envy is shown by words and that we can offend God in this, and you're right. If, therefore, we see a Sister speaking often to the Sister Servant, and we're inclined to envy her, we'll think, 'What is she saying to her?' If she has a dress that's different from what others have, even though this may be from necessity, we'll think it's made of better fabric, for the devil makes use of all that. One day a Sister said to me in tears, 'Monsieur, one of the things I dread most is to be a Sister Servant.' Sisters, think about the words of that good Sister. Those who aspire to that are far removed from such sentiments! What a sorry state they're in! It's the devil who incites them to that. Search your memory to see if, until now, you've had these desires. If you still have them, ah, poor Sister! what state are you in? If there's ever something you should fear, it's that. If you feel tainted with this vice, ask God earnestly to free you from it and, if you have any tears, shed them before His Goodness to obtain it. Don't rest until you're rid of it, and say, 'My God, how can You allow a Daughter of Charity to be a daughter of the devil, who is pride!' For the devil and pride are one and the same; if you have envy, which is its daughter, you are the daughter of the devil. Quoi! is it possible for a Daughter of Charity not to suffer by being in that state! She'd have to be unaware of God! A Sister who thinks she's guilty should have no rest until she has won her deliverance from the Divine Goodness. She must ask for the prayers of others and beg her Sister to obtain this grace from

reestablished it in 1656 as a Congregation with simple vows; in 1669 Pope Clement IX completely re instituted the Order.
God for her; if she meets some good religious, let her say to him, 'I
entreat you, Father, to ask God to deliver me from an accursed
proud thought that is tormenting me: I want to be a Sister Servant.
Obtain from His Goodness that He will free me from this tempta-
tion.'

"Recently, a Prelates' meeting was held for the election of a Su-
perior. Two of those good Prelates wrote to me about it, and I also
wrote to them on this matter. When they were on the point of namin-
g the Superior, those good Fathers from that Order began to shed
bitter tears for fear that they might be raised to that office, which
they knew was too burdensome for them. The Archbishop of
Narbonne and the Bishop of Alet 2 wrote me that words cannot ex-
press how edified they were by the humility of those Fathers. In-
deed, Sisters, aren't positions of authority onerous and dangerous
for those who seek them? How far removed they were from envy!

"The means of finding a remedy for envy, then, is neither to de-
sire such positions nor to set great value on them. We send Sisters to
a new establishment, such as we've done for Poland; Sisters
shouldn't be thinking that they'd be suitable for that.

"So, Sisters, there you have sufficient reasons to make you want
to be freed from envy, if you have any. You know the misfortune of
a soul who is jealous. It's a diabolical state. We must rid ourselves
of envy, if we want to persevere and don't want God to abandon us,
especially since He gives His grace to the humble and resists the
proud.

"Sister, what are the means of combating envy?"

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2Nicolas Pavillon was born on November 17, 1597. As a very young priest he placed himself
under the direction of Saint Vincent, who had him teach catechism and work in the missions
and the Charities, where his presence was deemed useful. More than once he entrusted him with
conferences and retreats for priests. Appointed to the diocese of Alet in 1637, Pavillon accepted
it only on the Saint's urging. This new office did not deter him from his apostolic works; he gave
a mission in Rueill at Richelieu's invitation, then in Saint-Germain-en-Laye at the King's request.
He was consecrated at Saint-Lazare on August 22, 1639, and went to his diocese accompanied by
Étienne Blatiron, C.M. A zealous, intelligent Bishop, dedicated to reform, he justified the
expectations placed on him. His episcopate would have been more fruitful had he been more on
his guard against Jansenistic ideas. Saint Vincent begged him in vain to sign the formulary
against Jansenism. Pavillon died on December 8, 1677. There are several biographies of him,
notably that of Étienne Dejean, Un prêtre indépendant au XVIIe siècle, Nicolas Pavillon, évêque
da Alet (1637-77) [Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1909].
"I think, Father, that the best means is to ask Our Lord for humility."

"Well now, that’s one means, it’s a thought God has given you. Another is to bring before our minds the example of the saints so as never to be ambitious about anything whatsoever. A further means is to reflect that this is displeasing to God. Do you think, Sister, that a good means of not sinning by envy is to love patched clothes?"

"Yes, I do, Father."

"It’s certain that a very good means is to be satisfied with shabby clothes and to be distressed when you’re given new ones, far from wanting to have better clothes than others, and to say to Mlle Le Gras, ‘Mademoiselle, that dress is too good for me. You’re making me too pretty. Don’t you know that I’m proud already, and this will only make me more so? I’m too vain and filled with envy! That’s why I don’t deserve to be dressed that way.’ That’s how you should act, Sisters.

“And you, Sister, what are the means of not falling into the sin of envy."

“It seems to me, Father, that one means is always to seek after the most insignificant things.”

“You’re quite right, Sister. And when we’re given something more than is given to others, we should blush for shame. When you see yourselves better dressed than poor persons, you should blush for shame and confusion, Sisters, because the poor are your masters and you are their servants; therefore, you should have less than they do.”

“Father, I think it’s also a good means to reject promptly every thought tending toward envy, without trying to scrutinize them too closely.”

“That’s what I like to hear! Sister says that as soon as you have an envious thought, you shouldn’t wait until tomorrow but reject it immediately as if it were poison. Ah, but it will return! If it does, begin over again and urge all the good people you know to ask God to free you of an accused thought that’s trying to ruin you; ask your Sister to tell you something to help you to dispel the envy that’s tormenting you, and ask Our Lord to free you from it. ‘My God, grant
me the grace of never wanting to be the Sister Servant. You gave it to the Sister who wept for fear of being one and asked Mademoiselle never to make her one.' Afterward, go at once to your confessor; hurry here to Mademoiselle and to M. Portail, declare yourself openly and confess as follows: 'I accuse myself of having an accursed thought of envy against my Sister; and afterward I allowed myself so many times to say some arrogant, contemptuous words.' That's how you should confess because envy usually causes people to fall into this fault.

"If you hear something good said about a Sister of whom you're jealous, you'll say that it isn't the case: 'She's not even as good as you say; you don't know her; she's a real hypocrite,' and similar expressions. For that's the work of the devil; he stirs up jealousy with regard to the good and the virtue practiced and, if no fault can be found in the deed, the intention is attacked and is regarded as not being pure but simply capricious. What disorder when that happens, Sisters!

"One of the greatest evils that can happen in the Company is if the Sisters—I'm speaking of some and not of all because I know that some of you live very virtuously; Mon Dieu! what holy souls there have been in the Company, and still are!—is, I repeat, if you were to discuss one another's failings. When you come here you sometimes question one another, 'And who is in the house with you now? How do you get along? Is your Sister kind? Isn't she bad-tempered? And what about that other Sister, in such or such a parish, what's she like? Do you get along well together?' The others, in reply, will mention the things that annoy them: 'Ah, Sister! I get on so badly with Sister X. She's so rude to me. She's always scolding; she does this or that,' and many other things that are said on such occasions. Dear Sisters, never open your mouth to talk about your Sisters. Converse, rather, about good things such as your Rules, the service you're rendering to poor persons, and how many they are, so as not to give rise to these bad conversations. And when you're asked, 'How are you getting along in the parish where you are?' I entreat you, Sister, to reply as follows: 'Let's remember that
it's forbidden for us to talk about these matters and about our Sisters.'

“That’s what you should do, Sisters. If a Sister persists, stop listening to her and leave; for, by listening to such talk, you encourage her to continue. That’s why theologians say of those who listen to uncharitable persons that they’re as guilty as those who do the talking; and this is true, because it’s in our power to prevent it, and we don’t. That’s why we sin just as much—and more—than they do.

“When you come here, never report what you’re doing, nor the difficulties you may be having with one another, but talk about something good, the means of improving yourselves and of acquiring the virtues you need so as to encourage one another to persevere. By so doing, you’ll avoid many temptations that arise from such conversations.

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

“Father, what Your Charity said, along with the thoughts of our Sisters, is sufficient to warn us of the danger that this accursed spirit of envy and jealousy may infect the Company in general and each one in particular. Reflecting on this today, it seemed to me that it might have been envy as well as pride that caused Lucifer to become an inhabitant of hell instead of the angel of light he once had been, since this accursed sin is like a worm that gnaws constantly until it has destroyed itself, or is destroyed.

“An envious or jealous spirit gives itself no rest and incessantly persecutes, from near or far, the envious person, who thus cannot attain any perfection and is always in danger of being lost.

“Envy and jealousy are two passions which, like oil, diffuse themselves aimlessly as far as they are inclined, but their usual practice is to cause aversion, to be displeased at seeing the temporal or spiritual well-being of the person envied, to be unable to bear that any good be said of them. In a word, they’re a source that constantly generates occasions to offend God and to act contrary to the charity we owe our neighbor.

“The means to prevent ourselves from becoming habituated to this wicked vice are to consider that it’s directly opposed to the Will
of God and one of the greatest impediments to perfection, and often to repeat attentively the Commandments of God in order to recall to mind our obligation to do to others as we want them to do to us."

"Blessed be God, Mademoiselle! Well now, Sisters, I'll just make a brief comment on that. First, people say that all those who commit sin receive some satisfaction from it: the thief, for example, has the money he steals and he spends it; the glutton has the satisfaction of eating fine foods. In short, from every sin people imagine that they'll get some pleasure, but in the case of envy they can't expect any satisfaction; on the contrary, it's an executioner who immediately punishes those consumed by it. Look at an envious person: everything causes her pain; if she hears some good of a Sister whom she envies, it torments the life out of her and causes her to languish. Sometimes she feels that people really don't know her, and sometimes that, by esteeming that other Sister, they are despising her.

"The envious person may be compared to a man who has a tapeworm inside him. You know what agonies such people suffer; those worms gnaw at their hearts and give them no rest. Now, all those who have envy in their souls have a tapeworm. 'Envy,' says the Holy Spirit, 'rots the bones of those consumed by it.' 3 What a misfortune for envious persons! To be worse off than those with tapeworms in their bodies! Ah, Sisters! who among you will not dread falling into this vice? Let's give ourselves to God, beginning today, never to envy the welfare of others, but rather to want the lowliest and most difficult ministry and the shabbiest clothing, looking upon ourselves as the least of all, and always being satisfied with what we have.

"What will help you a great deal is for you to confess the sins you've committed through envy, making a firm purpose of amendment. In that way, Sisters, you can be sure that God will bless the Company and that, wherever people request the Daughters of Charity, they'll be an edification, the whole Company will enjoy a good

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3Cf. Prv 14:30. (NAB)
reputation, and God will give you the full measure of grace in this world and glory in the next.

"May Our Lord grant us the grace of helping us to understand and detest this accursed vice, so contrary to charity! I ask the Divine Goodness that the words of blessing I’m about to pronounce on His behalf may be operative in your hearts and mine, so that the wicked sin of envy may be driven out of them forever, and we may live henceforth in such a way that it may never find its way into them!"

"Benedictio Dei Patris. . . ."
INDEX

This index proposes to facilitate reference to the biographical data used in this volume and to the explanation of places and terms which recur frequently in the text and have been explained when first used. Names of persons are in **bold print**—alternate spellings are given in brackets, those of terms or places in *italics*. The accompanying numbers indicate the conference to which the reader should refer for the desired information.

A

ABELLY, Louis: Introduction
ACARIE, Madame
   *(DE L'INCARNATION)*: 1
ANGIBOUST, Barbe: 1
AUX COUTEAX, Lambert: 50
AVILA, St. Teresa of: 7

B

BÉRULLE, Pierre de: 8

C

CHANTAL, St. Jane Frances
   Frémonot de: 4
CHÂTILLON-LES-DOMBES: 20
CHÉTIF, Marguerite: Introduction
CONDÉ, Princesse de
   *(MONTMORENCY)*: 19
CONDREN, Charles de: 43a
CONFRATERNITY OF CHARITY: 1

D

DALMAGNE, Jeanne: 19
DEHORGNY, Jean: 6
DE VAUX, Abbé de *(LASNIER)*: 11
DE VAUX, Anne: 56
DOUÉLLE, Françoise: 49a
DRUGEON, Madeleine: 49a
DU FAY, Isabelle: 52

E

ÉCU: 1

F

FANCHON, Françoise: 50
FLANDIN-MAILLET, Antoine: 37
FOUNDLINGS: 16

G

GENEVIÈVE, Saint: 13
GENNES, Anne de: 46
GONDI, Françoise-Marguerite de Silly,
   Dame de: 1
GONZAGUE, Louise-Marié de: 43a
GOUSSAULT, Madame: 11
GUÉRIN, Mathurine: Introduction
GUILMINE, André: 59

H

HARDEMONT, Anne: 26
HELLOT, Élisabeth: Introduction
HOSPIITALIÈRES DE LA CHARITÉ
   DE NOTRE-DAME: 50
HÔTEL-DIEU: 1

I

INCARNATION, Marie de l’
   *(ACARIE)*: 1