SAINT
VINCENT DE PAUL

CONFERENCES
TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

VOLUME XII
Copy of the painting by Simon François de Tours 1660, preserved at Moutiers-Saint-Jean (France)
SAINT
VINCENT DE PAUL

CORRESPONDENCE
CONFERENCES, DOCUMENTS
II

CONFERENCES

VOLUME XII

NEWLY TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND ANNOTATED

FROM THE 1924 EDITION

OF

PIERRE COSTE, C.M.
To

THE ORGANIZERS
OF
THE INTERNATIONAL FORMATION CENTER (CIF)

In recognition of their efforts to facilitate a return to the sources by offering programs and experiences that encourage confreres to keep alive the fire of knowledge, love, and appreciation of Saint Vincent de Paul in living the spirit and charism today.
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Although Missioners are always bound to collect, if possible, all the words of M. Vincent because every one of them contains some instruction for them and for posterity, this is, nevertheless, a very particular obligation when he speaks to them as a father, treats them as his dear children, and addresses them on some important topic. For this reason, since the conference he gave on Friday, May 17, 1658, when he distributed the book of our Rules, was filled not only with good, useful teachings but also with the fatherly sentiments he has for the Company, certain persons have endeavored to collect them with the greatest possible fidelity, and even to describe all that took place, so that those who were absent might share in the edification and remarkable consolation of those who had the happiness to be present for it.

The subject of the conference was the observance of the Rules, and contained two points: first, the motives; and second, the means.

Note: This English edition of the conferences uses an informal, conversational style in order to preserve the spontaneity and simplicity of the exchanges between Saint Vincent and the confreres and to provide a translation that appeals to the modern reader. In his enthusiasm, he often uses exclamations such as O Sauveur!, Or sus!, Jésus!, Et quoi!, etc. Since these are sometimes awkward to translate in context, they have been left in French. —Ed.

Conference 180. - Manuscript of Conferences.

1According to the testimony of Bro. Pierre Chollier at the beatification process of Saint Vincent, these were Fr. Jacques Eveillard and Bro. Bertrand Ducournau (cf. XI, xxix, n. 14).

As in the case of this footnote, biographical information given in Vol. XI, the first of the two volumes of conferences to the Congregation of the Mission, is not repeated in Vol. XII; the reference in the preceding volume is cited. For this and for other volumes of this series, the number of the volume will be given in bold characters, the page in italics, and, if applicable, the number of the footnote preceded by n.; for example, (cf. V, 243, n. 4).

Jacques Éveillard, born in Nogent-le-Bernard (Sarthe), entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 12, 1647, at sixteen years of age, took his vows on October 13, 1650, and was then sent to Poland. Because of political unrest there, he was recalled to France the following year and was given the chair of philosophy at Saint-Lazare by Saint Vincent. René Alméras appointed him Superior of Saint-Charles Seminary in 1662, but sent him during the year to Noyon in the same capacity. In 1668 he put him in charge of the Collège des Bons-Enfants. Éveillard left there in 1674 to become Superior of the Warsaw house. He found such favor with the King, Queen, and Ministers there that Edme Jolly, who was dissatisfied with his administration, had to use great circumspection to recall him. Because Éveillard continued to connive in order to remain in his position, the Superior General expelled him from the Congregation, notifying the Visitors of this in a circular letter dated June 29, 1680.
of observing our Rules well. M. Vincent arrived in the conference hall while a Brother was speaking. On the first point, the Brother said that if we didn’t observe the Rules well now, with far greater reason would they not be observed well a hundred or two hundred years from now. M. Vincent had him repeat this; then, after allowing him to finish, spoke himself in almost the following way:

“My dear confreres, God hasn’t granted me the grace of giving me such pressing reasons for keeping our Rules well, or with means as good as the ones I just heard mentioned. Blessed be God! May His holy name be forever blessed.”

Here he paused for a moment, then said, “I think that one reason that should prompt us to observe our Rules well, my dear confreres, is that, by the grace of God, all the Rules of the Mission² are aimed at disengaging us from sin—and even from imperfection—to procure the salvation of souls, to serve the Church, and to give glory to God. It seems to me that all of them, by the grace of God, tend so well to this end that anyone who observes them as he should will be in the state God asks of him, personally free from vice and sin and useful to the Church, and will give Our Lord the glory He expects from him. What a motive, Messieurs, for the Company to observe its Rules well, to be free from faults as far as human frailty may allow, to glorify God, and to see that He’s loved and served on earth! O Sauveur! What happiness! I can’t reflect on that enough!

“A good servant of God³ once said to me concerning the Introduction to the Devout Life,⁴ ‘You see, anyone who observed well everything in this book would attain great holiness,⁵ even though all the practices recommended seem ordinary and adapted to human weakness.’ Couldn’t I say the same of our Rules, which apparently prescribe for us a rather ordinary way of life, yet can lead those who practice them to great holiness, and not only that but also to the destruction of sin and imperfection in others? Frankly,

²Saint Vincent often refers to the Congregation of the Mission simply as “the Mission.”
³Saint Francis de Sales (cf. XI, 21, n. 3).
⁴Francis de Sales. Introduction à la vie dévote (3rd edition, Lyons: P. Rigaud, 1610). This is the edition Saint Vincent probably would have used.
⁵Saint Vincent frequently uses the word perfection in the sense of “growth in holiness.” In this English edition, both expressions are used to fit the context.
Messieurs, could those who fail to observe them work toward their own holiness and that of their neighbor? And what glory will they give to Our Lord? On the contrary, if, by the grace of God, the Company has made some progress in virtue, and if each man has abandoned the state of sin and advanced in holiness, isn’t it the observance of the Rules that has brought all that about? If the Company, by the mercy of God, is doing some good on the missions and for the ordinands, isn’t it again our Rules that are the cause of this? And without our Rules, how could we have done it? Oh, we have great reason then to observe them inviolably. And happy will the Company be if it’s faithful to them!

“Another motive why we should be exact in keeping our Rules is that they’re all drawn from the Gospel, as you’ll see, Messieurs, as you’ll see. All of them aim at conforming our lives to that which Our Lord led on earth. Our Lord came and was sent by His Father to evangelize poor persons. Pauperibus evangelizare misit me.6 Pauperibus, to the poor, Messieurs, to the poor, as, by the grace of God, the Little Company strives to do.

“An important reason for the Company to humble itself is that there’s never been one—for that’s unheard of—whose purpose was to do what Our Lord came into the world to do, namely, to announce the Good News to the poor alone, to the forsaken poor: Pauperibus evangelizare misit me. For that’s our purpose, you see, which God has been pleased to leave for a short while as a monument to the Company and a reminder to posterity.

“When the Queen heard of the lack of faith and of certain disorders prevalent in the town of Metz,7 even among the clergy, she decided, some time ago, to have a mission given there, and sent me word through two Prelates that I should go to see her about it. So, I

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6He sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor. Cf. Lk 4:18. (NAB)
7The mission of Metz was one of the most famous missions organized by Saint Vincent, both for the quality and number of missionaries who participated in it and for its excellent results. Bossuet did the preparatory work; Louis de Chandenier (Abbot of Tournus) directed it, aided by such collaborators as Omer de Champin, Nicolas Gédoy, Claude-Charles de Rochechouart de Chandenier (Abbot of Moutiers-Saint-Jean) and some fifteen other outstanding priests. From March 6 to May 22, 1658, the inhabitants of that ancient town in Lorraine flocked around the pulpit to hear the preachers.
went, and, when Her Majesty told me of her devout plan, and that she wanted the Company to go to Metz to give a Mission there, I replied, 'Madame, Your Majesty must not know that the poor Priests of the Mission are only for poor country people; however, we have another group of priests, who meet every Tuesday at Saint-Lazare and are well able, if Your Majesty has no objection, to carry out this ministry more worthily than we could.' In answer to this the Queen replied that, before this she hadn't realized that our Company didn't minister in the towns, that she'd be very sorry to cause us to act contrary to our Institute, and that she willingly consented to have the priests of the Tuesday Conferences give the mission in Metz. They did give it, by the grace of God, and were very successful. They're just now returning from it.

"So then, my dear confreres, poor persons are our portion, the poor; pauperibus evangelizare misit me. What happiness, Messieurs, what happiness! To do what Our Lord came from heaven to earth to do, and by means of which we'll go from earth to heaven to continue the work of God, who avoided the towns and went to the country to seek out those who were poor. That's what our Rules engage us to do, to help poor persons, our lords and masters. O poor but blessed Rules of the Mission that oblige us to serve them and to bypass the towns! You see—for that was unheard of—that those who observe them are blessed because they will conform their lives and all their actions to those of the Son of God. O Dieu! What a reason the Company has for observing its Rules faithfully: to do what the Son of God came into the world to do! That there should be a Company, and that it should be the Company of the Mission, composed of poor men, and that it should be entirely dedicated to that purpose, going here and there through hamlets and villages, leaving the towns behind—something that's never been done—and going to announce the Gospel only to persons who are poor; yet, those are our Rules!

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8The Tuesday Conferences (cf. XI, xvii, n. 11). The Superior of the Congregation of the Mission or his delegate directed these Conferences, which were attended by more than 250 priests during Saint Vincent's life. Similar conferences, modeled on those of Saint-Lazare, were organized in dioceses throughout France and Italy.
"But what are those Rules? Are they the ones the Company has had in its hands until now? Yes, they are, but it seemed advisable to explain them a little and to have them printed, so that each individual might have them in a more convenient form. We're going to distribute them to the Company this very evening. You've had a long wait for them, Messieurs, and we've delayed giving them to you for a long time, but for good reasons. First of all, to imitate the way Our Lord acted, who began to do before He began to teach: "caepit Jesus facere et docere." He practiced the virtues for the first thirty years of His life and used only the last three to preach and teach. So, the Company has tried to imitate Him, not only by doing what He came on earth to do, but also by doing it in the same way He did; for the Company can also say this, namely, that it acted first and then taught, "caepit facere et docere." It has been thirty-three years or so since God established it, and during that time we've always, by the grace of God, practiced the Rules we're now about to give you. So you won't find anything new in them, nothing but what you've been practicing for many years with great edification.

"Secondly, had we given the Rules first, it would have been difficult to avoid certain inconveniences that might have arisen from this, from which, by the grace of God, delaying has preserved us. If the Company were given Rules it hadn't practiced at all, it might have experienced some difficulty; but, by giving it something it has carried out and practiced for so many years in an edifying way, and which it didn't find difficult in the past, there's

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Translations of scripture quotations are usually taken from The New American Bible (NAB), unless a passage cannot be found in that edition or a more suitable rendering of the quote is found in the Douay-Rheims Bible (D-R B). Where there are variations in the numbering of the psalms in these two editions, both versions may be cited. Saint Vincent referred to Scripture innumerable times; occasionally he gives an incorrect rendition or attributes the passage to the wrong person. This edition does not give references for all the allusions, many of which are already familiar to the reader. For further study of Saint Vincent's use of Scripture, see the following studies: Warren Dicharry, C.M., "Saint Vincent and Sacred Scripture," Vincentian Heritage, VII, no. 2, 1989, 137-49; Maurice Vansteenkiste, C.M., "Les Règles Communes et la Bible, Citations explicites, implicites, et réminiscences," CD-ROM Documents vincentiens, Écrits et Images, Claude Lautissier, C.M., Paris 2002; and François Garnier, "Enchiridion Spirituale Sanctii Vincenti a Paulo, IV: Textes Bibliques Cités par Saint Vincent," Vincentiana, 23 (1979): 214-19, among others.
nothing in them that the Company shouldn’t find equally easy in the future. We’ve acted like the Rechabites mentioned in Holy Scripture, who, by tradition, kept the Rules their fathers had left them, even though they weren’t set down in writing. Now that we’ll have ours written out and printed, the Company will have only to keep on doing what it has been doing for many years and continue to do always what it has done and practiced until now.

“In the third place, Messieurs, if we had given the Rules right from the start, before the Company had put them into practice, there would have been reason to think that there was something more human than divine in this, and that it might have been a plan adopted and worked out in a human way rather than a work of God. But, Messieurs, I don’t know how all these Rules and all that you see done here came about, for I never thought of them; that was all introduced gradually, so that no one could say what brought it about. Now, it’s a principle of Saint Augustine that, when we can’t find the cause of a good thing, it must be brought back to God and acknowledge Him as its principle and author. According to this rule of Saint Augustine, isn’t God the author of all our Rules, which have all been introduced in some way of which I’m unaware, and in such a way that we can’t explain how or why?

“O Sauveur! What Rules! And where do they come from? Had I ever thought of them? Not at all! For, Messieurs, I never had a thought either of our Rules, or of the Company, or of the very term ‘Mission.’ God did all that; men had no part in it. As for myself, when I consider the means God was pleased to use in bringing the Company to birth in His Church, I confess that I don’t know where I am, and everything I see seems to be a dream. Oh! That’s not human; it’s from God. Would you call human what human understanding didn’t foresee and what the human will neither sought after nor desired in any way whatsoever? Poor M. Portail never

10Cf. Jer 35. (NAB) The Rechabites represented the conservative defenders of Israelite traditions, also exemplified by Elijah, Elisha, and Jehu. They did not drink wine, dwell in houses, sow, plant, or own vineyards, but lived in tents. Jeremiah praises them for their fidelity to their traditions.

11Antoine Portail (cf. XI, xv, n. 5).
thought of it; neither did I; it has all come about contrary to my every hope and without my ever thinking of it in any way. When I consider that and see the ministries of the Company, it truly seems like a dream to me, and I think I’m dreaming; I can’t explain it to you. It’s like the poor prophet Habakkuk, whom an angel grabbed by the hair of his head and carried off a great distance to console Daniel, who was in the lions’ den; then the angel brought him back to the place where he had seized him and, when the prophet saw himself in the same place from which he had set out, he thought he had dreamed all that.12

"Would you call the origin of our missions human? One day I was called to hear the confession of a poor man who was seriously ill. He had the reputation of being the most upright of men—or at least one of the most upright men—of his village. Yet, he was burdened with sins he had never dared to confess, as he himself afterward declared aloud in the presence of the late wife13 of the General of the Galleys. ‘Madame,’ he said, ‘I would have been damned had I not made a general confession, because of the serious sins I had never dared to confess.’ The man died shortly afterward and the said Lady, realizing the necessity of general confessions, wanted me to preach a sermon on this subject the next day. I did so, and God blessed it so much that all the inhabitants of the place made a general confession. There was such a throng of people that I had to send for two Jesuit Fathers to come to help me hear confessions, preach, and catechize. This led to doing the same thing for several years in the other parishes on the estates of the said Lady. In the end she wanted to maintain some priests to continue these missions, and, for this purpose, obtained for us the Collège des Bons-Enfants,14 where M. Portail and myself went to live, taking with us a good priest to whom we paid fifty écus15 a year. The three of us used to go

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12Cf. Dn 14:31-39. (NAB)
13Françoise-Marguerite de Silly, Madame de Gondi (cf. XI, 3, n. 2)
14The Collège des Bons-Enfants (cf. XI, xiii, n. 1)
15Throughout this edition the various denominations of money have been left in French, since no adequate, unchanging value in American dollars can be assigned. In the time of Saint Vincent, one écu equaled three livres; one thousand livres could support two priests and a Brother for one year on the missions (cf. V, 485).
off to preach and give missions from village to village. When we were leaving, we’d give the key to one of the neighbors, or ask him to sleep in the house at night. However, everywhere I went I had only one sermon, which I adapted in a thousand different ways: it was on the fear of God.

“That’s what we used to do; God, meanwhile, was doing what He had foreseen from all eternity. He gave a certain success to our works, which, when some good priests saw it, they joined us and asked to stay with us. O Sauveur! O Sauveur! Who could ever have imagined that this would reach its present state? If anyone had said that to me then, I would have thought he was making fun of me; yet, that was the way God was pleased to give a beginning to what you now see. Eh bien, my dear confreres, would you call human something no one had ever intended? For neither I, nor poor M. Portail ever thought of it. Ah, we never thought of it! It was very far from our minds!

“Had we ever imagined the ministries the Company now has, with the ordinands, for example, who are the richest and most precious deposit the Church could entrust to us? That had never entered our minds. Did we ever think of the Confraternity of Charity? How did we happen to undertake the rescue of poor foundlings? I don’t know how all this came about; for my part, I couldn’t tell you. M. Portail over there can attest that nothing was further from our thoughts than all that.

“And how were the Community practices introduced? In the same way; little by little, and I couldn’t tell you how. The conferences, for instance—of which this may be perhaps the last I’ll give you—we never thought of them. And Repetition of Prayer, something that was as yet unheard of in the Church of God, but which has since been introduced into several well-regulated Communities, where it’s now practiced successfully. How did the thought of it occur to us? I have no idea. How did the thought of all the other exercises and ministries of the Community occur to us? Again, I haven’t the slightest idea.

16Repetition of Prayer (cf. XI, xiii, n. 3).
“That happened gradually, almost on its own, one thing after another. The number of those who joined us increased, everyone worked at acquiring virtue, and, as the numbers grew from one day to another, good practices were introduced to help us to live closely united and to assure uniformity in our ministries. Those practices have always been observed and, by the grace of God, are still observed today.

“Finally, it seemed advisable to us to set them down in writing and to formulate them into Rules, and these are the Rules we’re now going to distribute to the Company. Now, there are two kinds of Rules, Messieurs: the first are particular ones for the Superior, the Assistant, and the other Officers and are to be given only to those in office, as is done in all well-regulated Communities. There are others that apply to everyone—priests, seminarians, and coadjutor Brothers. These are the ones we’ve had printed and are going to give you. I hope, Messieurs, that, as the Company has always observed them loyally and sincerely, I hope, I repeat, that it will accept them, now that we’ve gathered them together, with the same good faith, sincerity, and simplicity, not considering them as coming from men but from God and emanating from His Spirit, a quo bona cuncta procedunt,\(^\text{17}\) and without which non sumus sufficientes cogitare aliquid ex nobis.\(^\text{18}\)

“O mon Sauveur! O Messieurs! Am I asleep? Am I dreaming? For me to give Rules! I don’t know how we’ve reached that point; I can’t conceive how it happened; it always seems to me as if I’m still at the beginning. The more I think about it, the further it seems to me from human invention, and the clearer I see that it’s God alone who has inspired the Company with them, yes, Messieurs, inspired the Company. For, if I’ve contributed anything to them, I’m afraid it’s that little bit which keeps them from being well observed and from producing all the good they might have done. What now remains, Messieurs, but to imitate Moses who, when he had given God’s law to the people, promised all those who would observe it

\(^{17}\text{From whom all good things come. Cf. Jas 1:17. (NAB)}\)

\(^{18}\text{We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves. Cf. 2 Cor 3:5. (NAB)}\)
every manner of blessings in their bodies, in their possessions, and in all things! So, my dear confreres, we should hope for all kinds of benefits and blessings from God's goodness for all who will observe faithfully the Rules He's given us: a blessing on their persons, a blessing in what they undertake, a blessing on everything they do, a blessing on their comings and goings, in short, God's blessing on all that concerns them.

"But also, just as Moses threatened with the vengeance and curse of God all those who wouldn't keep His holy Commandments, there's reason to fear—great reason to fear—that those who would not observe these Rules, with which God inspired the Company, may bring God's curse on themselves; a curse on their bodies and souls, a curse on all their plans and enterprises, in a word, a curse on all that concerns them.

"But I have confidence in the grace of God and in your goodness, Messieurs, that all of you, on this occasion, will renew the fidelity with which you observed them even before they were written, and that the man whose exact observance stood at level three will henceforth go to level four and the man who was at four will, in the future, be at five or six. In short, Messieurs, I hope that your past fidelity in keeping these Rules, and your patience in waiting so long for them, will obtain for you from the goodness of God the grace to observe them with even greater ease in the future."

He asked that the Rule books be brought to him and continued as follows:

"O Lord, You who have blessed so abundantly certain books—for example, the one now being read at table—19—with the result that souls who are well prepared are drawing great benefit from them in ridding themselves of their faults and advancing in holiness, give Your blessing to this, Lord, and please accompany it with the anointing of Your Spirit, so that it may produce in the souls of all who read it separation from sin, detachment from the world and all its vanities, and union with You."

19The copyist notes that this was The Practice of Perfection and of Christian Virtues (Seville, 1609), written by Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J. (1538-1616).
Then he said that he was going to distribute the books only to the senior priests, but would give them to the students the following day, and that there would be one or two copies in the seminary for common usage, so that everyone would be able to read them. Since the coadjutor Brothers don't understand Latin, the Rules would be printed in French for them and would be given to them as well. Then he asked the senior priests to come up to get their copies, saying that, if he were able, he'd spare them this trouble and would bring a copy to each one at his place. He concluded as follows:

"Come, M. Portail, come on, you who have always put up with my infirmities; may God bless you!"

Next, he gave them to MM. Alméras, Bécu, and Gicquel, who were nearest to him on either side, and said that the others should come up in the order in which they were seated. Each man received them kneeling, with great devotion, kissing respectfully the book and M. Vincent's hand, and then the floor. While they were doing this, M. Vincent said a word or two to each, such as "Come, Monsieur; God bless you!"

When the distribution was finished, M. Alméras knelt down and asked for his blessing in the name of the whole Company, who also knelt down. Following this, M. Vincent himself went on his knees and added the following words:

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20 René Alméras the younger (cf. XI, xxii, n. 17), was First Assistant to Saint Vincent. When the latter had the Rules sent to those living outside of Paris, Fr. Alméras sent an accompanying circular letter of explanation. A copy of this letter, written in Italian, is preserved in the Archives of the Province of Turin (Italy). From the contents of other writings of Saint Vincent, it is possible to assign a date to it between July 30 and October 2, 1658.

Jean Bécu, born in Braches (Somme) on April 24, 1592, was ordained a priest in September 1616 and came to join the first companions of Saint Vincent in September 1626. Two of his brothers, Benoît and Hubert, followed him into the Congregation, the latter as a coadjutor Brother; two of his sisters, Marie and Madeleine, became Daughters of Charity. Bécu was Superior of the house in Toul (1642-46) and spent the rest of his life in Paris. He died on January 19, 1664, having been Vice-Visitor, then Visitor, of the Province of France. (Cf. Notices, Vol I, pp. 125-33.)

Jean Gicquel, born in Miniac (Ille-et-Vilaine) on December 24, 1617, was ordained a priest during Lent of 1642, entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 5, 1647, and took his vows on May 6, 1651. He was Superior of the Le Mans Seminary (1651-54) and at Saint-Lazare (1655-60), and was Director of the Daughters of Charity (1668-72). Gicquel wrote an interesting diary of Saint Vincent's final days (cf. XIIIa, 191-208), which is preserved in the Archives of the Mission, Paris. He died in 1672.
"O Lord, You are eternal law and unchanging reason and govern the whole universe by Your infinite wisdom. From You all the governance of creatures and all the laws of good living have emanated, as from their living source; may You be pleased to bless those to whom You’ve given these Rules and who have received them as coming from You; give them, Lord, the grace necessary to observe them always and inviolably until death. In this hope and in Your name, I, a wretched sinner, will say the words of blessing: *Benedictio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi descendat super vos et maneat semper, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*"

When he had finished that, he began the prayer *Sancta Maria*, etc., and then the Company left.

These words of M. Vincent were given in a moderate, humble, gentle, and devout tone of voice, and in such a way as to make the hearts of all those who were listening to him sense the paternal affection of his own heart. It seemed to all those listening that they were with the Apostles, listening to Our Lord speak, especially at that last sermon He gave them before His Passion, when He also gave them His rules in giving them the commandment of love and charity. *Mandatum novum do vobis; hoc est praeceptum meum ut diligatis invicem, sicut dilexi vos.*

Several men couldn’t hold back their tears, and all experienced in their souls various sentiments of joy at what they were seeing and hearing, of love of their vocation, of a renewed desire to advance in virtue, and a firm resolution to be faithful in the observance of their Rules. And, had it been permitted, each would have said that very evening what some were saying to one another, especially these words of the Gospels of Saint Luke and Saint Matthew: *Beati oculi qui vident quae vos videtis,* et *aures vestrae, quia audiant:* Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, and blessed are the ears that hear it!

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21*I give you a new commandment: This is my teaching. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.* Jn 13:34. (NAB)

22*Cf. Lk 10:23.* (NAB)

23*Cf. Mt 13:16.* (NAB)
181. - REPETITION OF PRAYER  

[1658]\(^2\)

"God bless you, my dear confrere! You do well to pray that God will give us good Bishops, good Pastors, and good priests, and all of us should ask Him for this. As the Pastors are, so will the people be. The success or failure of a war is attributed to the officers of an army; and we can even say that, if the Church's ministers are good and do their duty, all will go well; but if, on the contrary, they don't, they're the cause of all disorders.

"In the state we've embraced, we've all been called by God to work on a masterpiece; for, if there's a masterpiece in this world, it's the formation of good priests; nothing greater, nothing more important can be conceived. Even our Brothers can contribute to this by their good example and their exterior work; they can do their duty with the intention that God may be pleased to give His Spirit to the ordinands. Each of the others can do the same, and all must make an effort to edify them well; if it were possible to foresee their inclinations and desires, we should anticipate them in order to satisfy them as far as is reasonably possible. In a word, those who will have the happiness of speaking with them and of being at their conferences should raise their hearts to God when they're talking to them, in order to receive from Him what they have to say to them. Because God is an inexhaustible source of wisdom, light, and love, it's from Him that we must draw what we say to others; we have to efface our own spirit and personal feelings to give place to the operations of grace, which alone enlighten and enkindle hearts; we must set ourselves aside in order to be in communion with God; we must consult Him to learn His language, and ask that He himself speak in us and through us; then He'll be doing His own work, and we won't spoil anything. When Our Lord conversed with people,
He didn’t speak in His own name. ‘My knowledge,’ He said, ‘doesn’t come from me but from my Father; the words I speak to you aren’t mine but are from God.’ That shows us how much we should have recourse to God so that it’s not we who are speaking and acting, but God. It could perhaps be that, if God is pleased that we have some good results, it will be due to the prayers of a Brother who won’t even be in contact with these men; he’ll be engaged in his ordinary duties and, while working, will often raise his heart to God to ask Him to be pleased to bless the ordination retreat; and, perhaps also, without his ever thinking of it, God will do the good he desires, because of the good dispositions of his heart. It’s said in the Psalms: Desiderium pauperum exaudivit Dominus.’

M. Vincent paused here because he couldn’t remember the rest of the verse, and asked, “How does the rest of the verse go?” So, his Assistant completed it, saying, “Praeparationem cordis eorum audivit auris tua.”

“God bless you, Monsieur,” said M. Vincent, with a great sentiment of joy at seeing the beauty of that passage, which he repeated several times with devout and touching emotion in order to instill this in his children. “What a marvelous way of speaking,” he added, “worthy of the Holy Spirit! The Lord has granted the desire of the poor, He has heard the preparation of their hearts to show us that God hears souls that are well disposed, even before they pray to Him. That’s very consoling, and we should certainly encourage one another in God’s service, even though we may see in ourselves only wretchedness and poverty. Do you remember that beautiful reading we had at table yesterday? It was telling us that God conceals from the humble the treasures of grace He’s placed in them. And a few days ago one of our men was asking me what simplicity was. He doesn’t know what this virtue is, and yet he has it. He doesn’t think he has it, but he is, nevertheless, one of the most candid men in the Company.

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3Cf. Jn 14:10. (NAB)
4The Lord has heard the desire of the poor. Cf. Ps 10:17. (NAB)
5Your ear has heard the preparation of their heart. Ibid.
“A few men told me that, when they went to work in a place where there are many priests, they discovered that almost all of them are useless. They read their Breviary and celebrate Mass, but they do it very poorly; some of them administer the Sacraments after a fashion, and that’s all. But the worst of it is that they’re living a life of disorder and vice. If God were pleased to make us truly interior and recollected, we might be able to hope that God would make use of us, weak as we are, to do some good, not only with regard to the common people, but also and principally with regard to priests. Even if you never said a word, if you’re really united with God, you’ll touch hearts by your mere presence. The Chandeniers⁶ and those other priests who just gave a very successful mission in Metz in Lorraine, used to walk two by two, wearing their surplices, from the place where they were staying to the church, and from the church back to their house, without saying a word and in such great recollection that those who saw them admired their reserve, having never seen anything like it. Their reserve, therefore, was a silent sermon; but I’ve been told that it was so efficacious that perhaps it contributed as much, or even more, to the success of the mission than anything else did. What the eye sees affects us much more than what the ear hears, and we believe in a good that we see rather than in one we hear. And, although faith may enter by the ear, fides ex auditu,² nevertheless the virtues we see practiced make a greater impression on us than the ones we’re taught.

“All physical objects have their different characteristics by which they’re distinguished one from another. Every animal, and human beings themselves, has its distinctive quality causing it to be known for what it actually is and differentiating it from another spe-

⁶Louis de Rochechouart de Chandenier (cf. XI, 157, n. 11) and Claude-Charles de Rochechouart de Chandenier.

Claude-Charles de Rochechouart de Chandenier, Abbot of Moutiers-Saint-Jean, was, like his brother Louis, remarkable for his virtue, especially his humility. After the death of their uncle, François Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld (1645), the two brothers went to live at Saint-Sulpice Seminary, which they left in 1653 for Saint-Lazare. Claude-Charles died on May 17, 1710. François Watel, Superior General at the time, announced his death to his priests and recommended him to their prayers. The long, beautiful epitaph placed on his tomb is found in Collet, La vie de St Vincent de Paul (2 vols., Nancy: A. Leseure, 1748), I, pp. 584-88.

cies of the same genus. Likewise, God’s servants have their characteristics which distinguish them from carnal persons: a humble, recollected, and devout exterior manner and bearing, which stems from the grace within them and produces its effects in the souls of those who regard them. There are persons here in this house so filled with God that I never look at them without being touched. Artists, in their pictures of the saints, represent them surrounded by rays because the just who live a holy life on earth diffuse a certain light around them that’s characteristic only of themselves. There was so much grace and modesty apparent in the Blessed Virgin that she inspired with reverence and devotion those who had the happiness of seeing her. This was even more apparent in Our Lord and holds true, in due proportion, of the saints.

“All that shows us, my dear confreres, that if you work at acquiring virtue and fill yourselves with divine things, and if each individual strives continually for holiness, even if you have no exterior talent that may be beneficial to those ordinands, God will see that your very presence will bring light to their understanding and warmth to their wills to make them better men. May God be pleased to grant us this grace! This is so difficult and lofty a work that God alone can bring about any progress in it. That’s why we have to ask Him constantly to bless the modest services we’ll be trying to render the ordinands and the words we say to them. Saint Teresa8 who saw, in her own day, the Church’s need of good workers, used to ask God to be pleased to make good priests, and she wanted the Sisters of her Order to pray frequently for that. Perhaps the change for the better that is found at present in the priestly state is due in part to the devotion of this great saint, for God has always made use of weak instruments for great plans. When He instituted His Church, didn’t He choose poor, ignorant, rustic men? Nevertheless, it was through them that Our Lord overthrew idolatry, subjected Princes and the powerful ones of this world to His Church, and extended our holy religion throughout the world. He can also make use of us, weak as we are, to assist the priestly state to advance in

8Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-82), who reformed the Carmelite Order.
virtue. In the name of Our Lord, my dear confreres, let’s give ourselves to Him that we may all contribute to this by our services, good example, prayers, and mortification.”

182. - DETACHMENT FROM THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD

June 8, 1658

The conference was on detachment from earthly things and had three points: first, the reasons why the Company should detach itself entirely from earthly things; second, from what things in particular Missioners should detach themselves; and third, the means of detaching ourselves so that we may live, from now on, only in and for God.

This conference was the second on the same topic. After a few men of the Company, both Brothers and priests, had spoken, M. Vincent concluded this topic, saying that “one of the motives the Company had for giving itself entirely to God and detaching itself from all earthly things—from attachment to goods, honors, and conveniences—is that, without this detachment, it will never do much or be capable of rendering any great service to God. The Apostles left everything when it was a question of following Our Lord; we, too, have given ourselves to God to follow Him, even having taken vows for this, because, by the vow of chastity we’ve promised God to renounce the pleasures of body and mind; by the vow of poverty, the goods and conveniences of this life and the gold, silver, and riches of this earth; and by that of obedience, honors, high positions, and worldly praises. These three vows, namely, chastity, poverty, and obedience, aim at destroying, and are opposed to, the three vices that reign in the world, of which Saint John speaks, namely, concupiscence of the flesh, the pride of life, and covetous-

Conference 182. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 69.

1In Appendix 2 of this volume, Topics treated in the Conferences at Saint-Lazare (1650-60), mention is made of a conference on “Detachment from the Things of This World,” given on May 31, 1658, but no text for it is available.
ness of the eyes. Another motive that occurred to me, and which should incline us to that, has just been mentioned by the man who spoke last, so I won't repeat it.

"Second point: What is this detachment, and from what things should Missioners be particularly detached? It's good to explain this for the sake of our coadjutor Brothers. It means to have no inclination for, or attachment to, any of those things we've just mentioned, with regard to ourselves and our senses, avoiding anything that tends toward impurity either of mind or body; not to pamper ourselves so much; not to be so easy on ourselves or so weak as not to be able to endure the lack of anything, either in food or drink. We want good bread, good wine, fine clothes—I repeat, fine clothes—to be well fitted out and to want for nothing. Messieurs. Shall I call you Messieurs? Or shall I say brothers? Or sus, I told you recently that, in the future, I'd only call you brothers, and here I am calling you Messieurs; that word slipped out; maybe it will escape me again; be that as it may, my intention, however, is always to call you brothers from now on; that's the term Our Lord used with His Apostles.

"Now, to go back to where we were, I say then that you should know that there was someone among us who was so contemptible as to refuse to accept a certain article of clothing, a cassock he was given, because he didn't like it. Isn't that strange? Quoi! To refuse what someone offers you and to say, 'I don't want it; it doesn't please me!' Now I ask you, to what is a person reduced when he's reached a stage like that? Is that practicing the virtue of poverty? Quoi! Instead of being glad to find an opportunity of practicing an act of virtue, he does just the opposite! O brothers! O brothers! What reason we have to fear God's punishments if we don't improve!

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2 These are expressed in the New American Bible as "sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life." Cf. 1 Jn 2:16. (NAB)

3 Saint Vincent uses the term Monsieur (Messieurs in the plural) when speaking of or to a Priest of the Mission. He refers to the clerical students, coadjutor Brothers, and the generic confrere, all of them members of the Congregation, as confreres or brothers. The context usually helps us to know in which sense he is using the term brother.
“Wretched man, vile person that I am, to make use of an infamy! A beggar, a swineherd, riding in a carriage! Oh, what a scandal! Savior of my soul, forgive me! Consider for a moment the miserable state into which God has allowed me to fall, that I’m obliged to use a carriage, since I can’t get around otherwise.

“Well, to go back to where we were, I say that, when we have something to say to women, we should cut short the conversation; when we have to discuss anything with them, it should always be in a place where people can see us. If it’s in the parlor, keep the door open; in fact, it’s wise not even to use the parlor. I have to tell you that there’s an individual among us who, as soon as he’s told that a woman is asking for him at the door, immediately goes off and plants himself in this little parlor. Once he’s there, he closes the door halfway and often stays there for a rather long time. Now, brothers, let’s avoid these frequent, useless appointments with women; let’s talk to them only when necessary. I’m well aware that we’re sometimes obliged to discuss matters with persons of their sex, but let’s do it only when necessary; furthermore, this should be kept short, giving them, however, the time they need to tell us what they have to propose to us. Take those poor Daughters of Charity; I certainly have to discuss matters with them in order to take care of what has to be done. Because of my infirmities, I can’t remain standing, so I have to go and sit down in the parlor.

“Just consider for a moment whether the establishment of those poor Sisters isn’t a work of God. I’ve received three or four letters this week from various places in the kingdom asking me for those poor Sisters. The Duchesse d’Aiguillon is writing to me for some

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4The “infamy” Saint Vincent here mentions is the carriage he is obliged to use—a cause of shame and embarrassment to him.
5Marie de Vignerod de Pontcourlay, Duchesse d’Aiguillon, was born in the Château de Glenay near Bressuire in 1604, the daughter of René de Vignerod and Françoise de Richelieu, eldest sister of the great Cardinal. She married the nephew of the Duc de Luynes, Antoine de Beauvoir de Grimoard de Roure, chevalier, Seigneur de Combalet, whom she had never seen and did not love. During the two years of the marriage, the couple lived together only six months. The Marquis de Combalet, kept away from home by the war, died at the siege of Montpellier on September 3, 1622. His wife, widowed at the age of eighteen, left the Court and entered the Carmelite convent in Paris. After a year of novitiate, she received the habit from the hands of Fr. de Bérulle and took her first vows. Richelieu, who loved her dearly, did his utmost to bring her back to the Court. At his request the Pope forbade her to remain in the cloister, Marie de Médicis
for Havre de Grâce. On the other hand, the Queen⁶ is asking for some; she didn’t write herself but had a letter written to me by M. de Saint-Jean,⁷ one of her chaplains, to ask me to send some of them to assist the poor sick and wounded soldiers. The Bishop of Sarlat⁸ is also asking for Sisters for Cahors, since he wants to have some for a little hospital he established there a short time ago. Now, what’s that, my dear confères? Isn’t it a work of God? Quoi! poor, weak village girls, and most of them uncultured! And yet, see how they’re being asked for from all sides! Tomorrow I have to give them another conference on their Rules.

“Pride of life: to want to succeed everywhere, to choose newly-invented words, to seem brilliant in the pulpit, or in talks to the ordinands, and in catechetical instructions. And why? What are we looking for in all that? Do you want to know, brothers? It’s ourselves. We want people to talk about us, we’re looking for praise; we want it said that we’re a great success, are working wonders, we

chose her as lady of the bedchamber on January 1, 1625, and the King elevated her estate of Aiguillon to a duchy-peerage on January 1, 1638.

The Cardinal gave her a small mansion on rue de Vaugirard, one of the dependencies of the Petit Luxembourg Palace, where he lived. The Duchess made noble use of her immense wealth and great influence. She frequented and protected men of letters and took charge of all works of charity. She established the Priests of the Mission in Notre-Dame de la Rose and in Marseilles, entrusting them in the last-named place with the direction of a hospital she had built for sick galley convicts. The Richelieu and Rome houses subsisted on her generosity. She had the consulates of Algiers and Tunis given to the Congregation of the Mission. She contributed to the foundation of the General Hospital and of the Society of the Foreign Missions, took under her protection the Daughters of the Cross and the Daughters of Providence, and was a great benefactress of Carmel. She was President of the Confraternity of Charity at Saint-Sulpice, and replaced Mme de Lamoignon as President of the Ladies of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu. The Duchesse d’Aiguillon must be placed, along with Saint Louise de Marillac, Mme de Gondi, and Mme Goussault, in the first rank of Saint Vincent’s collaborators. No one perhaps gave him more; few were as attached to him. She watched over his health with maternal solicitude; the carriage and horses the saint used in his old age came from her stables. Saint Vincent’s death grieved her deeply. She had a silver-gilt reliquary made in the shape of a heart, surmounted by a flame, to enclose his heart. The Duchess died on April 17, 1675, at the age of seventy-one and was buried in the Carmelite habit. Bishops Bresacier and Fléchier preached her funeral oration. (Cf. Comte de Bonneau-Avenant, La duchesse d’Aiguillon [2nd ed., Paris: Didier, 1882].) Le Long mentions in his Bibliothèque historique de la France (Fontette ed., 5 vols., Paris: Hérissant, 1768-78), Vol. III, no. 30.854, a manuscript collection of her letters, which has since been lost. Any further mention in the text of “the Duchess” refers to her, unless a footnote indicates otherwise.

⁶Anne of Austria, Queen Regent of Louis XIV.
⁷Nicolas de Saint-Jean.
⁸Nicolas Sevin.
want to be exalted. That’s the point. Look at that monster, look at that ugly person! O human wretchedness! O cursed pride! How much trouble you cause! In short, that’s preaching ourselves and not Jesus Christ or souls.

“Today—this very afternoon—I listened to the talk the Bishop of Sarlat gave to the ordinands. When it was over, I was chatting with him and I said, ‘Excellency, you converted me today.’ ‘How is that, Monsieur?’ ‘Because,’ I said, ‘you said everything in such a plain, simple way that I was so touched by it I couldn’t help but praise God for it.’ ‘Ah, well, Monsieur,’ he replied, ‘I certainly could have said something more lofty, more polished, but I thought I’d be offending God if I did.’

“So,” said M. Vincent, “think about the view of this Prelate, brothers; you see, that’s how men who seek God and the salvation of souls act—quite plainly and simply. If that’s how you act, you see, God is, in a sense, obliged to bless what you say, to bless your words; God will be with you, He’ll act with you. Cum simplicibus sermocinatio ejus,9 God is with the simple and humble; He assists them, blesses their work, blesses their undertakings. Quoi! Are we to believe that God will help a person who’s trying to ruin himself? Quoi! That He’ll help a man ruin himself, as do those who preach other than humbly and simply, who preach themselves, etc.? Such a thought can’t even enter our mind! O brothers, my dear confreres, if you only knew how harmful it is to preach other than the way Our Lord Jesus Christ did here on earth, as the Apostles preached, and as many servants of God still do today, you’d be horrified!

“God knows that on three different occasions I went down on both knees at the feet of a member of the Company—he was one of us then but is so no longer. I did this on three consecutive days, begging him with hands joined to be good enough to preach simply and plainly and to say only what was in the notes that had been given him, but I could never get him to do this. He was giving a talk at the ordination retreat. You can see what this cursed attachment was and what a great hold it had on him! So God didn’t bless him; he had no

9His communication is with the simple. Cf. Prv 3:32. (D-RB)
success in his sermons and conferences; that whole pile of beautiful words and sentences went up in smoke.

“Simplicity, then, my dear confreres! Let’s preach Jesus Christ and souls; let’s say what we have to say simply, plainly, and humbly, but firmly and charitably; let’s not try to gratify ourselves but to please God, to win souls, and to dispose them to do penance, for everything else is only pride and vanity; yes, to act otherwise is nothing but pride—pure pride—you see, and some day God is going to punish those who have allowed themselves to be carried away by it.

“If the Mission should ever reach such a wretched state, we can say that it’s the end of it; it will be on the way to its destruction and will be left at that. For, please tell me, for example, what draws those gentlemen of the Sorbonne here for the ordination retreats? Nothing but the humility and simplicity with which, by the mercy of God, we strive to act and have striven to do so up to the present. Take the licentiate in theology who’s here now; what could have induced him to come? Is it to learn anything else but virtue? And as soon as they no longer see humility, simplicity, and charity sparkling in the Company, they’ll stop coming here because, as far as learning is concerned, they know much more than we do. Therefore, brothers, what we have to hope for, and to ask God for, is that He may be pleased to grant each member of the Company in particular, and the whole Company in general, the grace to act simply, humbly, and plainly, to preach the pure truth of the Gospel in the way Our Lord himself taught it, so that everyone may understand us and benefit from what we say.

“As for attachment to goods, such as, verbi gratia, to be delighted to have some money left over when we come back from a Mission, to keep some of it, and then to go to the Superior and say, ‘Monsieur, I have some money left over; may I buy a book or something else with it?’ now, brothers, that shows that we’re still attached to goods and conveniences. We mustn’t do that but, as soon as we get home, any money remaining should be given to the person

\[10\] For example
whose duty it is to keep it, namely, the Procurator of the house. In addition, we have to detach ourselves from what we have or from something that may be willed to us, free our spirit of all those things and have no attachment to them, or even to our relatives and friends; yes, my dear confreres, that’s what I’m saying, we have to detach ourselves from too great a love of relatives and friends and from their interests, etc. In short, whoever says ‘Missioner’ (I mean a true Missioner) says a man who has God alone in view, his own salvation and that of his neighbor, a man who has no other attachment than the one that unites him more closely to God.

“The means: First, to give ourselves wholeheartedly to God and to make a firm resolution, beginning right now, not to prize anything whatsoever in the future, to detach ourselves from any earthly thing that might hamper our progress in virtue and the holiness Our Lord asks of each of us in our vocation, but always to seek God purely and simply, and never ourselves or our own interests. Believe me, if the Little Company acts in this way, rest assured, brothers, that Our Lord will bless it and all that it does, and that this state is a good disposition for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

“Second, since tomorrow is the feast of Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Spirit came down upon the Blessed Virgin, the Apostles, and the other disciples gathered together, a good means for obtaining this detachment from ourselves and from all earthly things will be to unite ourselves in spirit with the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles and to pray fervently to God for a share in that same Holy Spirit. May the Divine Majesty be pleased to grant us this grace!”
"Regarding what has just been said about the gift of tongues, I think it will be well for us today to ask God for the grace, for those who will be sent to far-off countries, to learn foreign languages well, because, since the Divine Majesty has been pleased to raise up this Little Company to do, throughout the world, a little of what the Apostles did, we need to share with them this gift of tongues, so necessary for teaching the people the doctrines of our faith. For, if faith enters by hearing, as Saint Paul says, \textit{fides ex auditu},\textsuperscript{2} those who announce it have to make themselves understood by those on whom they want to shed this divine light. Now, there’s a very great diversity of languages, not only in Europe, Africa, and Asia, but even in Canada; for we see in the \textit{Relations}\textsuperscript{3} of the Jesuit Fathers that there are as many languages as there are tribes. The Hurons don’t speak like the Iroquois, or the latter like their neighbors, and a person who understands one group can’t understand the others.

"With such differences of language, how can missionaries go throughout the world to proclaim the Good News if they know only their own language? And how can they learn other languages if they don’t ask God to teach them, and apply themselves to studying them? What’s the meaning of the word ‘missionary’? It means a person who is sent. Yes, brothers, ‘missionary’ means a person sent by God, and it’s to you Our Lord has said, \textit{Euntes in mundum universum, praedicate Evangelium omni creaturae}.\textsuperscript{4} For that purpose, He wants you to be able to understand the necessary languages. God never calls a man to a state of life without seeing that he has the requisite qualities for it, or at least without intending to

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Conference 183. - Archives of the Priests of the Mission, Provincial House, Krakow.
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\textsuperscript{1}Subheading: The Gift of Tongues.  
\textsuperscript{2}Faith through hearing. Cf. Rom 10:17. (NAB)  
\textsuperscript{3}Name given to the annual report (1632-72) of the mission of New France, addressed by the Jesuit Superior of Quebec (Canada) to the Provincial of Paris, who had it printed for public circulation.  
\textsuperscript{4}Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation. Cf. Mk 16:15. (NAB)
give them to him. Therefore, my dear confreres, let’s hope that if He’s pleased to call you to distant lands, He’ll give you the grace to learn the language. Put your trust in Him; He doesn’t will the end without the means; and if He asks you for the one, He’ll give you the other.

“At any moment now I expect word from Poland with instructions to send men there for an establishment that a good priest of that country is procuring for us in Krakow. We have M. Ozenne there, and he speaks a little Polish; M. Desdames, who speaks it well; and also M. Duperroy; but the others we’re about to send won’t know a single word; should we on that account not send them? Oh no, no, no! But they must be determined to study the language carefully and patiently, and so should others who may be sent elsewhere.

“First of all, you learn the nouns and then the verbs, which are the actions. You begin with the principal things, the sky, the earth, etc., and gradually you become capable of serving God everywhere. How do you think the Jesuit Fathers have done so much work in Japan and other foreign countries, for they didn’t know the language right away? They took the trouble to study it well, and you’ll do well, brothers, to offer yourselves to God not only to go abroad, like those great men, to make Jesus Christ known and loved, but also to apply yourselves to learn the language well once you get there, without being put off by the difficulties, because that’s the point at issue. There are some who imagine, when they’re there, that they’ll never succeed. They grow discouraged after a few attempts and, instead of praying and trusting in God to make progress, rather than waiting patiently for this favor from His Goodness, they lose their desire to continue, convince themselves that they’re suitable only for their own country, and are tempted to go back.

“Let’s ask the Holy Spirit, my dear confreres, through the intercession of that holy assembly, which today received the gift of tongues, to give that grace to the Company, since it’s called to the

5Charles Ozenne (cf. XI, 323, n. 3).
6Guillaume Desdames (cf. XI, 323, n. 4).
7Nicolas Duperroy (cf. XI, 323, n. 4).
same ministry. Let’s all pray fervently for this, joining our intentions and prayers for that purpose; but let’s entrust ourselves, my dear confreres, let’s entrust ourselves to His infinite Goodness, which honors some by selecting them for foreign lands, that God will give them the grace of tongues. But let them rely on God’s goodness and await God’s hour in peace; and let them use their time well to acquire the knowledge and use of languages. Let our coadjutor Brothers pray for this also because, even though they’re not called to preach to the peoples, they give the priests the means of instructing and saving them.”

184. - THE GOOD USE OF INFIRMITIES

June 28, 1658

Our Most Honored Father M. Vincent arrived for this conference a little late, namely, half an hour after it had begun. When one of the priests of the Company had finished speaking, he concluded it in this way: first of all, he greeted the Company in his usual manner, by raising his biretta, and then said, “I’ve missed a lot by not being present at the first conference on this subject, held a week ago, and also by not arriving at the beginning of this one. What has just been said seems very good to me, and I must try to profit by it.

“One motive that should induce us and the whole Company to make good use of, and to conduct ourselves well during, the infirmities occurring here on earth is that we should regard all that as coming to us from God—or which He allows to befall us: life, death, sickness, health—all these things happen according to the order of Divine Providence, regardless of how they come about, and are always for our good and our salvation. I’ve already said this many times, and I can’t help repeating it once more now, namely, that we should be of the opinion that those suffering from illness in the Company are the blessing of the Company and the house, and that

Conference 184. - Repetitions of Prayer. MS. f° 72.
we should consider this to be all the more true since Our Lord Jesus Christ loved that state of suffering, through which He himself willed to pass and became man in order to suffer. The saints passed through it, and the ones to whom God didn’t send illness into their lives sought to afflict their own body by way of punishment. Witness Saint Paul: *Castigo corpus meum et in servitutem redigo.*¹ And that’s what we who are in perfect health should do. *Castigo corpus meum,* chastise ourselves, afflict ourselves, in view of the sins we ourselves have committed, and of those committed in the world against His Divine Majesty. *Mais quoi!* We’re so weak and miserable that not only do we not chastise ourselves, but very often are even quite impatient in bearing with the state of sickness and distress in which God is pleased to place us, even though it’s for our own good. This is a fault committed by many of those whom God is pleased to afflict with illness and inconvenience.

“Another fault that’s committed, or may be committed, in the Company, is the great desire some have of wanting a change of place or house; to go here or there, to this house, to that province, or to their native region, on the pretext that the air there is better—or they seem to think it is. And what’s all that, my dear confrères? And what can we say of such persons except that they’re men attached to themselves, men with the spirit of little girls, men unwilling to endure anything? Shall I tell you that there’s a man like that in the Company, who’s asked for a change, to come here from a place a hundred leagues away, because of some minor inconvenience he has to put up with? And if we had been willing to believe him, he’d have gone to another place, one hundred fifty leagues from here, that appeals to him, where he thinks the air is better! Isn’t it strange to see persons like that, and so filled with self-love, in the Company! As if bodily infirmity was a state to be avoided, when it pleases Our Lord to place us in it! To run away from our own happiness! Yes, brothers, that’s running away from our own happiness, for the state of suffering is a state of happiness because it sanctifies souls.

¹i chastise my body and bring it into subjection. Cf. 1 Cor 9:27. (D-RB)
"I remember that good M. Pille, now deceased, was sanctified in this state. Yes, he was a saint, and we've always considered him a saint.

"Not many members of the Company knew him, except M. Portail and a few other seniors. About two years after that holy man was admitted into the Company, God was pleased to afflict him with an infirmity—it was lung disease—and he died from it. This was a man who received many graces from God! In a word, he's a saint; M. Pillé is a saint; he lived like a saint and died like a saint.

"Oh! how far removed from this changeable disposition was good M. Senaux. I can tell you, brothers, that, although he was ill almost constantly from the time he entered the Company, nevertheless I don't think he ever asked for a change of air because of it. No, M. Senaux never took up his pen to write a single word to ask for a change of house and air either in Normandy, where he was from, or anywhere else; yet, despite his condition, he never stopped working, doing as much as he was able, keeping and observing the Rules—yes, the Rules. I also have to say that, while he was in our little house in Troyes, it got on very well. After his death, the men who are still there were quick to acknowledge this, and wrote to me expressing their sorrow at the loss of this good servant of God, who, they said, had been an example of regularity when he was alive.

"Furthermore, there will perhaps be others who won't openly ask for a change of place, but will do so covertly through the doctor, to whom they'll give so many ifs and buts, so many reasons aimed at leading him to say it would be a good thing for them to have a change of air, or that they should go to their native place or somewhere else, that in the end he advises them to do it. And what do those men say then? 'The doctor says I should have a change of air.'

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2Jean Pillé, a priest of the Sens diocese, was received into the Congregation of the Mission around October 1631. He was Superior of the Collège des Bons-Enfants (1635-38) and died in Paris on October 7, 1642. Saint Vincent related his life and praised his virtues in a long circular letter (cf. II. 363-89). There is a copy of his will in Arch. Nat. M 211, file 1.

Note: He is speaking here of M. Senaux, who died in our Troyes house this year.

Nicolas Senaux, born in Auffay (Seine-Maritime) on May 9, 1619, entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 22, 1639, was ordained a priest on February 20, 1644, took his vows on March 23 of the same year, and died in Troyes on March 28, 1658. Saint Vincent also praised his regularity, resignation, and spirit of detachment in the letter of April 12, 1658 (cf. VII, 143).
“The remedies for this are to accept everything that happens as coming from the hand of God; and not to do so is a fault. One day a good Brother named Bro. Antoine—his portrait is hanging in this room—was asked. . . . He was a man who could neither read nor write and yet he was filled with the Spirit of God. Not many members of the Company who are here have met him, except M. Portail, who may have; but I knew him. He’s already been dead a long time. That good man called everyone his brother; if he was speaking to a woman, he called her my sister; even when he was speaking to the Queen, he used to call her his sister. In those days everyone wanted to see him. One day someone asked him, ‘Brother, what do you do when you get sick? How do you act with regard to illness? What use do you make of it?’ ‘I accept sickness as coming from God,’ he said. Then, since they were pressing him a little more on this point, he added, ‘You see, when I have an attack of fever, for example, I accept it this way, saying to it, “Or sus, Sister Sickness—or Sister Fever—you come from God; or sus, since that’s the case, you’re welcome.” ’

“That, my dear confreres, is how that holy man acted. That’s also how the servants of Our Lord, lovers of His Cross, are accustomed to act. This, however, doesn’t prevent people from being free—or even obliged—to use the temporal remedies prescribed for the relief and cure of each illness. To do so is to honor God himself, who created plants and gave a specific virtue to each one of them. But to be too easy on ourselves, to coddle ourselves for the slightest pain we have, Sauveur! that’s something we have to stop doing. Yes, we should banish such a spirit and not be so soft on ourselves.

“O wretched man that I am! What poor use have I not made of the sickness and of the minor inconveniences God has been pleased to send me! How many acts of impatience have I committed, wretch that I am, and what scandal have I not given to those who have seen me acting like that! Help me, brothers, to ask God’s forgiveness for having made such poor use of my little discomforts as I’ve done in the past, and for the grace to make good use in the future of those it may please His Divine Majesty to send me in my old age and in the little time I have left to live on earth.”

4Antoine Flandin-Maillet (cf. XI. 61, n. 1).
After several members of the Company had spoken, M. Vincent said in conclusion that he had been greatly edified by what was mentioned by those who had spoken on this topic. It was also very well said that mutual support is, in a Company, what nerves are in the human body. And, in fact, what's there to be seen but disorder in a house or Company in which mutual support doesn't prevail? “Our Lord,” he said, “put up with Saint Peter, who committed that despicable sin of denying his Master. And didn’t Our Lord also bear with Saint Paul? And where shall we find people so perfect and faultless as not to need to be borne with in some way? Furthermore, where shall we find any Superiors who are faultless and have no need of forbearance on certain occasions? Find me a single one. Let me go further and say that we are constituted in such a way that most often we have to bear with ourselves, so true it is that this virtue of support is necessary for everyone, even in order to practice it toward ourselves, whom we sometimes find hard to bear. Alas! What a wretched man I am to be talking about others! No one on earth has greater need of forbearance than I, wretched man! O Sauveur! How much I need the support of the Company!

“What is there in our brothers that requires our tolerance? We have to bear with them in everything, in all things, my dear confreres: putting up with their bad moods, their way of doing things and of acting, etc., which doesn’t please us or may offend us. Some persons are so perverse that everything annoys them, and they can’t stand the slightest thing that doesn’t go along with their own opinion or mood. How our good deceased foundress, the wife of the General of the Galleys, excelled in this practice of forbearance! She put up with everyone, no matter who it was. There was no one she wouldn’t excuse, sometimes alleging human weakness, then, at
other times, the wiles of the devil, natural hasty ness, a quick temper, and so on: people could rest assured—yes, everyone alive could be sure—that they had in this good lady someone who supported and defended them.

"The Blessed Bishop of Geneva used to say that he'd much rather subject himself to the will of a hundred persons than to subject one single person to his will. Where will we find two persons who look alike and who behave the same way? I'd like you to find me two of them; you won't find them, since God has willed that we should be that way, for the greater glory of His Divine Majesty; so, everyone, consequently, needs this virtue of mutual support, as much to bear with himself as to bear with others. Alas! wretched man that I am, talking about others, and yet there's no one who needs this virtue more than I, who can't tolerate anything and who, moreover, have such great need to be borne with in my faults!

Sometimes, in the evening, when I reflect on what has occupied my mind throughout the day, I find that it has been a thousand useless things and I don't know how many insignificant trifles, with the result that I have a hard time tolerating myself, and think I deserve to be hung at Montfaucon.3

"On this point, I'd also like to tell the Company something that was told to me yesterday, which shows me clearly how fragile we are, even to the extent that sometimes we can't bear the slightest thing that happens, and we need forbearance, even with regard to our closest friends. So then, I was told that two abbés—I know both of them, and one of them is a little fastidious about his food and drink—had always been very good friends, and, until that time, even lived together and took their meals together. It happened, however, that, when the coachman, or somebody else, was pouring the wine, one of them spilled a little of it. That offended the second gentleman—the one who was fussier—with the result that he started shout-

2Saint Francis de Sales.
3Montfaucon, situated at that time outside the walls of Paris, between La Villette and the Buttes-Chaumont, was the place where the corpses of executed criminals were hung on display as an example to others.
ing, saying, 'Was that done to annoy me?' Reflect for a moment on that man's disposition! He imagined that it was done to offend him. Shortly afterward, he cried out again, 'I won't stand for that.' The upshot was that, when the other abbé saw this, and that anything he might say to dissuade the other from thinking it had been done to annoy him was useless, he got up from the table and went to his room to weep. Now, my dear confrères, judge from this example what the human spirit is like, and to what it's subject, wanting one thing now; then, another; liking to do a certain thing now, then giving up doing it, unable to stand it any longer.

"Here's something else: for example, there are two people you've never met, yet, it happens often enough that you'll feel more inclined toward one than toward the other. How does that happen? It's because that's the way we're made. Or sus, my Savior, or sus, my Savior, please give us this virtue of mutual support!

"I think I should console the Company by saying that, by the mercy of God, the Company is very supportive, and all the members are very tolerant of one another. Things are going well, by the grace of Our Lord. I sometimes ask some of my fellow priests what they think of the Company. I asked one of them again not long ago, and he told me he thought things hadn't been this good for a long time. Why is that, do you think, if not that the men are very forbearing and respectful of one another? In short, things are going well, by the mercy of God, and we have to thank Him for that. You see, when I notice something good, I can't help mentioning it; just as, on the contrary, when I see something wrong, I can't refrain from mentioning that also, and from shouting at and reproving those who commit it and are the cause of it. But let's move on to the means.

"I think the first and only means, after that of asking God for this virtue of mutual support, is humility, brothers, humility, you see, humility, self-contempt, considering ourselves the most wretched of all, placing ourselves beneath everyone, never preferring ourselves to anyone, looking on everyone as superior to us, as Saint Paul says, being quite pleased to have others preferred to us, as Saint Paul says, being quite pleased to have others preferred to us, either on the missions, or elsewhere, in any ministry whatsoever; or that they succeed better than we do; and we accept that cheerfully for
love of Our Lord. Take my word for it, brothers, if you do, the Little Company will be a little paradise on earth; yes, the Saint-Lazare house will be a little paradise on earth. May God in His mercy grant us this grace!"

Then, M. Vincent went on his knees and said, “And because I, more than anyone else, need the Company’s forbearance on account of the many miseries of which I am conscious within myself, and for the many causes for disedification that I give to my confreres, especially those who look after me in my little infirmities, I ask you, brothers, to be kind enough to continue this same charity toward me and to forgive me for the past. The elderly, as David says, have great need of being supported, so please bear with me, brothers, and pray that I’ll improve.” Then he kissed the floor as usual, and the whole Company did likewise.

After that, M. Vincent recommended to the prayers of the Company M. Hopille, a Canon of Agen, who had died a few days before. He said he was a man who had always been kind and charitable toward the Missioners there and, when he died, had even left them his library. He asked the priests to celebrate Mass for the repose of the soul of that good departed man, and the Brothers to offer their next Holy Communion for him, at least as a second intention, if they couldn’t do otherwise.

186. - REPETITION OF PRAYER¹

August 4, 1658

When three or four members of the Company had finished their Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent advised the Company to ask God for zeal for the salvation of souls and the spirit and virtues necessary

¹Subheading: Return of Francis White, Missioner in Scotland; illness of Bro. Christophe Delaunay; death of two Daughters of Charity in Calais; words of praise for the Daughters of Charity.
to work for this. He then recommended that they thank God for the return of M. Le Blanc,² and for having preserved him and those who were with him from so many dangers.

“Our Bro. Christophe Delaunay,³ who remained in Saintes after his long journey, has fallen ill. I recommend to the prayers of the Company this good Brother, for whom the Captain of the ship from Ostend that captured them at sea showed such great affection; he loved and cherished him, delighted to have him with him during nearly the month they were at sea after the capture of the French ship by this man from Ostend.

“I also recommend the Daughters of Charity we sent to Calais to nurse the poor wounded soldiers. Of the four we sent there,⁴ two of them, the strongest and healthiest among them, have died. One of these, Sister Manceau,⁵ the niece of M. Manceau,⁶ Priest of the Company, was the Sister Servant; that is, the one who had the charge and care of the others. She was one of the strongest Sisters in that Little Company of Charity, yet she was the first to succumb beneath the weight of this heavy duty. Just picture that, Messieurs. Four poor Sisters in the midst of five or six hundred poor sick and wounded soldiers! Please consider for a moment the guidance and goodness of God in raising up such a Company in these days. And to do what? To assist the poor corporally, and even spiritually, saying a few good words to them, especially to the dying, to help them to prepare to die well. O Sauveur! O mon Sauveur! History makes no mention to us of there ever being such a Company of virgins—true, there are a few widows among them—who have given themselves to God in the way those poor Sisters do to nurse the sick

²Francis White [François Le Blanc] (cf. XI, 166, n. 1).
³Christophe Delaunay (cf. XI, 337, n. 5).
⁴Françoise Manceau, Marguerite Ménage, Marie Poulet, and Claude Muset. The hospitals in Calais were filled to overflowing with soldiers who were wounded at the battle of the Dunes or were victims of a serious epidemic. The disease the Sisters were coming to combat struck all four of them. The Queen had a memorial erected to the first two, who died of it.
⁵Françoise Manceau, a native of Laumesfeld (Moselle), entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity around 1643 and was in Chars in 1650. In June 1658 she was sent to Calais, where she died shortly after, a victim of her devotion.
⁶Nicolas Manceau, born on August 10, 1613, in Laumesfeld (Moselle), entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on November 30, 1646, took his vows in April 1651, and was ordained a priest in 1656.
and the wounded. For my part, I can't remember either having heard or read of any. God willed to wait until now to do this, at a time when He's allowing His Church to be greatly persecuted, afflicted, and almost eradicated in certain countries like England, Ireland, and Scotland; and God grant that this may not happen in Flanders! For, people say that Cromwell is beginning to take under his protection all those who are of an opinion contrary to the Catholic religion, making himself their advocate, etc.

"And who are the women who make up that Company? They're all poor village girls, poor servants, with the exception of one or two who are persons of a certain social condition. All the rest are of the class I just mentioned. Yet, we see how greatly God is blessing them, and how zealous they are for His glory and the assistance of their neighbor. And since the Company of the Mission—even though, if not totally imperfect, is at least lacking in many virtues—has a certain relationship with the Little Company of those poor Sisters, and Our Lord has willed to make use of the Mission to help to begin that of those poor Sisters, we have, therefore, a greater obligation to offer them to God, which I now ask the Company to do, and I thank Him for all the graces He's given them until now. We ask Him, in His infinite goodness, to continue the same graces and blessings on them in the future.

"The Queen has written to Mlle Le Gras and to me to send others to Calais to help those poor people, and we're going to do that. Four are leaving today for that purpose. One of those poor Sisters, who's about fifty years of age,
Hôtel-Dieu, where I happened to be, to say she had heard that two of her Sisters had died in Calais, and she was coming to volunteer to be sent in their place, if I agreed. ‘Sister,’ I said, ‘I’ll think it over.’ And yesterday she came here to find out what answer I had for her. See the great zeal of those poor Sisters, in volunteering like that, my dear confreres! Isn’t it wonderful how they offer themselves to go to risk their lives as victims, for the love of Jesus Christ and the good of their neighbor? As for me, I don’t know what to say about it except that those poor Sisters will be our judges on Judgment Day. Yes, brothers, those Sisters will be our judges at the Judgment seat of God, if we aren’t prepared, like them, to risk our lives for God. And, believe me, the man who hasn’t yet reached that stage is still a long way from holiness.

“O miserable man that I am, I, who do not feel disposed—or feel so little disposed—and attracted to this very high degree of virtue, how must I not fear, my dear confreres, how must I not fear! And how should the members of the Company who are in this same state not fear along with me, if they’re not in that disposition, a disposition which, you see, is one of the most excellent interior degrees we can have—yes, the most excellent! That’s why those who don’t find themselves in this state must constantly ask God to put them in it, that is, in the disposition of being ready and willing to give their lives for Jesus Christ. As for those to whom God has already given this grace, and who experience it interiorly, believe me, they should thank God fervently for it, and ask Him not to allow them to make themselves unworthy of it by any action that may displease Him.”

The conference held on Friday evening, August 23, on the subject of moderation in eating and drinking, was concluded by M. Vincent, who had begun it the previous Friday. “God be praised,” he said, “and may He grant us the grace to profit well from all that has just been said! The subject of this conference is the moderation we must practice in eating and in drinking, the reasons prompting us to do this, and the means the Company must use in order to avoid falling into self-indulgence. For the present, we’ll speak only about the moderation we must have with regard to wine; we’ll content ourselves with that point for now, since it’s the most dangerous step.

“Now, my dear confreres, one reason prompting us to practice this virtue of moderation very carefully concerns the great evils that result from the contrary, that is, from drinking to excess, for what disorders don’t arise from that? Alas, well do you know! A person who begins to drink, and to drink wine beyond what’s necessary, falls into an animal state—even worse than an animal and a creature lower than an animal. There’s no vice such persons aren’t capable of committing; furthermore, this vice of drunkenness is seldom or rarely a single vice but is always followed by another, greater one, especially that abominable and horrible vice of the flesh that the person commits either with himself or with others. O what a pitiable state! What is it, brothers, if not an animal state, living like a beast, following one’s inclination like an animal, like a horse, like a pig—yes, like a pig—and worse than animals? Animals follow their natural inclinations; but a man—and a man who’s drunk—doesn’t know what he’s doing. He’s worse than an animal because he has to be carried, he has to be held up and carried by the armpits; otherwise, he’d fall to the ground like a stone. . . .”

Conference 187. - Repetitions of Prayer, MS, f° 76 v°ff.

1The following text, as far as “Speaking of this,” etc. was omitted by Coste, although he had included a typed copy of it in his own book, without giving its source. It is probably in the
"'But, Monsieur,' someone may say to me, 'what you are saying is well and good to say to peasants and to people who fall into this vice; but what leads you to use that language for the Company of the Mission, which makes profession of virtue and of preaching against this vice?'

'Brothers, I'm telling you this because in the past God allowed there to be in the Company some men who slipped into this vice of drunkenness. And I'm telling you further that there's still someone in the Company now, who has also fallen into this misfortune recently. That's the second reason, and it should lead us to be on our guard against this same vice and to counteract its effect by the practice of the virtue that's opposed to it: temperance and moderation in drinking.'

"Quoi! There were Missioners who fell into that state!"

"Yes, there were."

"Quoi! You're saying that even now in this same Company, there are some who have slipped into that fault!"

"Yes, that's what I'm saying. And it happened just recently."

"Eh! But, Monsieur, eh quoi! Are you going to put up with that? Quoi! Aren't you expelling those men from the Company?"

"No, I'm not."

"Eh! But, Monsieur, quoi donc! What scandal you're allowing to happen! Quoi! Then what do you do to them?"

"I admonish them to correct themselves; I'm trying to get them to change their lives. If they don't, God won't allow them to stay any longer, and they'll leave of their own accord."

"But, Monsieur, do you have experience of what you're saying, that they can't remain in the Company and will be compelled to leave it of their own accord?"

"Yes, I do have experience of this, and it's like those dead bodies that are in the sea, which don't remain in it but are washed ashore. The same thing happens in the Company, which soon purges itself"
of such people when they’re found in it, since God can’t tolerate their being in it.

“Here are some of them: a certain priest of the Company left and went off to see a [Bishop] and said to him, ‘I’m a Missioner.’ ‘Yes, replied this [Prelate], you’re a Missioner. Fine! I’m pleased about that. Or sus, we’ll begin by giving you a certain parish to administer; then, after that, depending on how you succeed, we’ll see about giving you something more important.’

“That man wasn’t more than three weeks in that place when he began to let himself slip into that vice of drunkenness, and then got involved with women; for it usually leads to that. And yet, here we have a Missioner—or at least he calls himself a Missioner; and on that title alone he’s given a ministry—and see how he ends up in that pitiful state I just mentioned to you.

“I remember a certain priest, who came here to make his retreat, and who was from another Institute. He controlled himself fairly well during his retreat and asked to be admitted into the Company. We accepted him, and once he was in it, he also behaved himself for a few days, but, since his stomach was ruined because he was used to drinking a lot of wine—yes indeed—he soon made it apparent what he was. He was able to mend his ways a little, but, in the end, being unable to overcome himself with regard to this vice, which, however is very easy to do, he left.

“Another man comes to mind, who fell into that misfortune of becoming inebriated, but so much so that they had to hold him up by his arms because he kept falling from one side to the other. And since he was in the country, [?Company]2 people said, ‘Who is that?’ ‘It’s one of the Missioners.’ The local Pastor was asked to be so kind as to take him into his residence. He did this with great sorrow at seeing what he was seeing. The next day, he came back here. In the end, he had to leave, for how can we allow such men to stay who are fit only to do harm and to give scandal; for, I ask you, what use is a man who lets himself become intoxicated? And how will he be able to help the poor country people rid themselves of this

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2This word is difficult to read. Since Saint Vincent goes on to speak about the Pastor preaching to the country people, the word “country” might fit more easily into this context.
vice, if he himself isn’t free from it? Quoi! A Missioner goes and preaches to the poor people that they shouldn’t drink and can’t be cured, and that it’s a great sin; yet, he allows himself to fall into the same sin! Come now! Come now! That’s a mockery. He himself has to mend his ways, renounce that idolatry he has for his stomach, and correct himself; then, after he’s well grounded in the virtue contrary to this vice, he can go to preach to others.3

“Speaking of this, there’s a certain person in the Company who, when he presents his glass for wine, is dissatisfied if he’s not given much. ‘Pour it in, pour it in,’ he says to the server. I’ve warned him to correct this fault, but he still hasn’t done it. If he doesn’t, and doesn’t correct himself soon, we’ll have to use some other remedy, for that’s intolerable. So the Company of the Mission isn’t exempt from this vice, and God has allowed Satan to tempt us.

“‘But, Monsieur, why are you saying this in public? You’re really scandalizing the Company. Even if one or two confreres may be addicted to this vice, at least it would seem better to admonish them privately about it.’ My dear confreres, apart from the fact that Our Lord Jesus Christ himself acted in this way when He was on earth—as Saint Augustine also did, for he publicly admonished persons of the faults they had committed, so that those who had committed them might amend, and those who were listening might be on their guard against falling into them—it’s also, brothers, my reason for acting in the same way and mentioning in public the faults God has permitted some members of the Company to commit.

“Shall I also tell you, my dear confreres, that some ordinands have been greatly scandalized by two priests of the Company—yes, two priests—who showed very bad manners in the refectory by the way they ate and drank, pouncing on their food as if they wanted to devour everything all at once? In a word, they scandalized some of those ordinands so much that the latter felt bound to mention the matter to me in order to remedy it. Two Priests of the Mission behaving in such a way that, instead of edifying their neighbor, were a scandal to him! O my dear confreres! To what have we been reduced? And what a subject of shame and distress for the Company,

1In the margin: Note that he quoted in Latin a passage that mentions those whose gods are their stomachs: Quorum deus venter est. Cf. Phil 3:19 (NAB)
especially for those who have a high regard for moderation in eating and drinking!

"Of all the means to remedy this fault, so that it won’t happen again in the future, I think the first that seems appropriate to put into practice is that the Superior should sit at one end of the table and his Assistant or sub-Assistant at the other, so that the Superior can see what’s happening on one side of the refectory and the Assistant can also see what’s happening on the other. To do this, it will be necessary to divide the table in two at the lower end to provide a passageway.

"Another means we’ve considered is to reduce the quantity of wine; instead of the pint that’s given, to be satisfied with a half pint. Some Communities have only that much, and they manage quite well on it. Now, if other Communities are already doing this and get along fine with a half pint at each meal, couldn’t we do that, too? We’ll think about this means for a while longer before putting it into practice, for if, after trying other means, they’re found to be ineffective, we’ll really have to be reduced to that. So, we’ll have to think it over.

" ‘But, Monsieur,’ someone may say to me, ‘there are persons and there are persons; some can get along with a little wine, but there are also others who need more. As for me, who have a cold stomach, I need some to warm it up a little; otherwise, I have a hard time digesting meat, salad, etc.’ Brothers, it’s a mistake to think that the stomach needs wine to help it digest food. I used to think so myself at one time, wretch that I am, but M. Portail set me straight and showed me that it was an error. And I’ve found out and learned by experience that what he said was really true.

"On that subject, I’m going to tell our Brothers here who work in the pantry not to serve plates piled up with salad, as they do. They give one man enough for three or four people. Salad! Alas, older Communities don’t eat any at all! And if they don’t, couldn’t we also get along without it? Look at the Oratory. True, they have salad there. But how much do you think is given to each man? Oh, very little! I’d like you to see what they’re given there. You’d see clearly the difference between them and us. Should we be surprised at see-
ing many of the Company often not feeling well? No; and why? It's because too often their discomfort arises from eating and drinking too frequently. Some of them, for instance, eat breakfast, have their dinner, have something to eat in the afternoon, and then have supper. In the morning, they go to the refectory for breakfast. It isn't long from breakfast to dinner, so the poor stomach hasn't time for digestion. They go to dinner before the first process of digestion is finished and then, soon after, they add a snack to this. All that gives rise to vapors, which circulate and mount to the brain, and that's the cause of most of the headaches some of us have.

"A third means, which we've already thought about several times, is to appoint a Visitor, as is a practice with the Jesuits; that is, someone assigned by the Superior, whose duty is to oversee all that's going on in the house and in the refectory, to see if moderation is being well observed there, and if the men dilute their wine well. When he notices a fault, he tells the Superior about it; the latter prescribes a suitable penance, and then he publicly admonishes the person who committed the fault: 'In a spirit of humility and charity, I admonish M. X or Bro. Y, for committing such or such a fault, and he shall do such and such as a penance.' The man who sees himself admonished in this way kneels down at once and performs the prescribed penance. Now, that's what the Jesuit Fathers do, and you can see from it the great modesty and decorum there is among them. I think we'll have to do the same. We'll see if it's advisable to add this duty to those of the table prefects, or whether it will be necessary to create and establish another officer for that purpose, whose duty it will be to walk from one side of the refectory to the other to see if everyone is behaving modestly, if anybody is wolfing down his food in an unmannerly way, if everyone is diluting his wine appropriately, and so on. When he notices any fault, let him give an admonition, for, as a matter of fact, we really have to try to find some means of remedying the evil when we see it. We see that this custom is observed in certain Chapters and Cathedral churches. A person walks about the Choir to see if modesty is being observed, and if the chant is being sung properly; and if he discovers any fault, he calls attention to it.
“Fourth: Lastly, not to waste time listening to nature or compromising with our temperament, but accustom ourselves to diluting our wine so that the water is barely reddened. And, speaking of this, I ask our Brothers who serve at table not to give more than two or three fingers of wine to any individual at dinner. Believe me, my dear confreres, we see clearly that those seminarians who dilute their wine the most (for, by the grace of God, there are some who do, and do so properly, leaving no fault to be found in it), believe me, I repeat, they advance rapidly in holiness. As for me, I notice that those I see diluting their wine the most, I repeat that I see them going from virtue to virtue; this is obvious. And tell me this: did most of us drink wine before entering the Company? Certainly not—or at least very seldom. Well, what then? A little beer and, perhaps most frequently, water.4

"Or sus, God be praised and glorified for ever! We can add another means to all this, namely, to make our meditation tomorrow morning on this subject and begin to adopt the habit of diluting our wine well. However, tomorrow’s meditation will be on Saint Bartholomew, for tomorrow is the feast of that great Apostle. Nevertheless, it will fit in fairly well with this topic, for Saint Bartholomew was flayed alive. We’ll also begin to flay our own will and our taste for drinking wine without water. May God be pleased to grant us the grace to set to work at this in earnest!”

4In the margin: Note that most of the students and seminarians came from the Netherlands and from Picardy.
188. - AVAILABILITY FOR ANY MINISTRY ASSIGNMENT

[August 30, 1658]

"The first reason elderly people like myself, wretched man that I am, living with the discomforts of my old age, have for placing themselves in a state of availability with regard to ministry assignments—in the event that they’re not already in this state—is, my dear confreres, the glory given to God by the state of openness to God’s Will.

"The man who is not in this state of availability, but in the contrary one, is in a devilish state. In order to keep the vow of obedience we’ve taken, we must be in a state of openness to God’s Will regarding all things.

"Another motive is that anyone who isn’t in a state of availability regarding ministries, and isn’t ready to obey all sorts of Superiors who may be given him, is unfortunate.

"‘Oh, but I’m an old man!’ someone may say. You’re an old man! Eh bien! Should you on that account be less available, less virtuous?

"‘Oh, but I’m an educated man!’ Think about that a little. He’s an educated man! And because he’s educated, he doesn’t have to be available or ready and willing to do what the Superior or an Officer of the house will ask of him. Consider whether that objection is reasonable, and if it ought to come from the mouth of someone who professes to serve God.

"‘Oh, but he’s a holy man, Monsieur!’ I’m glad he’s a holy man. Quoi! Is that any reason why he should be exempt from doing what
will be asked of him, what he’ll be ordered to do, from obeying this Superior, who is, if you like, less perfect than he is, less educated and, if you like again, whose faults and failings are obvious? Once again, is that a valid reason? Most assuredly not. And that shouldn’t exempt him from availability regarding assignments: to go to the country, if he’s sent there; to stay at home, if that’s what’s desired of him; to direct a seminary or go to give a mission; to remain in this house or another; to go to foreign lands or not; to obey this Superior or another, since God wills it and he’s been found suitable to direct and govern.

"'But, Monsieur, do you have some example to give us?' Yes, indeed, here’s one that lends itself rather well to this topic, and it’s in Holy Scripture: When Judas had committed the abominable sin of betraying and selling his good Master, and then fell into a state of despair, the eleven Apostles met to elect someone else to take his place. For this purpose, they cast their eyes on two of Our Lord’s disciples, one called Barsabas, surnamed Justus, and the other, Mathias. Then they proceeded to the election and the lot fell on Mathias rather than on Barsabas, who was called the Just, on account of his holy life. He was, therefore, a righteous man, yet the lot fell on Mathias, of whom nothing was said. You see, my dear confreres, God saw that he was fit to govern and, because of that, it was His Will that the lot should fall on him. Some men are holy and lead a saintly life; however, they don’t always have the gift of leadership. Holiness is a continual disposition and total conformity to God’s Will, and leadership resides in the judgment. That is, a sound judgment is needed to guide and organize.

"Learning isn’t absolutely necessary to govern well; but when learning, the gift of leadership, and sound judgment are found in the same person, Dieu! What a treasure!

"Old age isn’t always to be considered for leadership because we see several young men who have a greater gift for leadership than many old men and senior confreres. We have an example of that in David, who was chosen by God to rule His people, although he was the youngest of all his brothers. You see, a man who has sound

judgment and great humility is capable of governing well, and I know from experience that those of a contrary disposition, who are ambitious for positions of authority, have never done anything worthwhile.

“I also know from experience that someone who has held office, and retains this spirit and the desire to be in charge, has never been a good subject or a good Superior.”

At this point M. Vincent humbled himself in his usual way. “As I was returning from the city,” he said, “I saw ten or twelve heavily-laden mules halted near the door of a tavern, waiting for the men in charge of them, who very probably were drinking inside this same tavern. I kept thinking about those poor beasts, with their burden on their back, standing there without moving, waiting for their master and leader.  

“It’s debatable whether it’s more excellent to volunteer for foreign lands in order to work there for the salvation of souls, or to be in a continual disposition to go there, without, however, requesting this, in line with the maxim of asking nothing and refusing nothing, and to remain in the place where obedience has put us, until it withdraws us from it. O Messieurs, how happy are those who feel this disposition in themselves and to whom God has given the grace of being ready and willing to go to far-off countries to spend their lives there for Jesus Christ! History tells us of the many martyrs who have sacrificed themselves for God. And if we see that so many men in the army risk their lives for a little honor, or perhaps in the hopes of a little earthly recompense, with what far greater reason shouldn’t we risk our lives to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the most distant lands to which His Divine Providence may call us! Just think, of the approximately 30,000 men or so at the siege of Montmédy, people are insisting that there were only about 22,000 survivors. Now, if those men had the courage to risk their lives in this way for the capture of a town, why shouldn’t we risk ours for the glory of God and to win souls for Jesus Christ?

4In the margin: This example shows us that, even though those animals lack reason, they nevertheless allow themselves to be led and are indifferent to what their handler wants them to do, standing motionless where he puts them, although they carry a burden on their back.
“The first means of placing ourselves in this state of availability, in the event that we’re not in it already, is humility and self-abjection, looking upon ourselves as animals incapable of leadership or of any position of authority or office of Superior.

“Second, when we’re given any ministry and find that some obstacle prevents us from carrying it out, to go before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and there ask Him for the grace to let us know whether we should make this known to the Superior; and once He’s let us know that it’s His Will that we mention it, to do so, and then do whatever the Superior tells us.”

189. - LOSS OF THE ORSIGNY FARM

[September 1658]

“For a certain time, I was dwelling on the fact, and even did so frequently, that the Company had nothing to endure, that everything was going well for it, and that it was enjoying a certain prosperity—or, to put it better—was being blessed by God in every way, experiencing no setbacks or adversities. I was beginning to be uneasy about this calm state of affairs, well aware that it’s characteristic of God to test those who serve Him and to chastise those He loves: Quem enim diligit Dominus, castigat. I remembered what was said about Saint Ambrose, 4 that, one time when he was travel-
ing, he happened to be in a house where the master told him that he
didn’t know what affliction was. Whereupon this holy Prelate, en-
lightened by heaven, felt that this house, treated so favorably, was
on the verge of destruction. ‘Let’s get out of here,’ he said; ‘the
wrath of God is about to fall on this house.’ As a matter of fact, no
sooner was he outside when a thunderbolt dashed the house to the
ground, enveloping in its wake everyone inside.

‘On the other hand, I’ve seen several Companies unsettled from
time to time, particularly one of the greatest and holiest in the
Church, which sometimes finds itself, so to speak, in a state of
consternation, and which right now is going through an atrocious
persecution, and I said, ‘That’s how God treats the saints and how
He’d treat us if we were really strong in virtue; but, knowing our
weakness, He brings us up, feeds us with milk, like little children,
and causes everything to succeed with us almost without our being
involved in it.’ Because of all that, I was right then to fear we
weren’t pleasing to God or worthy to suffer anything for His love,
since he was averting from us the afflictions and trials that test His
servants. Granted, we had some shipwrecks in the departures for
Madagascar, but there again God rescued us from them. In addi-
tion, in the year 1649 soldiers inflicted damage on us amounting to
42,000 livres. But we weren’t the only ones to sustain this loss;
everyone suffered from the public disturbances; it was a common
evil, and we were treated no differently from the others. But God be
blessed, brothers, that it has now pleased His adorable Providence
to deprive us of a property that has just been taken from us! This is a
considerable loss for the Company, yes, a very considerable one.
Let’s adopt the sentiments of Job, when he said, ‘God had given me
these goods; He has taken them away; may His holy Name be
blessed!’ Let’s not consider this deprivation as resulting from a
human decision, but let’s say that it’s God who has judged us, and

5He is speaking of the Society of Jesus, being attacked furiously at the time for the moral
precepts taught by some of its members.

6In January 1649, six hundred soldiers, billeted at Saint-Lazare, pillaged and plundered the
house, unhinged the doors, sold part of the wheat, and set fire to the wood pile (cf. III, 394, n. 4).

7Cf. Jb 1:21. (NAB)
humble ourselves beneath the hand that strikes us, like David who said, *Obmutui, et non aperuī os meum, quoniam tu fecisti:* ‘I’ve kept silent, Lord, because You’ve done this.’ Let’s adore His justice and consider that He’s been merciful to us in treating us this way: He’s done it for our own good. *Bene omnia fecit,* says Saint Mark: ‘He has done all things well.’

M. Vincent then added that, when urged by one of the judges to appeal the case, he replied, “*O mon Dieu!* far be it from us to do that.”

Then he went on to say, “O Lord, You yourself have handed down the decision; if it pleases You, it will be irrevocable; and, so as not to defer its execution, here and now we make the sacrifice of this property to Your Divine Majesty. And I ask, my dear confreres, that we accompany it with a sacrifice of praise; let’s bless this Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead for having visited us on the day of trial and tribulation. Let’s give Him infinite thanks for having not only withdrawn our attachment to worldly goods, but also for having actually deprived us of those we possessed, and let’s ask Him to grant us the grace to love this deprivation. I’d like to think that we’re all rejoicing at the loss of this revenue; for, since Our Lord says in the Apocalypse, *Ego quos amo castigo,*¹⁰ must we not love chastisements as marks of His love? Still, it’s not enough to love them; we must rejoice in them. O my God, who will grant us this grace? You are the source of all joy, and apart from You, there’s no true joy, so we ask it of You. Yes, Messieurs, let’s rejoice that it seems as if God has found us worthy to suffer. But how can we rejoice in sufferings, since they’re disagreeable to nature and we avoid them? We can do it in the same way we accept remedies; we’re well aware that medicines are bitter and that the mildest make our hearts palpitate, even before we take them; nevertheless, we cheerfully swallow them; and why? Because we like to be healthy and hope to preserve our health or to recover it by purging. Thus,

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¹⁰*Cf. Rv 3:19. (NAB)*
afflictions, disagreeable in themselves, nevertheless contribute to the healthy state of a soul and of a Company; through them God purifies us, as gold in the fire. In the Garden of Olives, Our Lord experienced nothing but anguish and, on the Cross, nothing but pain, which was so excessive that it seemed that, abandoned as He was by all human assistance, He was also abandoned by His Father; however, amid the terrors of death and the outrages of His Passion, He rejoiced in doing the Will of His Father and, harsh as it was, He preferred it to all earthly joys; it was His food and His delight. It should also be our delight, my dear confreres, to see His good pleasure fulfilled in us by the humiliations, losses, and pains we encounter. Aspicientes, says Saint Paul, in auctorem fidei, et consummatorem Jesum, qui, proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem, confusionem contempta. The first Christians were of this opinion, according to the testimony of the same Apostle: Rapinam honororum vestrorum cum gaudio susceptistis. Why shouldn’t we also rejoice with them today at the loss of our property? O brothers, what great pleasure God takes in seeing us gathered here for that purpose, conversing about it, and encouraging one another to rejoice! On the one hand, we’re made a spectacle to the world by the shame and disgrace of this decision, which makes us known, so it would seem, as unjust holders of the property of others: Spectaculum facti sumus mundo et Angelis et hominibus. Opprobriis et tribulationibus spectaculum facti. But, on the other hand, Omne gaudium existimate. brothers, that all joy has come to you when you experience various temptations and tribulations.

“So, let’s reckon that we’ve gained a great deal by our loss; for, together with this farm, God has taken from us the satisfaction we
had in possessing it and the pleasure we might have had in going there from time to time. As this recreation was pleasing to the senses, it might have been for us like a sweet venom that kills, a knife that wounds, and a fire that burns and destroys. Now, by the mercy of God, we’re delivered from that danger and, since we’re more exposed to temporal needs, His Divine Goodness wills also to raise us to greater confidence in His Providence, and to oblige us to abandon ourselves to it entirely for the necessities of this life as well as for the graces of salvation. Oh, if God were pleased to recompense this temporal loss by an increase of trust in His Providence, abandonment to His guidance, greater detachment from earthly things and self-renunciation, O mon Dieu! Brothers, how happy we’d be! I dare to hope that His fatherly kindness, which does all for the best, will grant us this grace.

“So then, what consequences should we draw from all this? The first is to offer God all that remains to us of the goods and consolations of body and mind; to offer ourselves to Him in general and in particular, but earnestly, so that He may dispose absolutely of our persons and of all that we have according to His most holy Will, and so that we’ll always be ready to abandon everything to embrace the inconveniences, ignominies, and afflictions that may come to us and, by this means, to follow Jesus Christ in His poverty, humility, and patience.

“The second is never to go to court, whatever our rights may be; or, if we’re obliged to do so, that it be only after we’ve attempted every way imaginable to reach an agreement, unless the right is absolutely clear and evident; for, the person who relies on human judgment is often deceived. We’ll carry out the advice of Our Lord, who said, ‘If someone wants to take your coat, hand him your tunic as well.’

May God grant the Company the grace to put this into practice! We have to hope that, if it’s faithful in making this maxim its own, and determined never to depart from it, His Divine Goodness will bless it and, if He takes something from it on the one hand, He’ll give it something on the other.”

16 Cf. Mt 5:40. (NAB)
September 20, 1658

"The first reason the Company of the Mission has for observing the virtue of silence carefully is that God is glorified by silence. *Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion.*\(^1\) There’s another version,\(^2\) which states, *Tibi silentium laus Deus, in Sion.*\(^3\) God is as glorified by silence as He is by hymns sung in His honor.

"The second reason is the great advantage and the great benefits accruing to the Company by keeping silence, either for the soul or for study and the other duties we have to do; for, since the spirit of man can’t remain without acting, if he’s obliged to keep silence, that will cause him to devote himself more to study if he’s a priest or scholastic; if it’s someone else, to his work and duties. The person who doesn’t possess this virtue of silence will never do anything but waste time, if he doesn’t strive with all his might to practice it; for, to pass the time, he goes there, comes here, talks to this one, chats with that one, is in and out of his room, talking to this man then to that one about the news of the day, the war, and so on; in short, he wastes time chatting and talking about useless matters that are very often harmful to our soul.

"Some time ago I never—or rarely—went to see the Papal Nuncio, who was residing in the house of a Religious Order, that I didn’t see the religious in the cloister or in the garden, busy chatting with one another, laughing, looking about, or strolling around. What did that come from? From the failure to observe silence; for, if those persons really loved holy silence, they’d never be seen behaving like that.

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\(^1\)A *hymn to you, O God on Zion.* is proper. Cf. Ps 65:2. (NAB)
\(^2\)The translation of Saint Jerome (c.340-420), popularly known as the Vulgate.
\(^3\)Silence is praise to you. *O God on Sion.*
“What happened a short time ago in the house of a religious Order in this city? Shall I tell you, brothers? Alas! It’s a strange thing and only too public. Two monks were killed. And why did that happen? For want of keeping silence and by getting involved in matters that were none of their business. The Parlement, which had learned that there was a certain disorder among them and some division, tried to remedy it, and some of the Councillors were even deputed to go into the house. At first the monks tried to resist. They shut themselves up and tried to defend themselves with arms. Yes, indeed! As soon as the Parlement saw that, they sent an armed band to the house a second time, and, as I just told you, some of the monks were wounded and then died. So those, brothers, are the evils that follow from not keeping silence, or from discussing the news, etc. And the evil was so great that the official reporter told me that some of them deserved nothing less than the galleys. Just think, brothers, just think about that.

“But, on the other hand, shall I tell you what occurred here at Saint-Lazare—yes, at Saint-Lazare? Something almost similar happened, but it didn’t reach that point or become known to outsiders, thank God. Oh no! So far things haven’t reached that stage; but they were well on the way to getting there soon. Yes, God allowed something almost similar to happen a few days ago at Saint-Lazare. It’s strange to see such a thing occurring in the Company, which has only just been born and is still in its cradle. ‘Mais quoi donc! What happened, Monsieur?’ It was as follows.

“What I’m about to tell you took place among our students. The students were going for a walk in our enclosure here. Two of them, who went ahead of the others, found a set of ninepins and began to play. The others came up and said they wanted to join in the game. One of them knocked down the ninepins; one of the two who had

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*The house of the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine.

Parlement refers to the French judicial system (cf. XI, 5, n. 1).

La Gazette de France, 1658, p. 265, gives an account somewhat different from the incident that put the Augustinians (les Grands Augustins) in opposition to the Parlement on August 23, 1658. Two monks were killed and two wounded. For the sake of opposition to the Parlement, Mazarin set free and escorted in triumph the monks who had been arrested.
begun to play set them up again; the other knocked them down again. And then they began to get angry. On seeing this, one of those who had begun the game grabbed one of the ninepins and gave the boy who had knocked them down a punch in the stomach. Not satisfied with that, he did it again and then gave him another blow on his shoulder, but he hit him so hard that he still feels the pain of it even now. Please consider a little to what an excess of rage that student let himself go. Just consider if that's not a very sensitive source of distress for the Company. Alas! If such a thing occurs in the Company at its beginning, what will it be in several years, when perhaps it has begun to slacken from its first fervor and exactness to the Rules! Well, we've had that student confined to his room.7

“Another motive is that, according to a maxim of the saints, everything goes well in the house or Community in which silence is well observed; whereas, on the contrary, in a Community that doesn't observe silence, it can be said that everything goes badly.

“Now, for the second point, which is to see in what places stricter silence should be more especially observed, these are: (1) the church; (2) the refectory; (3) the dormitory; (4) the cloister. No one should be conversing in twos at that time in the rooms, and whoever does so should know that he's doing something that may give scandal and will be the cause of others committing the same fault, of which he'll, consequently, be the most guilty.

“As for time, silence should be observed from one recreation to another. The Sisters of Sainte-Marie8 have two sorts of silence among them: one, which they call the grand silence, and the other, the little silence. During the grand silence, that is, from after night prayers until after morning prayers the next day, one Sister isn't free to talk to another, and that, mark you, is exactly and faithfully

7In the margin: Note: He was confined to a room for eight days, during which he lived on bread and water. To substantiate this, I must ask Bro. Pascal if it is true that he subsisted only on bread and water.

The Brother here is probably Jean-Pascal Goret, born in Angers in 1613, and entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother on November 21, 1641. Saint Vincent sent him to Picardy for the relief of the poor, as he had sent Bro. Mathieu Régnard to Lorraine.

8Visitation Nuns.
observed. The other, which they call the little silence, to distinguish it from the one I just mentioned, is the one they observe from morning prayer until the end of evening recreation, during which they may speak to one another, but in a very low tone and for necessary matters. I except the two times of recreation after dinner and after supper. But, apart from that, they speak only on necessary matters, and do so in a very low tone of voice. What is remarkable with them, however, is that no Sister speaks to another in her room without the permission of the Superioress. And that, brothers, is how silence is observed among them.

"I'm well aware that the Officers need certain times to discuss and get advice concerning the affairs of the house. We take the time immediately after the general examination of conscience as the most suitable and least inconvenient for being able to talk over such matters more easily and without interruptions. I asked other Communities what they do, and was told that this can't be avoided; it's a necessity. We'll have to see if we can't find some other moment during the day; nevertheless, I can see that it's hard to find another time that's so easy and suitable for this purpose.

"A good means to adopt so that each one may observe silence well is for each individual to make a firm resolution to adopt the practice of this virtue and to begin it tomorrow; mark you, from tomorrow, and let each of us give ourselves earnestly to God for that purpose.

"Another means I think we'll have to adopt is that, just as someone has been appointed to go from room to room every morning to see that each individual has arisen and not exempted himself from the four-thirty meditation, some member of the Company will likewise have to go through the house, acting as monitor for the entire Community to observe all that's going on, and to tell the Superior what he noticed. The Jesuits have one of their priests who goes about everywhere; and, if he finds that something isn't right, he informs the Superior, who imposes a penance. This penance, written on a piece of paper, is handed to the reader; when the community has entered the refectory for dinner or supper, he reads it aloud."
“It should be up to the sub-Assistant to do that. I ask you, M. Alméras, to consult your sub-Assistant and to see to it that someone is appointed for that purpose. For, you see, what occurred with the students is a warning given us by God; and, if the Mission fails to maintain the virtue of silence, it will fall into the same unfortunate situation as the monks I just mentioned; have no doubt about it.

“A few days ago I was in our room with the Pastor of Saint-Nicolas, and I heard the noise that was being made with the ordinands here in this hall. People were talking so loudly that, I assure you, I had a hard time hearing. In the old days, when we first began our direction of the ordinands at the Bons-Enfants, you could have heard a pin drop. Why isn’t it like that any more at present? It’s because we’ve failed to maintain the virtue of silence. O my God! O my Savior! Restore this holy virtue to the Little Company of the Mission, Lord. Let’s ask for it, Brothers, let’s earnestly ask His Divine Majesty for it!” 10

9Hippolyte Féret, born in Pontoise (Val-d’Oise), was a Doctor of Theology and later became Pastor of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, Vicar-General of Alet, and then of Paris. Saint Vincent thought so highly of Féret that he proposed him as Coadjutor Bishop of Babylon.

10In the margin: He gave yet another means, which has slipped my mind; I hope someone else in the Company recorded it.
When the students were ready to begin their philosophy course, they, led by their professor, M. Guillot, priest of the Company, went first to see M. Vincent. Kneeling down, they asked for his blessing, which he gave them, going on his knees also, in his usual manner. He recommended strongly that they study hard in the spirit Our Lord desires in order to serve God better and to be of greater assistance to their neighbor. He told them to be very careful that pride didn’t take hold of their heart by the desire to show off, to be esteemed, or to be highly successful. He said that many young men who leave the novitiate and seminary are often ruined by that and lose the spirit of their seminary. “Now, to avoid this misfortune happening to you, brothers, don’t desire to be a great success, to walk off with the prize, or to make a show either by supporting by argument, or by defending, or by maintaining, but rather wish, desire, and ask Our Lord to give you the grace to love and practice humility in everything and everywhere, to love your own abjection, and to seek and desire nothing but that; and, above all, to consider that if there’s anything in you that makes you ever so little commendable, you get it from God, and it’s God who has given it to you. Live in that spirit, brothers; strive to preserve it, if you already have it, brothers; and, if you don’t, ask Our Lord earnestly for it. May the philosophy you’re going to learn teach you to love and serve God better, to raise you up to Him by love, and, at the same time, make you better fitted for your ministry. May it help you to love and serve your neighbor, so that you may always be able to be good to him in all the things he needs. And may the grace of God never leave you, for the grace of God is all you need.”
time you’re studying the science and philosophy of Aristotle and learning all its divisions, that you may learn the philosophy of Our Lord and His maxims and put them into practice, in such a way that what you’ll learn won’t make your heart swell, but rather help you to serve God and His Church better. Philosophy is of great service to a man when he makes use of it as he should and in the spirit Our Lord desires; when people act otherwise, philosophy serves only to destroy them and to make their heart swell.

"Benedictio Domini Nostri. . . ."

192. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

November 1658

At Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent reproved a cleric who, during his Repetition of Prayer, had used the phrase the holy Company in speaking of the Company. He told him he should say plainly and simply the Company or this Company.

“We’ll have to see,” he added, “if the Assistant or the Sub-Assistant shouldn’t read the points of the meditation, for it seems to me that we’re not going about making mental prayer the right way. We don’t enter deeply enough into the subject proposed for each day’s meditation. Perhaps, this comes from the fact that we don’t understand well enough the points of the topic on which we’re meditating. Now, they could do something like this and say, ‘Brothers, the meditation is aimed at such and such. We’ll meditate on this in the first point; in the second, we’ll meditate on this, and in the third, on this.’ That’s so by this means, my dear confreres, you may have an easier introduction into the topic of the meditation that’s to be made.

Conference 192. - MS. Repetitions of Prayer, f° 83.

1Subheading: Reproof of a cleric who had called the Company the holy Company; how meditation should be made; the sad state of religion in certain countries; the Company must ask God for the gift of tongues; how to learn languages.
“Today, for example, we had the choice Our Lord made of His Apostles. *Eh bien!* On this topic there were many, many beautiful things on which to meditate! Twelve poor workingmen, poor fishermen, whom He chooses in order to convert and change the whole world radically and to destroy all idolatry, etc. He chose only twelve, no more. In this meditation we could consider the Church’s great need of good priests, good workers. True, there are plenty of them; but many among them aren’t as good as they should be in order to work usefully in Our Lord’s vineyard; many of them are given over to vice. Therefore, let’s ask God, my dear confreres, to be pleased to send good workers, good priests to His Church, and good Missioners to the Company; but let them be good and well chosen. That’s what we should have done in this meditation, which lent itself very well to that.

“M. Jolly² sends me word from Rome that he’s given a retreat to thirty students maintained by the Propagation of the Faith in a college in Rome, where it’s having them study; one of them is from Moldavia, a neighboring province of Hungary. This young man told M. Jolly that in his whole province, which is very large, there are only seven or eight priests all told. What has caused that? Heresy. Shouldn’t this encourage us, brothers, to give ourselves wholeheartedly to God to become as useful as we can, serving Him in our vocation in order to be able to help those poor people, if God in His Providence calls us there?

“When the Bishop of La Rochelle³ was still Bishop of Saintes, he told me one day that he found very few persons in that diocese who wanted to serve the Church and become priests, and that this was due to heresy, with which that diocese is strongly tainted in many places. Heretics, he said, have made the priesthood so dishonorable that it would be hard to find a single young man in his whole diocese who’d like to be a priest, and, even if the young person were

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²Edme Jolly (cf. XI, 329, n. 9).
³Jacques-Raoul de la Guibourgère, born in 1589, was the widower of Yvonne de Charette and father of several children when he was ordained. In 1631 he succeeded his uncle as Bishop of Saintes, then went on to Maillezais, and finally to La Rochelle when the Episcopal See was transferred there. Very few other Bishops were so closely associated with Saint Vincent. He died in 1661.
willing, the father and mother would prevent him from doing so. As a matter of fact, even today there are only four or five seminarians in the Saintes Seminary.

"The Company has to take pains to ask God to give it the gift of tongues; He gave it to the Apostles, after choosing them to be His Apostles, with the result that they understood all who spoke to them, even though they were from different regions and nations; and the Apostles likewise made themselves understood by speaking and replying to them in their own language. Let's ask God, my dear confreres, to give us at least the desire to learn languages; each individual should have some skill in that and should ask God for it. That great, holy Company of the Jesuit Fathers devotes itself assiduously to this, and one of the first things done by those sent to a country where they don't know the language is to apply themselves to learning it; they make it their chief study; they get someone from the area, or someone who understands the language, to help them. And that's what members of the Company who'll be destined for foreign lands should do, when God calls them there.

"That's what our poor but blessed M. Nacquart did; for, as soon as he arrived in Madagascar, he found a Frenchman who understood the language of that island, and began to study it, learning the nouns, then the pronouns, the verbs, how to conjugate them, and so on. Consequently, by the end of four months, he understood it and was able to begin to teach the catechism.

"So then, I'd like the Company to be devoted to acting in this way when the occasion arises, and when members are sent to a place where they don't understand the language. Let's ask God to give us this facility in learning languages, since He's been pleased to call us to the same ministries as His Apostles."

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4Charles Nacquart.(cf. XI, 263, n. 7).
193. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

November 11, 1658

"I recommend to the prayers of the Company our men who are sick; I also recommend to you those confreres who traveled by sea, not without danger. Some of them went on a large, well-built ship, and they were safer; the others were on another, smaller vessel and were in great danger because of the raids of the Turks who are on the waters from Marseilles to Genoa and Rome.

"I also recommend our dear Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy, from whom I received letters yesterday or the day before. They tell me that there's still plague in Warsaw, and that about twenty persons in their Holy Cross Parish die of it every week. They write in such a way that you'd say they were above those dangers and, as far as I can see from their letters, they're not the least bit afraid.

"I likewise recommend to your prayers one of our Brothers because of the great danger he's in, the result of an incident that just occurred; I'm referring to our dear Bro. Barreau in Algiers. This is what happened:

"About fifty leagues from Algiers, between Algiers and Tunis, that is, about halfway between those two cities, there's a fort held by the French, in which there was a Governor, and it even had a garrison. This was granted to the King of France by the Grand Turk in a treaty they made, with the proviso, however, that a certain sum of money be paid annually to the city of Algiers. This fort had been secured by the King of France to promote commerce by the Christians with the Arabs and the people of those countries. For a few years

Conf. 193. - MS, Repetitions of Prayer, f° 84.

1Subheading: News of Missioners in Poland; dangers encountered by Bro. Barreau in Algiers; need to pray for Toussaint Bourdaise; Saint Martin's great act of charity.

2In the margin: Note: The men of whom he is speaking here are M. Berthe [cf. XI, 165, n. 2] and the members of the Company whom Berthe had taken with him to Genoa and Rome.

3Jean Barreau (cf. XI, 192, n. 5).

4To protect their coral fishing grounds, merchants from Marseilles established around 1650 a fort on the North African coast, near El Kala. This fort, known as the Bastion de France, became an important commercial center but during the seventeenth century it was sacked repeatedly by the Turks. Abandoned in 1827, its ruins can be seen at Mers-el-Keraz.
now, that tribute hasn’t been paid. Seeing this, the people of Algiers sent four Sheikhs and about fifty Moors there. When the Governor saw those people coming to ask him for the money, he wasn’t at all disturbed. Those Sheikhs threatened him and said that, if he didn’t pay up, an army would be coming; it wasn’t very far away and would certainly force him to pay. When the Governor heard this, he put his garrison under arms, seized the Sheikhs, those forty or fifty Moors, and the other men they had with them. He bound them, boarded them on a ship, and loaded it with all the furniture he could that was in the bastion. He had them all loaded, I repeat, on a ship. This done, he left the bastion with all his men, set fire to it inside, and sailed straight to Italy.

“Now, brothers, I ask you to imagine the present danger of our poor Brother, the Consul of Algiers, along with so many poor French Christian slaves, of whom there are nearly 10,000 in that city of Algiers and the environs. O Sauveur! O mon Sauveur! What will become of those poor people? What will they do? But what will our poor Brother do, this man who left his home, his country, his parents, and his birthplace, where he could have lived peacefully? And yet he left all that for God, to serve God and to help his neighbor, that is, those poor slaves.

“M. Bourdaise, brothers, M. Bourdaise, who is so far away and all alone, and who, as you’ve heard, has begotten in Jesus Christ, with so much pain and care, a large number of those poor people of the country where he now is, let’s pray for him, too. M. Bourdaise, are you still alive or not? If you are, may God be pleased to preserve your life! If you’re in heaven, pray for us!

“O brothers, what happiness for the Company to have such fine members such as all those good servants of His I just mentioned! As far as possible, brothers, we should all be in this state, that is, ready and willing to leave everything to serve God and our neighbor—and our neighbor, you see, and our neighbor—for the love of God.

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5Toussaint Bourdaise (cf. XI, xvi, n. 7). He died in Madagascar on June 25, 1657.
“Look at Saint Martin; we’ve just been told what he did. This great saint, even though he was a catechumen, seeing a poor man asking him for alms, took his sword and cut his cloak in two in order to give him half of it. It was an act of charity that pleased Our Lord so much that He himself appeared to him the following night, wearing that same half of the cloak. And the Church had such esteem and veneration for this act of charity on the part of Saint Martin that it represents him to us, not as a Bishop or an Archbishop—even though those are lofty titles—but shows him to us on horseback, dressed as a soldier, cutting his cloak in half.”

With that, M. Vincent stood up, ending this little talk.

194. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

November 17, 1658

M. Vincent had called on one of the priests, who had already been a long time in the Company, that is, twelve or thirteen years, to make Repetition of Prayer. When this priest excused himself from doing so, M. Vincent said he was admonishing him because this wasn’t the first time he had excused himself and refused to make Repetition of Prayer. He added that this was what he usually did, and that it was really very strange to want to be exempt and to excuse oneself from doing something like Repetition of Prayer, which gave so much edification and from which everyone gathered so much fruit for virtue; he also stated that others do it well. “You see,” he said, “that all our poor coadjutor Brothers also make it, with few exceptions, telling quite simply what God gave them, some more, some less, according to the lights His Divine Majesty shared with them. The students do it and so do the novices. If a man sometimes excuses himself for having done nothing at meditation, eh bien,

Saint Martin of Tours (316-97). This conference was given on November 11, his feast day.

Conference 194. - MS, Repetitions of Prayer, f° 85.

Subheading: Reproof given to a priest who had refused to make Repetition of Prayer; other reproaches; a strict penance.
God will give him something to say on another occasion when he’s asked to make it. But you, Monsieur, you excuse yourself every time you’re asked.” And because the priest remained standing and didn’t kneel down, he said to him, “Monsieur, are you ready to accept the admonition that’s about to be given you?” At that, the priest knelt down.

M. Vincent also admonished this priest because, on the preceding Friday evening, he had absented himself from the conference, despite the fact that he had been told to go. M. Vincent called this formal disobedience. And because, when this priest saw himself publicly admonished in this way, he tried to point out that he had understood he had been dispensed from being there that evening, M. Vincent stated that this wasn’t true, but, on the contrary, he had said to him, “Come on, Monsieur, come on!” and that he was greatly surprised when the Brother who checks the rooms during the conference told him he was in his room instead of being at the conference. He also said to this priest, who was trying to excuse himself in that way, “We shouldn’t speak or make excuses when we’re being admonished for something, Monsieur; we shouldn’t say a word, but should humble ourselves, accept the penance that’s given, and carry it out.”

Another thing for which he admonished him was that he often slept late, on the pretext of not feeling well, and was frequently absent from meditation.

He said furthermore that, in the third place, when he was in the yard with two others from this house, he had behaved very impolitely for a priest, and that, if any outsiders had witnessed that, they’d have had good reason to be very disedified. He wouldn’t mention the names of the two others who were with him.

He told him, moreover, that, since he was already a fairly senior member of the house, he should be giving good example, that he had formerly seen him so devout—even when he was a young boy—that he had done very well in Le Mans, where he had been sent, and here as well. Yet, for about two years now people were remarking that he had grown lax and had gone so far as to allow laziness to get the better of him.
“Perhaps it’s painful,” said M. Vincent, “to see that you, as a priest, have to be reproved for such faults in this way. Mais quoi! People have to be reminded of their faults. When Our Lord admonished the Apostles—even though they were Apostles—how did He do it? What words did He use? ‘Depart, Satan, get behind me.’ 2 That’s how Our Lord gave an admonition. Those are the words He used for that purpose. And He reproves him for something that didn’t seem to be very serious. When Our Lord was speaking of His Passion and of all that He’d have to endure, Saint Peter thought he was acting rightly by trying to divert Our Lord from speaking of such things to them. Yet, when Our Lord wanted to correct him for this, He used the word Satan; that’s how He addressed him.

“The admonitions set down in Civil and Canon Law are made and established only for the edification of Christians, and so that individuals will not fall so easily into faults; or, if they do, that they correct themselves, and others who hear these admonitions given will take care not to fall into such faults or, if they have, to make amends and ask God’s pardon.

“And so that each member of the Company may know that he must be ready to give an account of his meditation when asked to do so, without making any excuses, you, Monsieur, because you’ve fallen into this fault many times, and so that you’ll remember not to fall into it again in the future, and the same for the other faults of which you’ve been admonished, shall refrain from saying Mass today and tomorrow. That’s the penance I’m giving you.”

2Cf. Mk 8:33. (NAB)
December 6, 1658

"My dear confreres, this evening we’re not going to proceed in the usual manner, which is by way of a conference, where each individual shares his thoughts on the topic proposed. We thought it appropriate to explain the Rules of the Company; and because I, wretched man that I am, don’t keep them myself, I’m really afraid I don’t understand as I should the importance of keeping them and, consequently, am incapable of saying anything that may give glory to God and can explain the spirit of the Rule so as to make it understood. Nevertheless, we’ll make an attempt at it, and see if we—myself or some others—should go on, and if we should continue in the way we’re now beginning.

"If we’re going to discuss the Rules, we have to read them," he stated, and, when he had the lamp brought closer to him and opened the book, he said, "Here’s the first Rule, which is the logical place for us to start. I’ll read it in French for the sake of our Brothers who don’t understand Latin.

We read in Sacred Scripture that Our Lord Jesus Christ, sent on earth for the salvation of the human race, began first by doing, and then by teaching. He carried out the former by practicing perfectly every type of virtue, and the latter by preaching the Good News of the Gospel to poor persons, and giving His Apostles and disciples the knowledge needed to guide the people. And since the little Congregation of the Mission desires, with God’s grace, to imitate Jesus Christ Our Lord, as far as this is possible in view of its limitations, both with regard to His virtues as well as in the works He did for the salvation of the neighbor, it is only right that it should use similar
means to carry out this devout plan in a worthy manner. That is why its purpose is: (1) to strive to grow in holiness, by doing its utmost to practice the virtues this Sovereign Master was pleased to teach us by word and example; (2) to preach the Good News to persons who are poor, especially to those in rural areas; (3) to help those in the priestly state to acquire the knowledge and virtue necessary for their state.

'Those, my dear confreres, are the first words of our Rules, showing us God's plan for the Company and how from all eternity He had the spirit and the services of this Company in mind. Now, the Rule contained in the words we just heard—if it can be called a Rule—states, at the end of the article, that the Little Congregation should use the same means Our Lord used to correspond with His vocation, namely, (1) to strive to grow in holiness; (2) to preach the Good News of the Gospel to poor persons, especially those in the rural areas; and (3) to be of service to the clergy. That's the Rule; and in that we've done as has been done at the Councils, where, before formulating the Canon, the Cardinals and Prelates state the doctrine and put forward not only the material from which they are to draw up the Canon, but also their reasons for doing so. The preamble to our Rule states that, when Our Lord came on earth to save us, He began to do and then to teach. He did the former by practicing all the virtues. Now, all His actions were so many virtues appropriate to a God who became a man to be the example to other human beings; and He practiced the second by teaching the divine truths to poor persons and giving the Apostles the knowledge necessary for the salvation of the world and the guidance of nations, and to make people truly happy.

'The intention of the Company is to imitate Our Lord to the extent that poor, insignificant persons can do. What does that mean? It means that the Company aspires to take Him as a model in the way He acted, what He did, His ministries, and His aims. How can one person represent another, if he doesn't have the same characteristics, features, manners, and looks? That can't be. So, if we're determined to make ourselves like this divine model, and feel in our hearts this desire and holy affection, it's necessary, I repeat, it's necessary to
strive to model our thoughts, works, and intentions on His. He’s not only *Deus virtutum*, but He came to practice all the virtues, and since what He did and did not do were so many virtues, we, too, must conform ourselves to them by striving to be men of virtue, not only with regard to the interior, but by acting virtuously exteriorly so that what we do or don’t do is based on this principle. That’s how the preamble to our Rule should be understood.

“It was appropriate, my dear confreres, to begin these Rules by stating the purpose of the Company, and in what and how it will render service to God; that’s what Saint Augustine, Saint Benedict, and all those who have founded Companies did. They first stated what they had to do and began by defining their Institute. Thus, it was appropriate for us to put at the very beginning of our Rules the goal or target at which we’re aiming. If someone were to ask us, ‘Why are you in the Mission?’ we should acknowledge that God established it so that we can work: (1) at our own growth in holiness; (2) for the salvation of the poor; and (3) to be of service to the clergy, and say, ‘That’s why I’m in it.’ O my dear confreres, what do you think of this goal? Could Our Lord give us a more holy and more sanctifying one, or one more in conformity with His Infinite Goodness and more in line with Providence in the care it takes to guide people to their salvation? Our purpose, therefore, is to strive for our own holiness, to preach the Good News of the Gospel to those who are poor, and to instruct the clergy in the knowledge and virtues proper to their state.

“As for the first, we’re invited to it by the Gospel, in which priests and all Christians have a rule of holiness—not just any sort of holiness but one like that of the Eternal Father. O wonderful decree of the Son of God! ‘Be perfect,’ He says, ‘as your Heavenly Father is perfect.’ That’s aiming high; who can reach it? To be perfect as the Eternal Father is perfect! Yet, that’s the standard. But, because all Christians don’t work at it, God, by certain ways we have to admire, seeing that most people neglect to do this, raises up some who offer themselves to His Divine Majesty to undertake, with His

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1 Cf. Mt 5:48. (NAB)
grace, to become holy themselves and to guide others to holiness. To what does this holiness lead? To make us pleasing in God's eyes, to obtain sanctifying grace, and to have it constantly. That's what makes all our thoughts, words, and actions pleasing to God—even what we leave undone—it's all pleasing to Him. Oh, what happiness! Oh, what happiness for a Missioner whose principal concern is to make himself pleasing to God, who works to rid himself of all deterrents to this and to acquire what he lacks! Working like that makes us pleasing to God. Or sus, Messieurs, this presupposes that working to acquire virtue is working to make ourselves pleasing to God. So then, we have to work constantly at it and to obtain the grace for it; always moving forward—plus ultra. If, in the morning, we're at six degrees, let's be at seven by afternoon, by doing all our actions as perfectly as possible. What does a priest or Brother do who raises his heart to God in the morning to offer Him all his actions of the day, in union with the actions and intentions of Our Lord, renouncing vanity, self-complacency, and all self-interest? He performs an act of holiness, making him more pleasing to God than he was the preceding evening. What does he do who considers at meditation his evil inclinations and takes means to overcome them, exciting himself to sorrow for his sins and to a love of humiliation, suffering, and zeal? He performs an act of holiness, making him more pleasing to God today than he was yesterday. That being the case, Messieurs, the more perfectly we practice virtue, the more pleasing we are to God. That's what our Rule prompts us to do. Let's thank God for this happy circumstance. O Sauveur! O my brothers! How fortunate we are to be on the path to holiness! O Savior, grant us the grace to walk straight on it without growing lax.

"In a word, then, in what does our holiness consist? In doing all our actions well (1) as rational men, getting along well with our neighbor and respecting his rights; (2) as Christians, practicing the virtues of which Our Lord has given us the example; and finally, (3) as Missioners, doing well the works He did, and in the same spirit—as far as our human weakness, of which God is well aware, allows; that must be our aim. In line with that, my dear confreres, a
Missioner who would think only of learning, of preaching well, of saying marvelous things in a province, of moving the entire population to compunction, and of all the other good accomplished by missions—or, to speak more correctly, by the grace of God—is such a man who neglects his meditation and the other exercises of his Rule? No, he’s not; he lacks the main ingredient—his own growth in holiness. It’s only right that persons called to a state as important as that of serving God in the way we do, and who have received from His Goodness the grace of having responded to that call, should make themselves acceptable in His sight and devote themselves in a special way to pleasing Him. Shouldn’t a wife please her husband in such a way that there’s nothing displeasing in her?

“Moreover, we’re the mediators who are to reconcile people with God. Now, to succeed in this, the first thing we have to do is to strive to please God, just as, when someone wants to negotiate with a nobleman, a Prince, or a King, he chooses a person who’s pleasing to him, who’ll be listened to, with nothing about him that could be a hindrance to the favor desired.

“So then, Messieurs, it’s important for us to work constantly at our growth in holiness and to do our actions well so that they’ll be done according to the good pleasure of God and so that, by this means, we may become worthy of helping others. In line with that, a Superior who would neglect the spiritual exercises and good order during a mission, who would allow each individual to do things his own way, and who wouldn’t make his own spiritual growth his main concern, would be failing in the first point of his Rule, which states that he should work at his own holiness. So, one of the resolutions we should take is to give ourselves to God, making it a priority to do our ordinary actions well in circumstances that will make them pleasing to God; our holiness consists in that; otherwise, quid prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animae vero suae detrimentum patiatur? 2 What good will it be to us to have done wonders for others and to have neglected our own souls? Our Lord

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2What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his own soul? Cf. Mt 16:26. (NAB)
went off to pray, after withdrawing from the people, and He wanted His Apostles, after having taken care of external affairs, to go apart like Him so as not to omit their spiritual exercises; their holiness consisted in doing both these duties well.

"The second thing the Rule sets down for us to do is to instruct people in the rural areas; that's where we're called. Yes, Our Lord asks us to evangelize the poor; that's what He did, and what He wants to continue to do through us. We have great reason to humble ourselves here, seeing that the Eternal Father is using us for the plans of His Son, who came to preach the Gospel to poor persons, giving this as a sign that He was the Son of God and that the long-awaited Messiah had come. So then, what a great obligation we have to His Infinite Goodness for having associated us with Him in this divine ministry, chosen by God from so many, many others, more worthy of this honor and more capable of succeeding in it than we are.

"'But, Monsieur, we aren't the only ones who instruct poor people; do Pastors do anything else? What about preachers in towns and villages? What do they do in Advent and Lent? They preach to the poor, and they do it better than we do.' True, but there isn't a single Company in the Church of God that has for its portion persons who are poor, devoting itself totally to the poor and never preaching in large towns. That's what Missioners profess to do; it's their special characteristic to be, like Jesus Christ, committed to the poor. So, our vocation is a continuation of His, or, at least, it's similar to it in its circumstances. Oh, what happiness, brothers, but what an obligation we have to be attached to it.

"One important reason we have for this, then, is the dignity of the matter: to make God known to poor persons; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and that it's for persons who are poor. Oh, what a great thing that is! But it goes beyond our understanding that we should be called to be associates and sharers in the plans of the Son of God. Quoi! to become... I wouldn't dare to say it... Be that as it may, it's such a lofty ministry to evangelize poor persons, which is, par excellence, the work of the Son of God, and we've been included in it as instru-
ments by which the Son of God continues to do from heaven what He did on earth. What great reason we have to praise God, my dear confrères, and to thank Him continually for this grace!

"Another reason we have to be totally committed to it is its necessity. You know, Messieurs, how great it is, you’re aware of the ignorance of the poor people, which is almost unbelievable, and you know also that there’s no salvation for persons who are ignorant of the necessary Christian truths, according to the opinion of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas, and others, who hold that anyone who doesn’t know about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Incarnation, and the other Mysteries, can’t be saved. And how, indeed, can a soul who doesn’t know God or what God has done for love of it, believe, hope, and love? And how will it be saved without faith, hope, and love? Now, when God saw this need and the disasters that have occurred with the passage of time through the negligence of Pastors and the rise of heresies, causing such great losses to the Church, He willed, in His great mercy, to remedy this through missionaries, sending them to put those poor people in a fit state to save themselves.

"There are other theologians who find this opinion too strict, even though it’s based on these words of Our Lord, Haec est vita aeterna ut cognoscant te solum Deum verum et quern misisti Jesum Christum;3 'This is eternal life that they may know You the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.' From this we can infer that those who don’t know the unity of God, or the Trinity, or Jesus Christ, will not have eternal life.

"So then, we have some who say that people can’t be saved without this knowledge, and others who hold the contrary. Given this doubt, isn’t it better to follow the safer opinion? In dubiis tutior pars est tenenda.4 Then, too, is there anything in the world more worthwhile than to teach these truths to those who are ignorant of them, since they’re truths necessary for salvation? Doesn’t it seem to have come from God’s goodness to remedy this need? O Savior!

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1Cf. Jn 17:3. (NAB)
2In doubtful matters, the safer position is preferable.
O my Lord and my God! You've raised up a Company for this purpose; You've sent it to persons who are poor, and You will that it should make You known to them as the one, true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent into the world, so that, by this means, they may have eternal life. This is what should cause us to prefer this to all other states and works on earth and to consider ourselves happier for it. O Dieu! Who could understand this?

"There's another necessary reason why we should help the people; it's concerned with those who don't make good confessions and who knowingly keep back mortal sins; for those persons don't receive absolution from them and, dying in this state, are damned forever. Nevertheless, how many do we find who conceal them through shame! They still go to confession and Communion, but they turn all those good actions into so many sacrileges.

"I once met a man like that who was guilty of a horrible sin, of which he never had the courage to accuse himself. It so happened that, during an illness in which he was in danger of death, he made his confession to his Pastor but didn't tell this serious sin, knowing quite well that, by not mentioning it, he was committing a sacrilege and would be damned if he died in that state; nevertheless, he was never willing to tell it. When he recovered, and a mission was being given near the place where he lived, he came to it, made his confession, and admitted to us everything I just told you.

"Now, assuming that to be true, please see what cause we have to praise God for having sent us as a remedy for this evil, and how much our hearts should be on fire with love for this ministry of assisting poor people and for devoting ourselves earnestly to it because the need is so great and God expects this of us.

"Since this is so, those who are unwilling to go on missions are acting contrary to the Rule, or who, having gone on them and encountered some difficulty, don't want to go back, or who, having a taste for seminary work, refuse to give it up, or prefer some other ministry and are reluctant to leave it for the work of missions, which is so necessary. Surely it's worthy of a Missioner to have and to preserve this desire to go on missions, to press on in assisting poor people in the way Our Lord himself would assist them, if He were still
on earth, and, lastly, to direct his intention to live and die in this holy ministry. That’s what we have to do; difficulties shouldn’t daunt us; this is God’s work, and it merits our overcoming repugnance and resisting temptation. These things happen to everyone who wants to follow Our Lord. *Mais quoi?* Wasn’t the Son of God subject to them? He rose above them, and He’ll undoubtedly give us the same grace if we’re willing to fight as He did. Something that will be a great help to us in this is our detachment with regard to ministries.

“The third aim of our little Institute is to instruct the clergy, not only in knowledge for the sake of knowing, but also in the virtues they should practice. What good do you do by teaching them one without the other? None—or almost none. They need both competency and a good life; without the latter, the other is useless and dangerous. We have to spur them on equally to both, and this is what God asks of us. In the beginning, nothing was further from our mind than to be at the service of the clergy; we were thinking only of ourselves and of the poor. How did the Son of God begin? He hid himself, and He seemed to be thinking only of himself; He prayed and acted only as a private individual; that’s all that was apparent, and then He began to announce the Good News to the poor. But, in the course of time, He chose Apostles, took the trouble to instruct, warn, and form them and, finally, animated them with His Spirit, not for themselves alone but for all the peoples of the earth. In addition, He taught them all the maxims for forming priests, for administering the Sacraments, and for carrying out their ministry. It would take me too long to go into detail about all that. So, in the beginning, the Company was concerned only with itself and the poor; at certain times it withdrew in private; at others it went out to teach the country people. God allowed that this was all we seemed to be doing, but, in the fullness of time, He called us to assist in the formation of good priests, in providing good Pastors to parishes and teaching them what they should know and practice. Oh, what a lofty, sublime ministry! Oh, how far above us! Who had ever thought about retreats for ordinands and about seminaries? This undertaking had never entered our minds until God indicated to us that it was His pleasure for us to be engaged in it. So then, He’s led the
Company to these ministries without our choosing them, and yet He asks us to commit ourselves to them earnestly, humbly, devoutly, constantly, and in a manner that corresponds with the excellence of the work.

"That, Messieurs, is just about what I had to say to you in explanation of this Rule. Now let's look at the difficulties that may be found in it. First, the Son of God could have been asked, 'Why have You come? It's to evangelize the poor. That's Your Father's order; so why do You create priests? Why do You give them power to consecrate, to bind, and to loose, etc.? We can say that coming to evangelize the poor doesn't simply mean to teach them the Mysteries necessary for their salvation, but also to do what was foretold and prefigured by the prophets to make the Gospel effective. You know that, in the old days, God rejected the corrupt priests who had profaned holy things; He considered their sacrifices an abomination and said that He'd raise up others who, from East to West, from North to South, would make their voices and words heard: In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum. And by whom did He fulfill this promise? By His Son Our Lord, who created priests, taught and trained them, and gave them power to ordain others: Sicut misit me Pater et ego mitto vos. And He did so in order that, through them, He might do for all ages what He himself had done during His lifetime, to save all nations by teaching them and administering the Sacraments.

"Someone in the Company may say, 'Monsieur, I'm in the world to evangelize the poor, and you want me to work in seminaries; I want to do what I came to do, namely, to give missions in the country and not to be confined in a town for the service of the clergy.' It would be a mistake—a big mistake—for a man to be unwilling to form good priests, especially since there's nothing greater than a priest, to whom Christ gives all power over His natural and His mystical Body, the power to forgive sins, etc. O Dieu!

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5*Their sound has gone out through all the earth.* Cf. Ps 19:5. (NAB)
6*As the Father has sent me, I also send you.* Cf. Jn 20:21. (NAB)
What power! What dignity! This consideration, therefore, obliges us to be of service in such a holy, lofty state.

“But there’s something else: the Church’s need for good priests to make up for all the ignorance and vice that cover the earth and to rescue the poor Church from that deplorable state, for which good souls should weep tears of blood.

“People wonder whether all the disorders we see in the world should not be imputed to priests. This could scandalize some, but the topic demands that I show, from the extent of the evil, the importance of the remedy. We’ve had several conferences on this question, which we treated in depth, to discover the sources of so many misfortunes; the result, however, was that the Church has no worse enemies than priests. It’s from them that heresies have come; take those two heresiarchs Luther and Calvin, who were priests; and it’s through priests that heretics have prevailed, vice has reigned, and ignorance has set up its throne among the poor people. All that is due to their own dissoluteness and failure to oppose with all their might, in accord with their obligations, those three torrents that have inundated the world.

“What a sacrifice do you not make to God, Messieurs, by working for their reform so they may live in conformity with the eminence and dignity of their state and that, by this means, the Church may recover from its present shame and distress.

“'It’s fine for us to do that, Monsieur, but why should we be serving the Daughters of Charity?’ Didn’t the Son of God come to announce the Good News to the poor and to create priests, etc.? Yes, He did. Didn’t He accept having ladies in His company? Yes, He did. Didn’t He guide them to holiness and to the assistance of the poor? Yes, He did. If, then, Our Lord did that, He who did everything for our instruction, shouldn’t we think it’s right to follow Him? Does taking care of those Sisters who assist the sick poor seem something contrary to His way of acting? Didn’t the Apostles also have women to guide? You’re aware that, from then on,

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7John Calvin was not a priest. At one time in his youth, with financial aid from two ecclesiastical benefices, he studied theology; then, at his father’s behest, he studied law. He did not complete either discipline.
Deaconesses were appointed, who did wonders in the Church of God. Their duty was to seat the women at meetings and to teach them the ceremonies, and in this way God was served equally by both sexes; and are we to think it's not fitting for the Congregation of the Mission to see that Our Lord is honored and served by both! Aren't we imitators of that Divine Master who seemed to come into the world only for poor persons and who, nevertheless, guided a group of women? See, my dear confreres, what a blessing from God it is to be in the state in which the Son of the Eternal Father was, and, like Him, to guide women who render service to God and to the people in the best way poor Sisters are capable of doing.

"But, someone will say to me, 'why burden ourselves with a hospital? Look at the poor people in the Nom-de-Jésus\(^8\) who are diverting us from our ministry; we have to go to say Mass for them, to instruct them, to administer the Sacraments, and to supervise the overall care of their lives. Why go to the border towns to distribute alms, to run the risk of many dangers, and to be diverted from our ministries?' Eh, Messieurs! Can we find fault with these good works without failing in our duty? If priests devote themselves to the care of the poor, wasn't that what Our Lord and many great saints did, and they not only recommended poor persons to others, but they themselves consoled, comforted, and healed them? Aren't those who are poor the afflicted members of Our Lord? Aren't they our brothers and sisters? And if priests abandon them, who do you think is going to help them? So then, if there are any among us who think they're in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, 'Come, beloved of my Father; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you, because I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was naked and you clothed me; sick and you assisted me.'\(^9\) To do

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\(^8\)The Nom-de-Jésus [Name of Jesus] hospice (cf. XI. 184, n. 4).

\(^9\)Cf. Mt 25:34-36. (NAB)
that is to preach the Gospel by words and by works, and that's the most perfect way; it's also what Our Lord did, and what those should do who represent Him on earth, officially and by nature, as priests do; and I've heard it said that what helped Bishops to become saints was almsgiving.

"'But Monsieur,' someone else may say to me, 'is it our Rule to admit madmen to Saint-Lazare and those troublesome persons who are little devils?' I'll answer him that Our Lord willed to surround himself with lunatics, demoniacs, madmen, and persons who were tempted and possessed. People brought them to Him from everywhere to set them free and cure them, and He tried to remedy those things. Why find fault with us for that, when we're striving to imitate Our Lord in something He showed to be pleasing to Him? If He welcomed the mentally ill and fanatics, why shouldn't we? We don't go out looking for them, people bring them to us; and how do we know whether His Providence, which ordains things in that way, doesn't want to make use of us to remedy the infirmity of those poor people, an illness He loved so much in them that He seems to have taken it upon himself, having willed to appear in a frenzy, as it were, and out of His mind, to sanctify this condition in His own sacred person: *Et tenuerunt eum, dicentes quoniam in furorem versus est*? O my Savior and my God, grant us the grace to see these things with the same eye as You do!

"'But the Foundlings, why burden ourselves with that? Don't we have enough other things to do?' Let's remember, brothers, what Our Lord said to His disciples: 'Let the children come to me,' and be very much on our guard against preventing them from coming to us; otherwise, we'll be opposed to Him. How friendly He was with children, even taking them into His arms and blessing them with His hands! Isn't it on their account that He gave us a rule for our salvation, commanding us to become like them if we want to enter the kingdom of heaven? To take care of children is, in a certain sense, to become a child; and to take care of the

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10And they seized him for they said that he was out of his mind. Cf. Mk 3:21. (NAB)

11Cf. Mk 10:14. (NAB)
foundlings is to take the place of their fathers, or, rather, that of God, who has said that, even if a mother should forget her child, He himself wouldn’t forget it. If Our Lord were still living among us and saw children abandoned by their fathers and mothers, as these are, do you think, Messieurs, do you think, Brothers, that He’d also be willing to abandon them? It would be an insult to His Infinite Goodness to entertain such a thought, and we’d be unfaithful to His grace, which has chosen us to run this hospital, if we were to refuse to accept the trouble we have with it.12

"I’m bringing up these problems, my dear confreres, before they occur because it may happen that they’ll arise. I can’t go on much longer; I’ll be passing on soon; my age, my poor health, and the abominations of my life don’t permit that God will let me remain long on earth. So then, it could happen that, after my death, trouble-makers and cowardly men may come along and say, ‘Why should we be weighed down with the care of these hospitals? How can we help so many people ruined by wars, and go to see them in their homes? What’s the use of taking on so many things and so many poor persons? Why guide these Sisters who nurse the sick, and why waste our time on persons who are mentally ill?’ There will be some who oppose those ministries—have no doubt about that—and others will say that it’s too much to attempt to send men to distant countries, to the Indies, or to Barbary. But, my God, but, my Lord, didn’t You send Saint Thomas to the Indies and the other Apostles throughout the world? Didn’t You make them responsible for the care and guidance of all peoples in general and many persons and families in particular? No matter; our vocation is: *Evangelizare pauperibus.*13

” ‘We’re willing to give a mission here in this country; there’s enough to do here without going any farther; I’m willing to do that, but don’t talk to me about the foundlings, the old folks at the Nom-de-Jésus, and those people who are locked up here!’ Some-day we’ll see men like that, so perverse that they’ll disparage the

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12The passage quoted in Abelly (op. cit., bk. III, chap. XI, sect. II, p. 127) seems to be a different rendering of this passage.

13To bring the Good News to the poor. Cf. Lk 4:18. (NAB)
good works God has led us to take on and maintain with His blessing; have no doubt about that. I’m warning the Company of this so that it may see things as they are, as works of God, which God has entrusted to us, without our having intruded ourselves into a single one of them, or doing anything whatsoever to have them entrusted to us. They were given to us either by those who have authority to do so, or from sheer necessity; that’s how God involved us in these plans. Thus, everyone thinks that this Company is from God because people see that it hastens to the relief of the most pressing and neglected needs.

“Despite all that, however, people will still have something to complain about; I’m warning you of this, my dear confreres, before I leave you, in the spirit in which Moses warned the children of Israel, as is said in Deuteronomy. I am going away; you shall never see me again;\(^{14}\) I know that several of you will rise up to lead the others astray;\(^{15}\) they’ll do what I forbid you to do and will ignore what I recommend to you on God’s behalf. Be very careful not to allow yourselves to be caught off guard because, if you act like them, evils will come upon you that will destroy you; but, on the contrary, if you do the works of the Lord without cutting back anything in them, you’ll be blessed with all sorts of blessings. *Post discessionem meam*, said Saint Paul, *venient lupi rapaces.*\(^{16}\) After I’ve gone away, ravenous wolves will appear and false brothers will rise up among you, proclaiming perverse things and teaching you the opposite of what I’ve told you. But don’t listen to them; they’re false prophets. There will likewise be found, brothers, carcasses of Missioners who will strive to insinuate false maxims in order to undermine these foundations of the Company, if they can; you must resist them.

“I don’t know if I’ll be going too far by saying what Saint Benedict said before he died. Even then, in the houses he had founded, there were disgruntled religious who were saying, ‘Why this and why that?’ murmuring against the leadership, and con-

\(^{14}\)Cf. Jn 16:16. (NAB)  
\(^{15}\)Cf. Mt 24:11. (NAB)  
\(^{16}\)After my departure, savage wolves will come. Cf. Acts 20:29. (NAB)
demning holy practices that had been established. When this came to the knowledge of that holy Abbot, he feared that after him everything would change course. So, what does he do? That's an Order in which there's no Superior General; each house is autonomous; it doesn't receive a visitation or correction from any other; so, he implores the neighboring Bishops who will see any of them in a state of disorder, to come down on it with reprimands and suspensions, to restrain those troublesome, recalcitrant monks, and even to appeal to the nobles in the environs to pursue them and recall them to their duties by force of arms. I really don't want to say all that but only that, if at some future time, some in the Company might suggest doing away with this practice, giving up that hospital, recalling the men ministering in Barbary, remaining here, not going there, giving up this ministry, and not hastening to respond to needs in far-off places, those false confreres should be told fearlessly, 'Messieurs, let us keep the laws of our fathers in our present state; God has put us there and wants us to stay in it.' Stand firm in that.

"But," they'll say, 'the Company is bogged down by such or such a ministry.' Ah! If, in its infancy, the Company sustained it and carried all the other burdens, why won't it be able to manage this when it's stronger? Those men have to be told, 'Leave us alone, leave us in the state in which Our Lord was when He was on earth; we're doing what He did; don't hinder us from imitating Him.' Warn them, you see, warn them and don't listen to them.

"But what sort of men will turn us away from those good works already begun? They'll be undisciplined, undisciplined, undisciplined men who seek only to enjoy themselves and, provided they have enough to eat, don't bother about anything else. And who else? They'll be. . . . I'd rather not say. They'll be men who coddle themselves (as he said this, he folded his arms, mimicking lazy men), people who have only a narrow outlook, confining their perspective and plans to a certain circumference within which they shut themselves away, so to speak, in one spot; they don't want to leave it, and if they're shown something outside it and go near to have a look, they immediately go back to their center, like snails into their shells."
Note: In saying this, he made certain gestures with his hands, moving his head around and speaking in a certain contemptuous tone of voice, which conveyed even better what he was trying to express than what he was actually saying.

Then, recollecting himself, he reflected, "O you wretch! You're an old man like those people; small things seem big to you, and difficulties frighten you. Yes, Messieurs, just getting up in the morning seems a great affair to me, and the slightest inconveniences appear insurmountable. So then, there'll be small-minded men, people like myself, who'll try to cut back the practices and ministries of the Company. Let's give ourselves to God, Messieurs, so that He'll grant us the grace to stand fast. Let's stand fast, Brothers, let's stand fast, for the love of God; He'll be faithful to His promises and will never abandon us as long as we're truly submissive to Him in carrying out His plans. Let's stay within the bounds of our vocation and strive to become interior men, forming a strong, holy attachment to the service of God; let's do the good that presents itself, and do it in the ways we've mentioned. I'm not saying that we have to go to extremes and undertake everything indiscriminately, but to do the things God shows us that He wants us to do. We belong to Him and not to ourselves; if He increases our work, He'll also increase our strength. O Savior! What a happiness! O Savior! If there were several paradises, to whom would You give them if not to a Missioner who will persevere respectfully in all the ministries You've marked out for him, and who has never failed to carry out any of the duties of his state! That's what we're hoping for, brothers, and what we ask of His Divine Majesty. At this time, let's all thank Him for the infinite grace of having called and chosen us for such holy ministries, sanctified by Our Lord himself who practiced them first. Oh, what graces do we not have reason to hope for if we do them in His Spirit, for the glory of His Father and the salvation of souls! Amen."
December 13, 1658

"My dear confreres, this evening we’re going to continue the conference on our Rules and will finish the first chapter, which contains three articles. We talked about the first one last Friday, and this evening we’ll speak about the second and third. This is what they contain:

There are both clerical and lay members in the Congregation. The work of the former is to travel around through towns and villages, as Christ himself and His disciples did, breaking the bread of the Divine Word for the neglected by preaching and catechizing. They should also urge people to make general confessions of their entire life and hear these confessions. Their ministry also includes settling quarrels and disputes, establishing the Confraternity of Charity, staffing seminaries which have been set up in our houses for diocesan clergy, giving retreats, and organizing meetings of priests in our houses. Their work also includes any other ministry which is supportive to those mentioned. The lay members help in these ministries like Martha in whatever way the Superior wants them to. This help includes “prayers and tears,” mortification, and good example.

If the Congregation, with the help of God’s grace, is to achieve what it sees as its purpose, a genuine effort to put on the spirit of Christ will be needed. How to do this is learned mainly from what is taught in the Gospels: Christ’s poverty, His chastity, and obedience; His love for the sick; His decorum; the sort of life style and behavior which He inspired in His disciples; His way of getting along with people; His daily spiritual exercises; preaching missions; and other ministries which He undertook on behalf of the people. There is something on each of these in the chapters which follow.

"On the first of these two last articles, we’ll speak about the persons of whom the Company is composed, and the ministries it has in order to achieve the purpose it has proposed for itself—this Company which God has raised up on earth in our day, to strive for its
own holiness, the salvation of people in the rural areas, and to assist those in the ecclesiastical state to grow in knowledge and virtue.

“On the second, we’ll discuss the best means to practice all that, which is none other than to clothe ourselves with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, as the article states. The poor Company! The poor Company that, without this Spirit, is only a body without a soul!

“So then, the Rule states that the Company should be composed of two kinds of men; first, of ecclesiastics, such as priests, clerics in sacris, and others who are in Minor Orders, or who, because they’re still in the seminary, are waiting to receive them; and second, of laymen, who have no Orders, nor do they aspire to them; and that both one and the other will work, although in different ways, for the salvation of poor country people and the advancement of those in the ecclesiastical state in piety and knowledge.

“People ask, then, how clergy and laymen can devote themselves to the end proposed with regard to the poor people and the clergy, which is done through the exercises of missions, staffing seminaries, guiding retreatants, etc., for there seems to be some problem with saying that Brothers can be referred to as persons working for the salvation of poor country people and the formation of the clergy, since they neither catechize nor preach, and have no aptitude or ability for such ministries; so, what contribution can they make to this? Nevertheless, Messieurs, in a certain sense, they do just that. They help in these ministries, although they neither preach, teach, nor direct anyone; and the Rule is stating the truth when it says that they contribute to these ministries, not, however, in the way the clergy does, publicly and directly, but in their own way, by helping those who actually do teach, exhort, and administer the Sacraments, etc. They cooperate in these ministries by filling the role of Martha, for this saint took care of preparing food for Our Lord and providing for His lodging. They go on missions to look after the priests, who are working to win souls to God, so that the latter may be free to work in this holy ministry without being taken away from it by their own physical needs. So, in this sense, it’s true to say that our Brothers help to instruct the people, to see that they can get to confession, that disputes are settled, and that the Confraternity of Charity is established directly, but they do all that in the
way the lower members of the body cooperate with the superior ones, so that it may carry out its functions.

"The operations of the mind aren’t carried out by the mind alone; it’s aided by the stomach, liver, and lungs, which are at the service of the understanding, judgment, and other intellectual faculties. A corpse can’t perform the functions of a living man, because it lacks those constituents that make blood and the respiratory system, the principles of life, whereas, in a living body, in a person endowed with reason, there’s a certain space in the head in which the vital spirits circulate, images are formed, and the reason operates by means of its inferior parts, which send vapors to the brain to serve that purpose.

"In like manner, the Brothers, who are the inferior members of the body of the Company, contribute, by their manual labor, to the spiritual ministries of the priests and to the conversion of the world; they do their part to give men faith and the knowledge of God, to stir them up to penance, to have the Sacraments administered to them, and to make them capable of eternal life, which the priests wouldn’t be free to do without the help they receive from the Brothers. This shows the communion that exists in the Church and in Communities, where everyone has the same goal, each individual does his part to achieve it—although in different ways—and they all work for one another. This is what led the holy royal Prophet to say: *Particeps ego sum omnium timentium te et custodientium mandata tua*: I share in all the good works done by those who fear You and keep Your commandments.¹ How is that? It’s the same as, in an association of merchants in the world, each of the associates profits according to the amount of money he’s invested in it.

"All of us have made in the Company the resolution to live and die in it; we’ve brought to it all that we have—body, soul, will, ability, industry, and the rest. Why? To do what Jesus Christ did, to save the world. And how? By means of the connection there is among us and the offering we’ve made to live and die in this Company, and to give to this all that we are and all that we do. It follows, therefore, that this communion among Missioners gives each of them the profits of the entire body because everyone works together for its

¹Cf. Ps 119:63. (NAB)
success; thus, the priests don’t make conversions on their own, but the Brothers, in accord with the Rule, contribute to that by their prayers, work, tears, mortifications, and good example. A man who plays the organ doesn’t play it on his own; he’s helped by another who works the bellows; true, the second person doesn’t actually play; it’s the master who does the playing; nevertheless, by blowing the bellows, he contributes to the harmony; without that, the musician would move his fingers in vain and would do nothing.

“And so, Messieurs, whether the Brothers serve those who work at preaching the Gospel, or pray for the conversion of sinners, or do penance, or weep, or behave in an edifying manner for the sanctification of the clergy and the people, it can be said that they participate in, and cooperate with, the good that’s done in the missions, seminaries, ordinations, retreats, and the rest.

“Oh bien, Brothers! You’re not direct workers like the priests, who have received a sacramental character to reconcile souls to God and to celebrate the holy Mysteries; God doesn’t want to receive hosts from your hands; and if someone had attempted to offer sacrifice, as Saul did, O Jésus! what a sacrilege! Or if someone else tried to offer incense, like Uzziah, what a crime! Saul and Uzziah were Kings; they were anointed, yet one was stricken with leprosy for having touched the censer, and the other was condemned for having acted as a sacrificer. Both lost their kingdoms, and when Samuel reproved Saul for his rashness, he announced to him the tragedies that were to befall him—and they were great because God, having cursed him, permitted that he kill himself in despair.

“Now, if the Holy Spirit attributes all those chastisements to the venture of those Kings, who thought they were acting rightly, judge, Brothers, how lofty is the role of the clergy above all other earthly dignities, even of royalty, and what a high opinion you should have of priests, whose sacred character is a participation in the eternal priesthood of the Son of God, who has given them power to offer in sacrifice His own Body and to distribute it as food, so that those who eat it may live forever.

“Surely, after that honor which they’ve received from the Divine Majesty, you should hold them in great honor, although you’ve been called to contribute with them to the sanctification of souls,
not by doing what they do, but as the Rule points out and in the way prescribed by the Superior. Note that, in the way prescribed by the Superior. You’re to go that far and not beyond. You must thank God for being in that state of being able to do your part in carrying out the plans Jesus Christ has for the Company. Happy are you to be in a situation which, to say the least, is the surest one! Praise God for that, for being able to assist your neighbor in the way obedience will indicate to you, with no danger of vanity, because you don’t see the good you do, which, ordinarily, is attributed to the priests, even though you may perhaps have done more for the success of their public actions by your secret, private ones.

"Here’s another reason you have for thanking God, Brothers, namely, for calling you to a Company where each individual has his own holiness as a goal. So then, you’re here to work at your own growth in holiness. Oh, what a grace! Oh, what a reason to humble yourselves! That’s how you can help to advance virtue as much as the priests do. And if you work faithfully at acquiring virtue, it will be true to say that you’ll be in a state of holiness. And if there’s a priest who’s doing a miserable job at this—like myself, abominable sinner that I am—it must be acknowledged that you’ll also be holier than he, even though he’s a priest, or a senior member, or even a Superior. How is that? Because it’s neither high positions nor age that give merit to a person, but the works that make him more like Our Lord. It’s through them that he grows in holiness; it’s through the practice of the virtues that he’s saved. That’s clear in the Gospel of the Last Judgment, where it’s stated that Our Lord will place at His right those who worked at acquiring virtue, especially the virtue of charity, and they’re the only ones who will enter the kingdom of heaven. So then, it’s the practice of the virtues that binds us to His love, and it’s His love that prompts you to perform more acts of virtue.

"If you really love God, you’ll act in the same way. Now, you can love God as much as the priests; and a poor weakling as much as those who are learned. One day, good M. Duval said to me, ‘Monsieur, some day the poor people will vie with us for paradise and

2André Duval (cf. XI, 21, n. 1).
will carry it off because there’s a great difference between their manner of loving God and ours.’ Their love, like that of Our Lord, is practiced in suffering, humiliations, work, and conformity to God’s good pleasure. And how is ours shown—if we have any? What do we do that’s anywhere near those signs of true love?

“You know the story of Bro. Gilles;³ it’s rather unremarkable. He expressed to Saint Bonaventure a great desire to love God. ‘Oh, if I were a learned man,’ he said, ‘if I were a priest like you, I’d really love God!’ And when that holy Doctor told him that, even though he was a Brother, without diplomas or Holy Orders, he could love God as much as the most learned persons in high positions, and that a poor weakling could do likewise, he said, ‘Quoi, a poor ignoramus like me can love God as much as Bonaventure!’ ‘Yes, you can.’ Then, enraptured, that Brother went off crying out, ‘Courage, you who hear me, courage! You can love our great God as much as our Fr. Bonaventure!’

“So, Brothers, you can equal the priests in that; but it’s always understood that you work deliberately at virtue and your own holiness; for, if you don’t, and, instead of growing in holiness according to the Rule, you wallow in your faults, you’ll be a scandal in the house and outside; consequently, instead of contributing to the salvation of souls, you’ll place some obstacle to it in a certain sense, and, what’s more, you’ll lose your own in the end. So be very careful about this, Brothers.

‘But,’ you may say, ‘what do we have to do to grow in holiness like that?’ I just told you: keep your Rules faithfully, especially the one that recommends to you holy union and mutual charity among us, but particularly among the priests and you Brothers, in such a way that we may always get along well together and live in perfect union, since we’re all members composing one same body, although some may be of more noble birth than others. The example I gave above of Saint Paul illustrates that beautiful union by the union between the human body and its members, in as much as they get along so well together, each according to its function and in no competition with the

³A Franciscan Brother.
others. Now, that’s how we should be united together; that, Brothers, is the way you should live with the priests in order to be able to advance in the holiness your vocation requires of you.

"‘But,’ someone will say, ‘how can we obtain and preserve this holy union among all of us, particularly between priests and Brothers?’ By mutual esteem and respect between the priests and the Brothers. We mustn’t think of ourselves according to the flesh or in a human way, but look upon one another as God’s creatures, who have given themselves to God and renounced everything that’s not of God, and, with this in view, to anticipate one another in honor and kindness, according to the advice of Saint Paul, Honore invicem praevenientes. It’s understood that this be with the requisite consideration and preparation; for we’re well aware that the coadjutor Brothers owe greater honor to the priests than the priests do to them. Now, you’ll ask me, Brothers, how you should honor the priests; my answer is that you should consider them your fathers; and, in fact, fathers are the ones who engender; that’s what priests do when they forgive sins and put us in the grace of God.

"Consequently, Brothers, far from you be any attempt to be on a par with the priests; don’t ever measure yourselves against them, and, even less, evaluate your state with theirs. The difference is like the difference between heaven and earth. They’ve received a very sacred and incomparable character, a power over the Body of Jesus Christ that the angels admire, and the authority to forgive people’s sins—a great subject of amazement and gratitude for them. Is there anything greater, Brothers? Is there any dignity similar to that? They are your fathers and guides in the spiritual life. You have to keep yourselves lowly, and humble yourselves greatly in their regard; you owe all priests, and notably the Superior and the Officers, special respect and great obedience. I’m saying ‘the Officers,’ Brothers, who have the right to give you orders, even to give you a penance—by order, however, of the Superior—for, if they can do this with regard to the clerics and even the priests, how much more can they do it with regard to you! You have fathers in the Company; treat them as such, with reverence and submission, and remove

\[Anticipate one another in showing honor. Cf. Rom 12:10. (NAB)\]
your hats in their presence. It doesn’t matter that they may have imperfections, just as I do, wretched man that I am, covered with iniquities; they’re incorporated into a holy, lofty state and, consequently, are worthy not only of respect and honor but also of obedience, especially the Superior and the Officers.

"Brothers, as long as you maintain the submission of true children and carry out your duties with regard to the priests, God will bless you; if, however, you have the rashness to put yourselves on a par with them, they who are your fathers, you’ll be like Satan, who said, *In caelum conscendam et simili ero Altissimo;* I will ascend to heaven and will be like the Almighty.5 When a layman tries to put himself on a par with a priest, that’s like trying to raise himself up as the devil did. The Brother who tries to put himself on the same level as a priest, whom God has fashioned according to His Heart, is a devil.

"Be on your guard against that, Brothers; remember that, as soon as you try to pass judgment on everything, minding someone else’s business and acting on your own whim, you’ll lose the Spirit of God; and if someone falls into this misfortune, he won’t be a Brother of the Mission but a disgusting carcass. That’s what the Brothers owe the priests.

"Now, what do the priests owe the Brothers? They owe them love as if they were their own children, even though they treat them as brothers; they also owe them mutual support, gracious condescension, and compassion in their infirmities. Yes, Messieurs, you should love the Brothers unreservedly and sincerely; you should condescend and sympathize with their infirmities. Here’s the means of maintaining the Company in this holy union: let our Brothers be respectful and obedient, and the priests have everywhere a genuine love and mutual support for our Brothers.

"But how can we preserve this union among priests, seminarians, and Brothers, a union among all of us; how can we do it? By the grace of God, we have it now. What else will we do in order never to break this loving and desirable bond of charity? For the time being, I’ll speak briefly about it and will tell the Company that we adopted a good means for it the other day. The right way for

5*I will scale heaven and I will be like the Most High.* Cf. Is 14:13-14. (NAB)
each man to contribute to this is to adopt the practice of the means that unite hearts, like the ones we just mentioned, namely, esteem, respect, and deference toward one another and, for this purpose, to fight constantly against the contrary vices, especially detraction, and, from time to time in our conferences, to discuss—as we did recently—this same detraction, the vice that's the source of division and the poison of Communities. Consequently, if we want to preserve this union, that accursed vice must, of necessity, be banished from the Company. It's very true that, by the grace of God, you've given chase to it, with the result that we see nothing of it any more—or almost nothing—but we have to be on our guard that it doesn't return and, in order to do this, to be faithful to practicing the means we've determined to take. You see, Messieurs, if we're firmly established in this, you can rest assured that we're on the way, not only to preserving firmly this union, but also of growing in our own holiness. God will bless this Company, even though it may be composed of all kinds of persons, poor men for the most part. Let's hope that it will serve God for the love of God himself, like that lute player mentioned in yesterday's reading, who, deaf though he was, took no other pleasure in his beautiful music than to please his Prince, who was listening to him. So then, let's hope that, if His Divine Goodness doesn't find any gossiping or disrespect among us, He will establish, through imperceptible ways, this means of maintaining the Company on the road of its holiness, and that priests and Brothers will make progress in it.

"O blessed Rules, which rid the Company of this fault so opposed to our advancement in virtue! If, sometimes, through human frailty, we fail in this, the remedy is to go down on our knees at once and ask pardon of God and of the Company for it. By the grace of God, some men have this holy practice, and it contributes in no small way to making amends for these two vices. It also seems to me that I'm seeing this improvement. That's the second means that will preserve the Company in the spirit of the Rule.

"Lastly, to put it in a nutshell, a sovereign means of maintaining ourselves in this union is humility. If we do an analysis of antipathies and disagreements, we'll see that all this stems from competi-
tion. If someone succeeds in preaching or in his ministry, he becomes complacent about it, brags a little, and becomes full of himself. Then what happens? People think less of him because of this and they humiliate him—we can’t stand a man who blows his own horn—and this becomes a bone of contention. The contrary, then, is a source of peace and union, namely to humble ourselves, to want people to know that we’re the worst of men, and, if we think we’ve been successful, to acknowledge immediately, from the experience of our own faults, our inability to do good and our inclination to evil. We’ll find only too many of them to convince ourselves that we’re deceiving ourselves and are capable only of spoiling everything, to make ourselves the most miserable of men in our own eyes, and, in fact, to love to be despised. If we have a good opinion and good sentiments about anyone, let it be about our neighbor and not about ourselves. Let the senior priests refer respect and success to others; let the clerics submit to one another, and let the Brothers subject themselves to the least among them, in line with the advice of the Prince of the Apostles, ‘Be subject to every human creature for the love of God.’6 Nothing will be apparent any longer but what is loveable and well ordered.

“I could say other things on this topic, but that’s quite enough to make you see how important it is for priests and Brothers to be closely united by true charity, in the way we just mentioned, if they want to cooperate with the priests in a useful and meritorious manner in the salvation of souls, by the means the Rule ordains. I’ve spent a long time on this point because it has seemed very important to me.

“Let’s move on now to the second one mentioned, which won’t take long, and see what means the Rule indicates to us to achieve the end it proposes to us; let’s read the very words of this article: And if this Congregation, with the help of God’s grace, is to achieve what it sees as its purpose, a genuine effort to put on the spirit of Jesus Christ will be needed, etc. We’ve said that the Brothers as well as the priests are equally obliged to work at their own growth in holiness; but, it’s not the same for what concerns the salvation of poor persons and the formation of those in the ecclesiastical state be-

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6Cf. 1 Pt 2:13. (NAB)
cause it’s the distinctive feature of priests to preach, catechize, and work at reconciliations, setting up the Confraternity of Charity, staffing seminaries, giving ordination retreats, and the rest of the ministries on behalf of the neighbor. That speaks for itself. The role of Brothers, however, is only to give them the means of doing that by carrying out the office of Martha and contributing by the other means we’ve specified.

“So the Rule states that, in order to do this, as well as to tend to our own perfection, we must be clothed with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. O Sauveur! O Messieurs! What an important matter it is to clothe ourselves with the Spirit of Jesus Christ! This means that to grow in holiness, to be useful in helping people, and to serve the clergy well, we have to work at imitating the perfection of Jesus Christ and to strive to attain it. It also means that, of ourselves, we can do nothing in this matter. We must be filled and animated with this spirit of Jesus Christ. To understand this clearly, we have to know that His Spirit is poured out on all Christians who live according to the rules of Christianity; their words and actions are diffused with the Spirit of God, with the result that God has raised up the Company—and you see this clearly—in order to act in like manner. It has always had a love for Christian teachings and has desired to be clothed with the spirit of the Gospel in order to live and act as Our Lord did so that His Spirit may be apparent in the entire Company and in each Missioner, in all its ministries in general and in each one in particular.

“But what is that spirit diffused in such a way? How is it to be understood when someone says, ‘The Spirit of Our Lord is in a certain person or in certain actions’? Is it that the Holy Spirit is diffused in them? Yes, the Holy Spirit personally is poured out on the righteous and dwells personally in them. When we say that the Holy Spirit is at work in someone, it means that this Spirit, residing in that person, gives him or her the same inclinations and dispositions Jesus Christ had on earth, and they cause the person to act in the same way—I’m not saying with equal perfection, but according to the measure of the gifts of that Divine Spirit.

“But what is the Spirit of Our Lord? It’s a spirit of perfect charity, filled with a marvelous esteem of the Divinity and an infinite desire to honor it in a worthy manner, together with a knowledge of
the greatness of His Father, in order to admire and extol them unceasingly. He has such a high esteem of this that He paid homage to Him for all the things that were in His Sacred Person and that passed out from it; He attributed everything to Him; He was unwilling to say that His teaching was His own, but referred it to His Father: *Doctrina mea non est mea, sed ejus qui misit me Patris* [sic]. Is there any greater esteem than that of the Son, who is equal to the Father, and yet who acknowledges the Father as the author and sole principle of all the good that’s in Him? And what was His love? Oh, what love! O my Savior, what love did You not show for Your Father! Could there have been any greater love, my dear confreres, than to annihilate himself for Him? For when Saint Paul speaks of the birth of the Son of God on earth, he says that He annihilated himself. Could He show any greater love in that than by dying through love in the way He died? O love of my Savior! O love! You were incomparably greater than the angels were able to understand and will never understand!

“His humiliations were nothing but love, His work only love, His sufferings only love, His meditations only love, and all His interior and exterior actions were nothing but repeated acts of His love. His love gave Him great contempt for the world, for the spirit of the world, for wealth, for pleasures, and for honors.

“That’s a description of the Spirit of Our Lord, with which we must be clothed, namely, in a word, to always have great esteem and love for God. He was so filled with these that He did nothing of himself or to satisfy himself, *Que placita sunt ei facio semper*. I always do the Will of my Father; I always do the actions and works that are pleasing to Him. And since it’s by the Will of the Father that the Eternal Son disdained the world, its goods, pleasures, and honors, it’s by disdaining them as He did that we’ll share in His Spirit.

“In line with that, brothers, we have to work toward esteem of God and try to conceive a great—a very great—respect for Him. Oh, if we only had a vision incisive enough to penetrate a little into the infinity of His excellence, O my God, what lofty sentiments we’d

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7*My teaching is not my own, but from the Father who sent me.* Cf. Jn 7:16. (NAB)
8*I do always the things that please Him.* Cf. Jn 8:29. (NAB)
take away from it, brothers! Like Saint Paul, we'd say that eyes have never seen, nor ears heard, nor the mind understood anything like it. God is an abyss of gentleness, a sovereign, eternally glorious being, an infinite good that embraces all good; everything in Him is incomprehensible. Now, the knowledge we have, that God is above all understanding, should suffice for us to have Him infinitely esteemed. And that esteem should cause us to annihilate ourselves in His presence and to speak of His Supreme Majesty with a great sentiment of humility, reverence, and submission; and we'll love Him in proportion to our esteem for Him. This esteem and love will give us a constant desire to do always His holy Will, to apply ourselves earnestly to do nothing against it, to distance ourselves far from worldly things, and will cause us to disdain earthly goods.

"Preserve in our hearts, my God, a holy aversion to those things and to perishable pleasures; may we never seek out any of them and carefully avoid the self-gratifications to which our nature imperceptibly inclines us, such as wanting others to adapt themselves to us, wanting to be successful in all we do and have everything smile on us. O Savior, teach us to seek our pleasure in You, to love what You loved and to be pleased with what pleases You.

"O my God, necessity obliges us to have these perishable goods and to preserve for the Company what Our Lord has placed in it; but we have to apply ourselves to this in the way God himself applies himself to produce and preserve temporal goods to adorn the world and feed its creatures, so that He takes care to provide for even the tiniest insect. This doesn't hinder His interior operations, by which He engenders His Son and brings forth the Holy Spirit. He does those things without omitting the others. So, just as it's God's pleasure to provide food for plants, animals, and human beings, those who are in charge in this little universe of the Company must likewise provide for the needs of the individuals who compose it. This really has to be done, my God; otherwise, all that Your Providence has given for their maintenance would be lost, Your service would come to a halt, and we'd be unable to go to evangelize poor persons gratuitously.

"So then, my God, allow us, in order to continue our ministries for Your glory, to work at the preservation of temporal things, but to do it in such a way that our spirit may not be contaminated by them, nor
justice wounded, nor our hearts encumbered. O Savior, remove the spirit of avarice from the Company and give it only that of providing for the necessities of life, providing for them, O Lord, as You provide for those of all peoples of the earth and even for the smallest animals, with a general and a particular attention, not allowing those external works to distract You for one instant from the eternal and admirably fruitful applications within You. May the Superiors and Officers of the Company do likewise, devoting themselves diligently to the care of business matters and providing the entire body and each of its members with what's right for them, without neglecting the interior life and the cordial union they should have with You.

“As for honors, O God, deliver us from those hellish, idle dreams, distance us from that damnable envy that drove the angels from paradise and turns men into devils, that insatiable desire for honor that causes us to have a good opinion of ourselves and of all we do, makes us disrespectful of others, and leads the proud man to raise himself up like a dragon. It’s an insidious, venomous monster that insinuates itself everywhere and infects with its stinking breath the most withdrawn souls. This demon is always prowling around the Communities and persons who come closest to holiness, seeking to devour them. It’s with them in particular that the devil is concerned, in order to fill them with self-esteem and satisfaction, and, little by little, to make it hard for them to be submissive, relegating them, in the end, to follow only their own false lights, causing them to fall later on into some precipice. And what a disaster that is! O disaster, how great you are!

“Oh bien, brothers, that’s what we have to say to you in general regarding the Spirit of Jesus Christ! All that would remain now is to speak to you in detail on what this Rule points out concerning this, but, since we’ve gone overtime, we’ll content ourselves with telling you for the present that this esteem and love of God, conformity to His holy Will, and disdain of the world and of self that we have to imitate in Jesus Christ in order to be clothed with His Spirit couldn’t be seen better in us than by the practice of the virtues that were particularly evident in Our Lord when He was living on earth, namely, those that are contained in His teachings, in His poverty, chastity, and obedience, in His charity toward the sick, etc., so that, if we begin to imitate Our Lord in
practicing all that, and in accord with what the other Rules state, we
should hope that we’ll be clothed with His Spirit.

“May God be pleased to give us the grace of always conforming
our behavior to His way of acting and our sentiments to His. May He
keep our lamps lit in His presence and our hearts always tending to
His love and always devoted to clothing ourselves ever more with
Jesus Christ in the way we’ve just indicated! All the baptized are
clothed with His Spirit, but all don’t do its works. Each individual,
then, has to strive to be conformed to Our Lord, to distance himself
from the teachings of the world, and to be bound in affection and
practice to the examples of the Son of God, who became man like us
in order that we might not only be saved, but, like Him, saviors;
which means, by cooperating with Him in the salvation of souls.

“Let’s remember, my dear confreres, that this happiness and
honor will never be ours if we don’t work to preserve the holy union
we’ve so strongly recommended to you, using, for this purpose, the
means we’ve pointed out, particularly mutual esteem and respect
among ourselves, and, above all, holy humility and flight from ma-
ligious gossip and contumely. But it will be useless for us to work to
enjoy that benefit, if God himself doesn’t help us to do it. Aren’t
you most willing, brothers, for us to ask Him right now to grant us
this grace and for all of us to make tomorrow’s meditation in order
to be animated with this desire of resembling Him in our thoughts,
words, and actions, and, in a word, to put into practice the rest of
what I just recommended to you? I have no doubt that all of you are
determined to do this, but this resolution has to be strengthened by
frequent prayers and renewed acts of affection. Oh, since it has
pleased God to propose that for us, He won’t fail to be faithful to His
promise, for He said that we’ll do the works that He did, and even
greater ones! So that’s what I can tell you just now on the explana-
tion of this Rule and the preceding one.”