February 14, 1659

"My dear confreres, you were told that the subject of this conference would be the daily schedule. When M. Gicquel and I were discussing this last night, I was doubtful that I'd be able to try your patience this evening, but, since I was feeling a little better, I thought, in nomine Domine, I'll speak to you on the second chapter of our Rules and postpone the daily schedule for another day.

"Up to the present, brothers, we've spoken to you about the purpose of the Company, namely, to work first and foremost at our own holiness—at our own holiness. (He repeated these words in a calm, serious tone of voice to instill zeal for this into the Company.) This is to be done by imitating the virtues Our Lord taught us by His words and example. We must, then, keep this divine portrait before our eyes. Second, it's to assist poor country people, to instruct them in the Christian virtues, to exhort them to a good life, and to help them make a good general confession, etc. Third, to be of service to the clergy according to our poverty and the little knowledge and virtue we have; and, even though those priests may have more of these than we do, we still have to speak to them about them.

"Next, the Rule states that the Company is composed of priests and laymen; that the role of the first-mentioned is to go from village to village to evangelize poor persons, to organize seminaries and conferences, and to work in the other ministries the Company is accustomed to carry out for the neighbor.

"As for the Brothers, their role is that of Martha, and consists in doing manual work at the side of the priests and contributing to their spiritual ministry by their prayers, tears, mortifications, and good example. We’ve said that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is necessary for both groups in order to carry out their obligations profitably. For
what else is the human spirit but misery and vanity? So then, we have to be animated by His Spirit in order to do what’s indicated by our Rules. Now, to know and to have this Spirit, we’ve said that the following articles will show in what it consists and the means of acquiring it:

“Let’s read the chapter, which is the second one in the little booklet of our Rules; here’s what it says: Before all else, let each of us strive to be well convinced of the truth of the following statement and try to make it our most fundamental principle: Jesus Christ’s teaching will never let us down, while worldly wisdom always will. Jesus Christ himself said that this sort of wisdom was like a house with nothing but sand as its foundation, while His own was like a building with solid rock as its foundation. And that is why the Congregation should always try to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ and never that of the worldly-wise. To be sure of doing this we should pay particular attention to what follows.

“It must therefore be laid down as a basis that the teaching of Jesus Christ does what it says and that the world never delivers what it promises; that those who do what Jesus Christ teaches build on rock, which neither floods nor raging winds can shake; and that those who don’t do what He ordains are like the man who built his house on quicksand, and it was demolished by the first storm. So, whoever speaks of the teaching of Jesus Christ speaks of solid rock and of eternal truths that are followed infallibly by their effects, so much so that the sky would sooner fall than the teaching of Jesus Christ fail. That’s why the Rule concludes that the Company must make profession of always embracing and practicing the teaching of Jesus Christ and never that of the world. In so doing, it will be filled and clothed with Jesus Christ.

“To explain this Rule clearly and, by the same means, to help us to derive good results from it, we’ll follow the method used to treat the things we’ve already explained in some of the preceding articles and will perhaps use with regard to a few others that follow, if the subject obliges us to do, as today’s does. So, we’ll tell you in what

2In *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, Hiver - Décembre 2008, no. 205, pp. 9-31, Bernard Koch, C.M. presents a study on the biblical references used by Saint Vincent in Chapters II and XI.
the teaching of Jesus Christ consists and what’s understood by the maxims of the world; (2) we’ll give a few reasons why we should love it; and (3) we’ll suggest some means of putting it into practice.

"As to the first point, the teaching of Jesus Christ is defined as follows: a divine positive law, given to all by Jesus Christ the lawgiver, the teacher of morality, and the institutor of the Holy Sacrifice and the new Sacraments. That’s the definition. Now, strictly speaking, a law obliges people to keep it. We have to realize, however, that this teaching of Jesus Christ consists in Commandments and counsels, which we call the Gospel. The Commandments place an obligation on the understanding and the will, such as, *Hoc est praeceptum meum, ut diligatis invicem:* ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another.’

This part is a coercive law, which gives a command; but the other part isn’t compulsory, it’s directive, proposing the evangelical counsels to us for growth in holiness, as, for example, ‘Sell what you have and give away the money in alms.’ That’s definitely a divine positive law, which is explained and proposed to everyone to be embraced by each of us according to our state in life and our dispositions and attraction to it, but its practice doesn’t oblige under pain of sin, even though everyone is bound to respect it, so that they’d sin if they held it in contempt. Now, this teaching or law of Jesus Christ is contained in the New Testament both with regard to what He taught us through the Apostles by way of inspiration, or taught us himself in the Gospel, where He speaks to us personally.

"In order to understand this better, we should know that the New Testament contains first the explanation of Holy Scripture and its elaboration for the people’s instruction and good living; and second, the institution of the Holy Sacrifice, the Sacraments, and the orders Jesus Christ established. Third, it contains preceptive teaching, which gives a command, and directive teaching or teaching of direction, which advises us—what we call the *evangelical counsels.* Now, what we intend to speak about in this conference and

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3*Cf. Jn 15:12.* (NAB)
4*Cf. Mt 19:21.* (NAB)
what the Rule mentions is mainly this third type of evangelical
teaching, both preceptive and directive. It's also what we call the
Gospel maxims.

"I'm well aware that, strictly speaking, maxims or axioms are
certain principles that have no proofs from which conclusive conse-
quences are drawn; however, generally speaking, we take them not
only as basic principles but also for the conclusions inferred from
them, either mediately or immediately, and even as noteworthy
adages and sayings that tend, either directly or indirectly, toward
the practice of some virtue or the avoidance of some vice. Now, it's
in all these senses that we take the word maxim and have entitled
this chapter of our Rules: 'Gospel Teachings.'

"But what are those teachings? There are a large number of them
in the New Testament, but the principal and fundamental ones are
those spelled out in Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, which be-
gins, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.'\(^5\) That Sermon is contained in
the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Saint Matthew. Let's take,
for example, one of the fundamental ones, 'Go, and do to your
neighbor whatever you would have him do to you.' That teaching is
the basis of the moral code, and we can regulate all the actions of
secular justice on this principle. Justinian\(^6\) established his laws on
it, as have jurists in formulating civil and canon law. And since
every conclusion drawn from one or several principles must show
with certainty what they ordain for the practice of virtue or forbid
for the avoidance of vice, in the same way certain consequences are
drawn from these Gospel teachings, which, in accord with the plan
of Our Lord, prompt us not only to avoid evil and do good but also
to procure the greatest glory of God His Father and to acquire
Christian perfection.

"To give a better understanding of these teachings and to distin-
guish more clearly those that are obligatory from those that are not,
it's appropriate to add here that there are some we're obliged to ob-

\(^5\) Cf. Mt 5:3. (NAB) Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quotes in this conference are all
from the fifth, sixth, or seventh chapters of Saint Matthew's Gospel.

\(^6\) Justinian I (482-565), Byzantine Emperor and restorer of the Roman Empire.
serve, such as the following: 'Take care to guard against all greed,'\(^7\) 'Do penance,'\(^8\) because these are absolute Commandments. Others are not of obligation, according to Saint Thomas, only: \textit{quoad praeparationem animi}, that is, to be disposed to accept them when necessary, when they're proposed to us and we have the power to do it, like the following one: 'Do good to those who hate you.' There are others that are purely counsels, such as, 'Sell all that you have and give it away in alms;' for Our Lord doesn't oblige anyone to sell all his property in order to give it to persons who are poor; that's only for greater perfection. Lastly, there are others that are also purely evangelical counsels and which, nevertheless, we're sometimes obliged to observe because they have become precepts. That happens when a person has vowed to keep them by taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, because the evangelical counsels have reference to and are summarized in those three virtues, since all of them are concerned with either poverty, or chastity, or obedience.

"According to that, my dear confreres, we who have vowed to follow these three evangelical counsels are obliged to observe them; and by observing them we're assured of building on rock and of constructing a permanent edifice. And those are the counsels and teachings with which our Rule is concerned, and which it states that our Company must adopt. This obligation commits us at the same time to avoid the maxims of the world because they're opposed to those of the Gospel; and in order to be able to avoid them, we have to know what they are. That's why I promised you that I'd tell you what's understood by those maxims of the world. Now, I couldn't describe them to you any better than by showing you how they're opposed to those of Jesus Christ and in what they're contradictory; and here's how:

"First, the teachings of Our Lord state, 'Blessed are the poor,' and those of the world say, 'Blessed are the rich.' The former tell us to be gentle and good-natured; the latter tell us to stand fast and

\(^{7}\text{Cf. Lk 12:15. (NAB)}\)

\(^{8}\text{Cf. Mt 4:17. (NAB)}\)
make people fear us. Our Lord says that suffering is good, 'Blessed are they who mourn,' and worldly people say just the opposite: 'Blessed are those who enjoy themselves and have a good time.' 'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice,' but the world laughs at that. It says, 'Blessed are those who look out for their temporal advancement and to become important.' 'Blessed are they who curse you,' says the Savior; and the world says that we should not put up with insults: 'The person who makes himself a sheep will be eaten by the wolf,' that we have to preserve our reputation at all costs, and that it's better to lose life than honor.

'That's enough to know what the teaching of the world is and to what it tends. Our Rule, then, by committing us to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ, which is infallible, obliges us at the same time, as we've said, to act contrary to the teaching of the world, which is an abuse. Not that there aren't some good adages in the world, but they're not opposed to Christian teachings. Take this one, 'Whoever does good will find good.' That's true; pagans and Turks declare it, and there's no one who doesn't agree with it.

'One day I was traveling with a member of the Great Council; he was telling me that the good teachings of the world are like evangelical counsels. For example, 'Grasp all, lose all.' That's a constant, proven truth; everyone has seen that. So, there are good and bad maxims in the world; the good ones are those that everyone agrees on and which don't contradict the Gospel; the bad ones are the ones that are opposed to those of Jesus Christ and are approved only by wicked, worldly persons.

'There is, however, a difference between the good teachings of the world and those of the Gospel, for we acknowledge the former through experience because we've had proof of them in their effects, but we know the infallibility of those of Our Lord through His Spirit, which gives knowledge and perception of them and shows where those divine consequences lead, and that, since they have been given by the Eternal Truth, they're very genuine and always effective.

'Good country people know that the moon changes, and eclipses of the sun and other stars occur; they speak about them of-
ten and can witness these events when they take place. But an astronomer, who knows the principles of art or science, not only sees them along with them but foresees them ahead of time and will say, 'We’re going to have an eclipse on a certain day, at a certain hour, at a certain minute.' Now, if the astronomers, through their knowledge, have this infallible perception, not only in Europe but among the Chinese, and, by the rules they have, see so clearly into the darkness of the future as to know for certain the strange effects that are bound to occur by the movement of the heavens a hundred years, a thousand years, or four thousand years from now and even to the end of the world; if, I repeat, men have this knowledge, how much more has this Eternal Light, which penetrates the most hidden things, even to the slightest details, seen the truth of these teachings!

“Ah, Messieurs, would that we were convinced that, since these same teachings have been proposed to us by the infinite charity of Jesus Christ, they can’t deceive us! Nevertheless, our malady is that we don’t trust Him but look to human prudence. Don’t you see that we’re guilty of putting greater trust in human reasoning than in the promises of Eternal Wisdom, and in the deceptive appearances of the world rather than in the paternal love of the Savior, who came down from heaven to free us from illusion? O Savior, You were well aware of the value of this teaching when You gave it, and yet few people can understand it. ‘If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other.’ Your Providence often allows us to see the importance of this, and yet we go so far as to do the opposite. So, I ask you, brothers, what’s the better teaching: that of turning the left cheek when someone strikes us on the right one, or the worldly one that would have us resent it? Who, I ask you, has known the nature of these teachings better: the world, that would have us avenge ourselves, or the Son of God, who would deter us from this? Let’s take a gentleman who has been slapped. Resentment causes him to take his sword in hand; everyone comes to encourage him to avenge this insult; blows are exchanged, but he finds himself in danger of losing his property by confiscation, his life by this duel, his soul by this crime, and his wife and children by this misfortune. Wouldn’t this wretched man have done better to hold fast to the teaching of Our Lord, which would have
maintained his person and his home in their prosperity and drawn
down on him great graces from God, than to follow those of the
world, which cast him into this strange reversal of fortune and with
the very great danger of eternal damnation?

"Don't you see that the maxims of the world are built on false
premises, whereas those of Our Lord are always advantageous in
practice, even though they may seem difficult? We must, then, hold
fast to these truths, my dear confreres; we must be guided by
heavenly wisdom.

"There's a teaching that forbids us to initiate lawsuits. 'If some­
one asks you for your coat,' it says 'give him your cloak as well.' So
what advice do you think should be followed: to sue someone when
he tries to take something from us that was acquired honestly, or to
hand it over without putting up an argument? Alas, we've had only
too much experience of the unfortunate consequences of our loss of
Orsigny, which will be a basis and a warning to the Company to
have it avoid lawsuits! Wouldn't it have been better for us to give up
that farm, even though it came to us without our doing anything to
get it? You know, my God, that it was nothing we did; You know
this, my God, You know it. Wouldn't we have done better to have
given it up first, seeing that we've lost everything, despite the great
expense to which we went, rather than going to court, as we did,
thinking we'd preserve that property that was acquired so legiti­
mately? And God has allowed this to teach us at our own expense
how deceptive human prudence is and how worthy of credence and
love is His divine word.

" 'Quoi!' someone will say, 'Do we have to allow ourselves to
be skinned alive and not say a word against the injustice? Isn't it
permissible to defend ourselves to preserve our possessions?' I re­
ply that people are sometimes obliged to go to court. Our Lord did,
and Saint Paul was engaged in a lawsuit and he himself defended
his rights. We're summoned to court, and we're obliged to appear;
but first it's advisable that, to honor Our Lord's advice and to have
devotion to this teaching, the Company should be ready to prefer
losing to entering a plea, and strive to settle all sorts of disputes,
whatever the cost, rather than stubbornly upholding its right, never
responding to the summons without having made an effort to reach a settlement. Let’s give this glory to God, Messieurs, and this example to the public. Our Rule, then, obliges us to stand firm for the teachings of Our Lord; consequently, my dear confreres, we should give ourselves to God to have great respect and love for them and to observe each of them at the proper time. Ask this grace of Him by prayer and sacrifice; let’s use all the means with which God has inspired His Church to adopt these divine truths, and let’s direct our life, our conduct, and our affections to this. Here are a few reasons to urge us on to do this:

“The first is that Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, has said that those who listen to His word and put it into practice are like wise men who built on solid rock, which lasts forever; and, on the contrary, those who hear it and do not act on it, are like those fools who constructed their buildings on sand and are close to being ruined. If we abide by the holy teachings of Our Lord, we’ll build on an immovable rock and, in a short time, will advance from virtue to virtue. If the Superiors of the Company are zealous about preventing it from falling back, but keep moving forward in this holy observance, if God is pleased that all of us should be well grounded and very firm in this resolution, the Company will make great progress in its growth in holiness and in the service of the Church and of the people; however, we have to enter into this and be convinced of its necessity, if we want to avoid our general and individual downfall and enjoy the great benefits promised to those who are steadfast.

“The second reason is drawn from Chapter 5 of Saint Matthew, where Our Lord tells the Apostles and other disciples, ‘This is what I have to say to you; if anyone breaks the least of these [Commandments] and teaches others to do so, he will be a weak man and the least before God; but whoever does and teaches what I order you to do will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’ Our Lord saw some of these among them. ‘We have the Commandments of the Law,’ they’ll say, ‘isn’t that enough?’ He wants to confine us to certain difficult precepts and says that only those who keep them will be blessed. That’s why, in Chapter 7 of the same Saint Matthew, He
gives them this response: ‘Know that the gate of paradise is narrow and the wide road leads to destruction, and great is the number of those who enter by the broad gate that leads to hell.’

“Messieurs, let’s not deceive ourselves; the Son of God has said it; He knows the unfortunate tendency people have to live as they please and, seeing that there would be few who would do violence to themselves in order to follow the Gospel, He warns us about that. Let’s be on the watch for it, and see what the saints have said about it and how strongly they felt that few people would be saved. Let’s reflect that there were only seven or eight in Noah’s Ark, and all the rest died, and that of the ten virgins, five were condemned, and of the ten lepers cleansed, only one returned to Jesus Christ.

“These examples are signs of the small number of the elect. ‘By their fruits you will know them,’ says Our Lord; and they’re the ones who, having been baptized, renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil and, with lively faith, animated with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, do the works of the Gospel. They’re the ones who reach the throne of Jesus Christ. Oh, how few they are! You speak to us of this small number, and yet we see that those who observed the law of Moses performed miracles, as they themselves will tell the Savior of the world on the last day. But He replies to them in advance, ‘Not everyone who says to me “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not drive out the devil, prophesy, and work many miracles in your name?” And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers; I abandon you.’ Oh, how great will be the number of those unfortunate people! Do we want to expose ourselves to their misfortune, Messieurs, and walk with them along the broad road, we who are called to the narrow way to be among the small number of those who are saved? Do we want to be like those workers of iniquity who build on sand and who perish miserably? O Jesus my Savior, we belong to You and, with the help of Your grace, we want to embrace Your teachings.

“Here, Messieurs, is a third reason obliging us to do this, namely, that Our Lord, who has given these divine counsels, ob-
served them first. Show me one teaching that this Divine Lawgiver didn’t practice. Actually, He didn’t pluck out His eyes or cut off one of His hands, but commanded this only for eyes that covet and hands that give scandal. And again, this shouldn’t be taken literally; it means that we simply have to close our eyes so as not to see the wretched occasions that lure us into sin, and that all dangerous friendships and conversations should be cut off. Apart from that, were there question of losing everything, of having nothing, of enduring insults, of loving His enemies, of praying for those who persecuted Him, of renouncing himself and carrying His Cross, He did that even to death in order to carry out His Father’s Will. Now, if we are His children, we must follow Him; like Him, we must embrace poverty, humiliations, and sufferings, detaching ourselves from all that’s not God, and being united with our neighbor through charity in order to be united with God himself through Jesus Christ. That’s what all these teachings prompt us to do; then we’ll be building on rock, with the result that the temptations of our passions will not cause our downfall, as they usually do to those who base their conduct on the maxims of the world.

“The means of establishing ourselves firmly in the teachings of the Gospel are for each individual to read with attention and devotion the New Testament, but mainly the chapters in Saint Matthew that contain them, namely the fifth, sixth, seventh, and tenth. Let’s begin to read them from tomorrow on, while raising our mind to God to ask Him for a respect and understanding of them, exciting within ourselves the desire to observe them without fail and to strive, from the very first day, to put them into practice.

“But that won’t be enough; it’s advisable to make meditation on this matter. I haven’t given enough thought to whether we’ll assign one of the teachings as the subject of meditation, or whether each individual will meditate privately on the one he thinks he needs the most. We shall see. Meanwhile let each man follow the attraction God will give him after reading those four chapters, taking, as matter for the first meditation he’ll make afterward, the teachings that suit him best.
"(2) Another good means to lead us to the practice of these teachings is to consider often that, from the beginning, the Company had the desire of being united to Our Lord to do what He did by the practice of His teachings, in order to become, like Him, pleasing to His Eternal Father and useful to His Church, and that it has really tried to make progress in this and to grow in holiness, if not to the degree we should have done, at least as best we could. This reflection should encourage both the newcomers and the older members, reminding them that it's the spirit with which Missioners must be animated in a special way.

"Lord, pardon our failings in this matter, renew in us the heart that led us to undertake them, and increase in us the grace of living them as they are in our little Rules. In this way, my dear confreres, we'll find in them the Spirit of Our Lord, the spirit of His teachings and everything He points out to us in them to make us worthy workers of His Gospel. We've always had this devotion, but, through my fault, the Company hasn't borne the fruits of it to the point it should have. We have to hope in God's goodness, brothers, in your present dispositions, and in the grace of the Company, which has made these Rules, as a précis of the Gospel, adapted to the use that's most fitting for us in order to unite ourselves to Jesus Christ and to correspond with His plans. He'll grant us the grace to carry each teaching and each Rule to the highest degree of perfection. We have to form a Company animated with the Spirit of God and preserved by the operations of this Spirit. Blessed be God who has laid its foundations and chosen you for this purpose! Blessed be His Holy Name for having disposed you to do so! That's obvious, because you've left the world and made vows to devote yourselves more closely to the holy imitation of Our Lord. So then, by His mercy we're quite ready and strictly obligated to practice these teachings, if they aren't contrary to the Institute. Let's fill our minds with them, fill our hearts with their love, and live according to all that. Let's ask the Apostles, who loved them so much and kept

9There is no reason to be surprised at this reservation; all the evangelical counsels are not for everyone.
them so exactly; let's ask the Blessed Virgin, who, better than anyone else, fathomed their essence and showed how to practice them; lastly, let's ask Our Lord, who laid them down, to grant us the grace to be faithful to practicing them, stirring ourselves up to this by being attentive to their virtue and example. There's reason to hope that, seeing us here in the process of living according to these teachings, they'll be favorable to us in time and in eternity. Amen.”

198. - SEEKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 2)

February 21, 1659

“Messieurs, since I'm feeling well enough to speak to you this evening, we're going to continue the explanation of the second chapter of our Rules. The last conference—the first one on this chapter—was on Gospel teachings in general, of which this Company should make a special profession, as of a divine teaching, given mainly for souls that aspire to holiness, for righteous souls chosen by God to be lights on earth, as Our Lord states, and to win heaven. We said something of this to you last Friday; I'd only bore you by saying more on it, except to remind you in passing that these teachings are addressed especially to us because they're means of achieving the primary purpose we've proposed to ourselves, which is our own growth in holiness, and because we have a special obligation to practice them since we've made them our own Rules.

“Let's move on now to the second article, in which the Rule states with Jesus Christ, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things you need will be given you besides.’ Since Our Lord has recommended this to us, we have to apply ourselves to it; He wills it; He's the Rule of the Mission; He's the one speaking, and it's our job to be attentive to His words and to give ourselves to His Majesty in order to put them into practice. It's

Conference 198. - Manuscript of Conferences.

1Cf. Mt 6:33. (NAB)
appropriate to explain to you word for word the ones we’ve just mentioned, at least the first and principal ones.

“So then, we’ve said that we’re seeking the kingdom of God. “Seeking” is just a word, but it seems to me that it says many things. It means putting ourselves in the state of always aspiring to what is recommended to us, working constantly for the kingdom of God, and not remaining in a cowardly state, with set ideas, and being attentive to our interior life and to keeping it well regulated, but not giving attention to the exterior for our own enjoyment. ‘Seek, seek,’ implies care and action. Seek God in yourselves, for Saint Augustine acknowledges that, as long as he sought Him outside of himself, he didn’t find Him; seek Him in your own soul, as in a dwelling place that’s pleasing to Him. That’s the foundation on which His servants who strive to put all the virtues into practice build them. The interior life is essential; it has to be our aim; if we lack that, we lack everything. Those who have already failed in this should be troubled, ask God’s forgiveness, and set things right. If there’s anyone who needs this, it’s the wretched man who’s speaking to you now; I fall, I relapse, I often let my mind wander, and I rarely enter into myself again. I pile up fault upon fault; that’s the miserable life I lead and the bad example I give.”

Then, recollecting himself, M. Vincent added, “O you pitiful man! You have such an obligation to lead an interior life, and here you are, in the state of falling and relapsing! May God forgive me for this!

“Messieurs, let’s strive to make ourselves interior men so that Jesus Christ may reign in us; let’s strive after this and not remain in a languishing, dissipated state, a worldly, profane state that causes us to busy ourselves with things the senses present, without reflecting on the Creator who made them, not making our meditation in order to extricate ourselves from worldly things, or not seeking the Sovereign Good. So let’s seek, Messieurs, and what? Let’s seek the glory of God, the reign of Jesus Christ.

“After that word ‘seek’ comes ‘first,’ that is, seek the kingdom of God before all else. ‘But, Monsieur, there are so many things to do, so many house duties, so many ministries in town and country;
there's work everywhere; must we, then, leave all that to think only of God?' No, but we have to sanctify those activities by seeking God in them, and do them in order to find Him in them rather than to see that they get done. Our Lord wills that we seek above all His glory, His kingdom, and His justice, and, to do this, that we make our primary concern the interior life, faith, trust, love, our spiritual exercises, meditation, shame, humiliations, our work and troubles, in the sight of God our Sovereign Lord. We must present to Him continual offerings of service and a desire to obtain kingdoms for His Goodness, graces for His Church, and virtues for the Company. Once we're grounded in seeking God's glory in this way, we can be assured that the rest will follow.

"We have Our Lord's promise that He'll take care of all our needs, without our worrying about them; still, we have to be prepared in temporal affairs and tend to them in the way God desires, but not make them our main concern. God expects this care of us, and the Company will do well to be watchful about it; if, however, it makes the mistake of seeking exterior and perishable things, neglecting those that are interior and divine, it will no longer be the Mission; it will be a body without a soul; and this place will be, as it was formerly, a cause of distress for upright persons and of divine aversion. That, Messieurs, is how, first and foremost, we must seek the kingdom of God. But what is the kingdom of God?

"Various explanations are given for this expression:

"(1) It's understood to mean God's reign over all creatures, angelic and human, animate and inanimate, over the damned and the devils. He is Master, Lord, and Sovereign of all and of all things.

"(2) In the government of His Church, composed of the elect and of reprobates, God is King; He has given laws to this Church; He inspires those who govern it with the good leadership they exercise; He reigns over the canonical Councils and holy assemblies held for the good organization of Christianity, and, therefore, the Holy Spirit presides at them. He's the one who has given the insights, spread throughout the world, that have enlightened saints, confounded the wicked, dissipated doubts, manifested the truth, unmasked errors, and shown the ways by which the Church
in general and each of the faithful in particular are able to proceed securely.

“(3) He reigns in a special way over the righteous, who honor and serve Him; over good souls, who give themselves to God and live only for God; and over the elect, who are to glorify Him eternally. It’s over persons such as these that He reigns in a particular way by the virtues they practice and which they have received from Him. He’s the God of virtues, and there’s none that doesn’t come from Him. They all proceed from this Infinite Source, who gives them to chosen souls, who, because they’re always ready to welcome them, are always faithful in practicing them. That’s how they gain the kingdom of God; and that’s how God reigns in them.

“Ah, Messieurs! Are we in that state? Do we have the happiness of having God as our Master, with the result that His virtues find no resistance in us? Let’s ask ourselves, my dear confreres, ‘Am I doing what those souls are doing? Am I prompt in responding to God’s calls, faithful to His Will, exact in my practices and always ready to do His Divine Will?’ If so, say confidently what Our Lord said, ‘Just as the living Father has sent me, so I have life because of my Father.’ Reflect that, since the God of virtues has chosen you to practice them, you live by Him and His kingdom is in you. But, if that isn’t the case, what must we do? We should give ourselves to Him without delay and unreservedly from this very moment, so that He may be pleased to dispose us to this life of the elect, and to divest us of so much self-will and from seeking our own satisfaction, which hinder God from residing peacefully and absolutely in us. What is there to prevent us from making now, all together, this act of abandonment to His Divine Goodness? Let’s say to Him, then, ‘O King of our hearts and souls, here we are, humbly prostrate at Your feet, totally committed to Your obedience and love. We consecrate ourselves anew, entirely and forever, to the glory of Your Majesty, and we entreat You with all our might to establish Your reign over the Company, to grant it the grace of referring its government to You, and to see that no one deviates from it, so that, in this

\[2\text{Cf. Jn 6:57. (NAB)}\]
way, we’ll all be guided by the conduct of Your Son and of Your subjects.’

“That, Messieurs, is how those words, ‘Seek the kingdom of God,’ are to be understood. But there’s more: ‘and His justice.’ Note that He adds justice. I’m well aware that there are some who make little distinction between seeking the kingdom of God and seeking His justice, and, even though I shouldn’t have to dwell any longer on the explanation of these words, nevertheless, because others do make this distinction and because there’s not a single word in Sacred Scripture from which we can’t draw some benefit if it’s explained clearly and meditated, it won’t be out of place to tell you here what may be understood by those words, ‘Seek the justice of God.’ To do this, we must, first of all, have a clear knowledge of what this justice of God is. You, Messieurs, have studied theology and I’m an ignorant man, a fourth form student; you know that there are two sorts of justice: commutative and distributive, and both are found in God: justus Dominus et justitias dilexit.3 It’s also found in human beings, but with this imperfection: it’s dependent, whereas God’s justice is sovereign. Still, our kinds of justice have their own properties, by which they’re related to and resemble divine justice, on which they depend. So, God’s justice is both commutative and distributive at the same time.

“(1) It’s commutative because God changes people’s works into virtues and their merits into rewards, and, since bodies become corrupt, the soul takes possession of the glory they’ve merited. This change of merits into rewards is done by measure and number—what the theologians call with arithmetic proportion. Yes, God grants virtues in proportion to the effort we make to acquire them and gives glory according to the number and value of good acts. That should impress us, Messieurs; God will reward us, based on justice and accounting of works. So, let’s get to work, my dear confreres, let’s strive for virtue, quicken our pace, seek the honor and good pleasure of our good and sovereign Savior, become spiritual men, and make the kingdom of God grow within us. There’s a

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3The Lord is just, and he loves just deeds. Cf. Ps 11:7. (NAB)
passage from Saint Paul to the Corinthians that states, *opera illorum sequuntur illos*; the good works of the righteous man will accompany him, and God will reward him for them, just as He’ll punish the wicked in proportion to their iniquities, in the pains of hell; but He’ll do it strictly and with that arithmetic proportion we’ve just mentioned. Let’s lessen the miseries of our soul and make progress in virtue; God will be exact in rewarding us for our good works and in punishing us for the bad ones. That’s true; I read it again just recently. If, then, God acts this way, Messieurs, shouldn’t we keep His justice in view by seeking His glory, and His glory in view by seeking His justice? Shouldn’t we do all the good we can in view of this so that our works may be worthy of this commutation of glory and that the glory may correspond to the works? We mustn’t hope that God will give us a good, overflowing measure, if we’re stingy with Him; we have to sow abundantly with good actions in order to harvest a big reward, and in this way we’re seeking God’s justice, as commutative and proper to Him alone.

“(2) It’s also distributive because it keeps a certain proportion called geometric, since God gives paradise to the good and hell to wicked persons like myself, who can’t expect anything but a severe punishment. Paradise is an assemblage of infinite benefits that God distributes to righteous souls. And what is hell? A place where all sorts of endless disorders abound, distributed to those who have prostituted themselves to sin; and that justice is called distributive. Why? Because paradise is the reward or salary with which God recompenses His servants, and hell is the punishment with which He chastises the wicked. God has the right to give to each person according to his works. Let’s not deceive ourselves, Messieurs, we will be punished; we should fear this.

“Recently I was reading—or else someone told me—that a religious said that the fear of God seemed to be present in his Order; fear prevailed in it but not for everyone, for he made exception of a few men who hardly think about God’s punishment and in whom there’s no fear of God; they’re negligent persons with no regard or

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concern for the last ends. 'As for me,' he said, 'I make meditation, say the Office, and perform all my spiritual exercises, but with the fear of doing them badly or at least of not doing them well enough.'

'Messieurs, let’s think about how we carry out ours; we’ll find only too great reason for worry that, instead of our meriting a reward for them, God will find us worthy of punishment. But what’s the point of all this talk of commutative and distributive justice? In a word, it’s to help us to understand that, to seek properly, and even to happily find, this divine justice, we must consider it as commutative and distributive at the same time, that is, to look on it as ready to reward us abundantly, if we strive to merit it by the practice of the virtues suited to our state; this, in a certain sense, is to imitate divine justice.

‘That’s a long explanation of this teaching, Messieurs; and yet, it’s not all; we have to realize that, by these words, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice,’ Our Lord is asking us not only to seek first of all the kingdom of God and His justice in the way we’ve just explained; I mean it doesn’t suffice to act in such a way that God may reign in us, seeking His kingdom and His justice in this way, but, in addition, we should desire and see that the kingdom of God is brought and extended everywhere, that God reigns in all souls, that there’s only one true religion on earth, and that the world may live other than it’s doing, by the strength and power of God and the means established in His Church, and, lastly, that His justice may be sought and imitated so well by everyone through their holy lives, that He may be perfectly glorified by them in time and in eternity.

‘So that’s what we have to do: desire and work for the spreading of God’s glory. I say ‘His glory’ and ‘His kingdom,’ and I use the terms interchangeably because they’re one and the same: God’s glory is in paradise and His kingdom is in souls. So then, let’s have this constant desire that the kingdom of God may be extended, and the zeal to work with all our might at it so that, having obtained the kingdom of God on earth, we may go to enjoy it in heaven. Let’s keep this lamp always lit in our hearts.

‘O Messieurs, how fortunate we are to be in a Company whose purpose is not only to make us worthy of His reign in us, but that He
may be loved and served by everyone and that the whole world may be saved! When we read the Rule, we’ll find that it recommends, first of all, that we strive for our own holiness, that is, to have God reign in you and in me, and, second, to cooperate with Him in the extension of His kingdom. Isn’t that something great? It’s acting like the angels, appointed by God to show us His Will so that we may act in accord with it. Is there any state on earth more desirable than ours?

“That, Messieurs, is a rough explanation of the words, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice.’ Let’s go on to the reasons we have to give ourselves to God for that purpose. The first is that, not only does our Rule oblige us to do it, but Jesus Christ orders us to do it. Aspiring to make God known, served, and loved, and that His kingdom and His justice may be sought above all else is the first of His teachings and His chief practice. Now, if Our Lord urges us to do this and commands it, He also gives the grace to do it to those who ask Him for it and increases it for those who are faithful to Him. What can prevent us, my dear confreres, from responding to something so holy, so advantageous and so much in tune with our vocation? My Rule tells me that I should act in such a way that God may reign. Oh, nothing will prevent me, with the help of God, from devoting myself entirely to such a just duty!

“The second reason for that is Our Lord’s promise. And what is it? If we see to His affairs, He’ll see to ours. Let’s seek His glory, concern ourselves with that, and not worry about anything else; et haec omnia adjicientur vobis: and all those other things you need will be given you besides. Let’s take care to seek God’s reign in us and in others by means of all the virtues, and let’s leave the care of all other temporal affairs to Him; that’s the way He wants it. Yes, He’ll provide us with food, clothing, and even with knowledge. How unfortunate for us if we don’t have these! How unfortunate for Missioners who don’t strive to acquire them! First of all, however, we have to aim to acquire the virtues, work at our interior life, and prefer spiritual things to temporal ones; then all the rest will follow.

“And, on this topic, remember Abraham, to whom God had promised to populate the whole earth through his son. Yet, God
commands him to sacrifice him. If Abraham puts his son to death, how will God fulfill His promise? Nevertheless, Abraham, who had accustomed himself to do God’s Will, makes it his duty to carry out that order, without worrying about the rest. ‘It’s up to God to think about that,’ he could have said. ‘If I carry out His command, He’ll fulfill His promise; but how? I have no idea. It’s enough that He’s omnipotent. I’m going to offer Him what’s most dear to me in this world, since that’s what He wills. But he’s my only son! No matter! But by taking this child’s life, I’ll deprive God of the means to keep His word. It’s all the same! He wants it that way so it must be done. But if I preserve my son’s life, my posterity will be blessed; God said so. Yes, He did, but He also said that I should put him to death; He made that very clear; I will obey, come what may; and I’ll trust His words.’ Just admire that trust; he doesn’t worry about what will happen; yet, it touches him deeply; he hopes, however, that everything will turn out well, since God has a hand in it. Why shouldn’t we have the same hope, if we leave to God the care of all that concerns us and prefer what He commands us?

“On this topic again, shouldn’t we admire the fidelity of the children of Rechab? He was a good man, inspired by God to live differently from other men. He had to live only in tents and shelters, and not in houses, so he left the one he had. There he was, in the country, where the thought came to him not to plant any vines so as not to drink wine. In fact, he didn’t plant them and never drank any. He forbade his children to sow wheat and other grain, to plant trees or have a garden, with the result that all of them lacked wheat, bread, and fruit. ‘So then, poor Rechab, how are you going to manage? Do you think your family can get along without food, any more than you can?’ ‘We’ll eat what God sends us.’ That’s hard to bear, Messieurs. Whatever the poorest religious may say, they don’t carry their renunciation that far. But the fact remains that the trust of this man was so great that he deprived himself of all the conveniences of life to depend absolutely on the care of Providence,

and he remained in that state for 350 years. This was so pleasing to God that, reproaching Jeremiah for the callousness of his people who had abandoned themselves to their pleasures, He said to him, 'Go to those hardened people; tell them there’s a man who does this, and this, and this.' So Jeremiah sends for one of Rechab’s sons to prove the great abstinence of the father and the children; he has bread, wine, glasses, etc. placed on the table. When the boy arrives, Jeremiah says to him, 'I have an order from God to tell you to drink some wine.' ‘And I,’ said the boy, ‘have orders not to drink it; we haven’t drunk any for a long time, since our father has forbidden us to do so.’

"Now, if that father was so confident that God would provide for his family’s subsistence, without his worrying about it, and if the children are so faithful as to respect the father’s intention, how confident we should be, Messieurs, that no matter in what situation God may place us, He will also provide us with what we need! What is our fidelity to the Rules, in comparison with the fidelity of those children, who weren’t obliged to abstain from those things to maintain life, and lived nevertheless in that poverty? O mon Dieu, my dear confreres! Let’s ask His Divine Goodness for great trust concerning the outcome of all that concerns us; provided that we’re faithful to Him, we’ll lack nothing; He himself will live in us, guide, defend and love us. Whatever we say or do, all will be pleasing to Him.

"The third reason we have is that, in St. Matthew,7 Our Lord speaks of that confidence we should have in God, when He says, ‘Look at the birds, who neither sow nor reap; yet God feeds them everywhere. He clothes and nourishes them, even the grass of the field and the lily, which is so magnificently clothed that even Solomon in all his glory had nothing like it.’ Now, if God provides in this way for the birds and the plants, why wouldn’t you, you of little faith, trust such a good and provident God? Quoi! To have greater confidence in yourselves than in Him! He can do everything, and you can do nothing; yet, you dare to rely on your own diligence

7Cf. Mt 6:26-29. (NAB)
rather than on His goodness, and on your own poverty than on His wealth! O human misery! Let me say here that Superiors are bound to see to the needs of each individual and to furnish whatever is needed. Just as God is obliged to furnish life to all His creatures—even to the smallest insect—He wills also that Superiors and Officers, as instruments of His Providence, should see that neither the priests, nor the clerics, nor the Brothers are in need of anything, nor one hundred, two hundred, three hundred persons or more, if they were here in this house, neither the most insignificant nor the greatest. Consequently, you, too, brothers, should count on the loving care of the same Providence for your maintenance, and be content with what it gives you, without asking whether the Community has or doesn’t have enough for this, nor should you worry about anything other than seeking the kingdom of God, because His infinite wisdom will provide for all the rest.

“Recently, I asked a Carthusian, who is a local Superior, if he called the monks to Council for the management of their temporal affairs. ‘We call the Officers,’ he replied, ‘that is, the Sub-prior, the Procurator, and myself. We leave the others in peace; their only concern is to chant the praises of God and to do what the Rule and obedience prescribe.’ We have the same practice here in this house, thank God; let’s keep to it. We’re also obliged to have some property and to use it to good advantage in order to meet all our needs. There was a time when the Son of God sent His disciples off without money or provisions; then He found it proper to have some of those things, to accept alms, and to gather something together to provide for His group and to assist persons who were poor. The Apostles continued that, and Saint Paul says of himself that he worked with his hands and earned enough to help the needy Christians. So then, it’s up to Superiors to make sure that we live economically; they also try to ensure that this attention to temporal matters doesn’t lessen attention to virtue; they must see that this practice is in force in the Company and that God reigns over everything in it; that has to be their primary goal.

“And so that all of us will have this, the Rule gives us a fourth reason: Consequently, it says, the Missioner should not worry too
much about temporal affairs, but cast all his cares on the Providence of the Lord, confident that, as long as we’re well-grounded in that sort of love and trust, we will be always under the protection of God, unaffected by evil, and never lack what we need, etc. This doesn’t come from us, but from Holy Scripture, where it’s said, ‘Qui habitat in adjutorio Altissimi, in protectione Dei caeli commorabitur.’ No evil will befall those persons because everything will work out well for them; and they’ll lack nothing because God won’t fail to give them whatever they need both for soul and body. In the end, all will turn out well for them, although it may seem that every evil is threatening them. Therefore, my dear confreres, we have good reason to hope that, as long as you’re firm in this confidence, not only will you be preserved from any unfortunate accidents, but all sorts of good things will happen to you. Yes, you have good reason to hope for this, even when everything seems to be lost.

“By this detachment from created things and from their own convenience, the saints, Messieurs, the saints, tried to witness to heaven and earth their perfect trust in the Lord; for that purpose they made to Him the sacrifice of their property, pleasures, and honors, their life, and their soul. Why? So that He might be their Master, that He might reign absolutely over them and that all of them might depend on Him alone for all things, for time and for eternity. Oh, what great surrender! Oh, what great trust! But how far did not the Saint of saints, who cleared the way for them, carry the practice of those things I just mentioned to you! (I have to cut this short; time is running out.) So then, the Son of God declared of himself that He didn’t seek His own glory but that of His Father. Everything He did and said was in order to glorify Him, reserving for himself only destitution, suffering, and ignominy. What a beautiful example, my dear confreres, by which Jesus Christ gently impels us to adopt His inclinations, affections, practices, and counsels! He never sought

8 You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High will remain under the protection of the God of heaven. Cf. Ps 91:1. (NAB)
His own glory. But if we’re willing to imitate Him, if we’re willing to renounce all aspiration to honor, if we’re willing to seek only His and to act only to establish His glory in souls, to make His kingdom come and His Will be done on earth as in heaven; if we are, we’ll have everything. These seem to me to be very compelling reasons to motivate us to the practice of that holy teaching. But what are the means to do that?

“The means are:

“(1) to ask God constantly for it. We’re beggars; let’s make ourselves such toward God; we’re poor and weak, we need God everywhere, especially in the observance of this teaching, which obliges us to seek God before anything else—which we can do only by His Spirit. Asking Him for it is still not enough; we have to adopt the practice of this Rule and begin to do it tomorrow. To do what? To practice the virtues it presupposes: zeal for His glory, detachment from created things, and confidence in the Creator; to make interior and exterior acts of it; to think often about it and, if we fall, to get up again.

“(2) In the same Rule it’s stated: that each individual will prefer spiritual things to temporal ones, the soul to the body, God to the world, and lastly that he’ll choose a shortage of food, infamy, tortments, and death itself rather than be separated from Jesus Christ. When we find ourselves in these circumstances, where there’s question of something spiritual or something material, we have to embrace the former and set aside the latter; that’s what God asks of us. Making Him reign in us means tending to His affairs rather than to our own, and preferring the life of the soul to that of the body, brothers, the life of the soul to that of the body. You see, if the occasion arises for the sick to give God something during their illness, they should do it. To prefer the soul to the body, to prefer the honor of God to that of the world, Messieurs, is part of the kingdom of God. Let’s drink the chalice, let’s accept shame, confident that it will turn to our advantage. Lastly, we must make up our minds, together with the Apostle, to choose tortments and death itself rather than be separated from the love of God. It may happen that the occasion will arise, where we have to choose between losing Jesus
Christ or suffering prison, torture, fire, or martyrdom. O blessed occasions which provide the opportunity for the Son of God to reign supreme! Let’s give ourselves to Him, Messieurs; I ask you to do this by His Holy Name, that He may grant us the grace of preferring sorrows and even death to the wretched danger of losing His love; that’s what we must be determined to do from this very hour. Yes, my God, yes, Messieurs, if the opportunity presents itself of losing honor or the pleasures of life in order that Jesus Christ may be known and served, living and reigning everywhere, here we are, disposed to do this, here we are, by His mercy, disposed to do this. So then, let’s make this offering to Him in advance, even though nature may find it repugnant; let’s be confident that God will strengthen us in our need. ‘I will send you as lambs among wolves,’ Our Lord said to his Apostles. He didn’t want them to think only of what they had to say before Princes and tyrants; ‘for at that time,’ He said, ‘what you’ll have to say will be given to you.’ Have no doubt, Messieurs, that He’ll also be with you in similar circumstances, to help you to speak and suffer like perfect Christians. Let Him act, and let’s have in view only His loving, unparalleled good pleasure. Oh, who will give us the zeal of Saint Teresa, who made a vow to choose always the glory of her Lord—not just His glory, but His greater glory! An opportunity would arise to do a good work for His honor; but should another, of greater importance, present itself she would do that one and put off the other; and she committed herself by word and in conscience to act always in that way. That was also the good custom of Saint Ignatius: Ad majorem Dei gloriam. A great Prelate of the present time has the same practice of animating his actions and conduct with this intention of choosing the greater good. I’m speaking of the Bishop of Cahors, who always tends toward what is the most perfect; and he’s successful in this.

“If there are any among us who feel a similar desire, fine, my dear confreres, open your hearts to that divine inspiration and

9Cf. Mt 10:16-20. (NAB)
10Alain de Solminihac (cf. XI, 327, n. 5).
follow that noble impulse, which always aims high. Let the others, who, like my wretched self, are crawling around here below, please get up. Let’s give ourselves to God to desire and act so that the kingdom of God may be extended in us, in the priestly state, and in the people. By so doing, we’ll put into practice what Our Lord and our zeal require of us in this article.

“O my Savior Jesus Christ, who became holy so that we also might become holy, and who spurned earthly kingdoms with their wealth and glory, having only at heart the reign of Your Father in souls, *non quaero gloriæ meam*, etc., *sed honorifico Patrem meum*; if You lived like that, even though with another self, since You are God in relation to Your Father, what should we not do to imitate You, who have raised us from dust and called us to observe Your counsels and to aspire to holiness! Ah, Lord! Draw us after You, grant us the grace of adopting the practice of Your example and of our Rule, which leads us to seek the kingdom of God and His justice and to abandon ourselves to Him for everything else; grant that Your Father may reign in us, and reign in us yourself, causing us to reign in You by faith, hope, and love, by humility, obedience, and union with Your Divine Majesty. By so doing, we have reason to hope that we will reign one day in Your glory, which has been merited for us by Your Precious Blood. That, my dear confreres, is what we should ask Him at meditation; and say to ourselves all day long, beginning on waking, ‘What shall I do to make God reign supreme in my heart? What shall I also do to extend the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ throughout the world? My good Jesus, teach me to do this and help me to do it!’ When the clock strikes, let’s renew this prayer and the resolution to work at this, and do it even more especially at holy Mass, instituted to acknowledge sovereignly the supreme majesty of God and to obtain for us the graces we need to live and die under the glorious reign of His eternal Son. Amen.”

After the prayer, M. Vincent said, with a deep sentiment of humility and gratitude, “Please wait a minute, Messieurs. We’re

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111*I do not seek my own glory but I honor my Father.* Cf. In 8:54. (NAB)
speaking about Providence, my dear confrères, and about God’s wish that we abandon ourselves to it; and just look at how it has pleased His Goodness to give us proof just lately of how true He is to His promises. He has inspired a lady, recently deceased (she died yesterday), to do some good for this poor, insignificant Company and to a house other than this one. In her will, she left it 18,000 livres—a considerable amount, 18,000 livres! O Goodness of God, how admirable You are! O admirable guidance, how worthy of love You are! O infinite Providence, who sees to the needs of each individual! On the very day we were to speak about You, You show yourself to us; on the very day we were to stir ourselves up to rely on your fatherly care with regard to temporal matters so as to think only of the spiritual, that same day You send a young boy to us here to give us the first news of that large donation! When that boy arrived at the gate, he asked to speak to me and was told that I wasn’t available; he persisted and in the end was so successful that he came into my room, where he presented me with the excerpt from the will of the deceased lady, Mme de Vins,¹² who remembered the poorest and most useful house in the Company, the Marseilles house, to which she bequeathed that sum of money, to be used as an annuity, provided that missions be given in the Marseilles diocese and, from time to time, on some of her lands in that region. Later, the Pastor of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet¹³ informed me of this. Who could not admire, Messieurs, that grace of God, who, seeing this poor family in danger of foundering, put it back on its feet and strengthened it by this considerable assistance! The house is midway on the route to Rome and is a seaport from which ships embark for Italy and the Levant; consequently, it’s very convenient for the Company. It takes care of the health and relief of the poor galley convicts, both the sick and those who are

¹²Dame Laurence Veyrac de Paulian, Baronne de Castelnau, was the widow of Melchior Dagouz de Montauban, Marquis de Vins, Maréchal of the King’s troops. She died in Paris on February 20, 1659. By her will, drawn up on May 29, 1655, she left 18,000 livres to the Marseilles house for the maintenance of two Missioners. There is an excerpt of this act in the French National Archives (S 6707).

¹³Hippolyte Féret.
well, and handles the business of the slaves in Barbary. Along with all that, it does the same good works that other houses do.

“O my dear confreres, what a great reason for us to humble ourselves before God for the care He is taking to maintain us in this important house and in such an effective way, which we were not expecting! It’s a strong reason for us to acknowledge with all our might the good He does for that poor house, where our confreres are working so successfully and with such blessing. I’m telling the Company all this so that it may thank God, on the one hand, for the graces His Divine Goodness granted that good lady, who was very holy, and also for the charity His Infinite Mercy has done for us through her; and, on the other, so that it may ask Our Lord to be himself the eternal reward of her soul and to apply to her the merit of the good that will be done as a result of this donation. I ask all the priests to celebrate Mass tomorrow for this intention, if they have no other obligation. I almost forgot to tell you this, although I had intended to do so. That’s what I had to say to you.”

199. - CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 3)

March 7, 1659

“My dear confreres, we’re explaining the second chapter of our Rules, concerning Gospel teachings. Recently, we spoke about this one: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice,’ contained in the second article of the chapter.

“This brings us to the third article, which states, And because a sure way for a Christian to be able to grow rapidly in holiness is a conscientious effort to carry out God’s Will in all circumstances and at all times, each one of us, then, should try to integrate into his life, as far as possible, these four principles: (1) We should conscientiously carry out what is ordered and avoid what is for-
bidden, when these orders or prohibitions come from God, from the Church, from our Superiors, or from our Rules and Constitutions.

(2) When there is a choice between several things indifferent in their nature and equally pleasing or displeasing, to be done at the same time, we should choose the less palatable rather than the more pleasing. This does not apply if the more pleasing things are necessary, since they then must be preferred to others. Still, our motivation ought not to be that we like them, but simply that they are more pleasing to God. If we are faced with several things indifferent in themselves but equally agreeable or disagreeable, then we may choose whichever one we wish, as coming from God’s Providence. (3) When something unexpected happens to us in body or mind, be they afflictions or consolations, we are to accept all without fuss as coming from the loving hand of Our Lord. (4) Our motive for doing all these things is that they’re God’s Will, and in order to imitate, as far as possible in all that, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who always lived by these principles, and for that very motive. He tells us this himself: I always do what pleases my Father.

“Now, in reading that, I find that a printer’s error has slipped in,¹ which we didn’t pick up; it’s in the place where it’s stated: When there is a choice between several things indifferent in their nature and equally pleasing and displeasing, to be done at the same time, because it should say, When there is a choice between several things indifferent in their nature, and neither pleasing nor displeasing, to be done at the same time; in that case, it’s all right to chose whichever one we wish.

“So, the Rule says that this practice of doing God’s Will helps us to attain the holiness of Christians and Missioners. We should note that there are various exercises suggested by masters of the spiritual life, which they practiced in different ways. Some proposed for themselves to have no preference in anything and felt that perfection consisted in desiring nothing, or refusing nothing God may send. In all circumstances, they would lift their hearts to God and had no preferences. This openness to God’s Will is a holy practice.

¹The printer’s error occurred only in the French version, not in the Latin.
O what a holy practice it is! To want what God wants in general and to want nothing in particular!

“(2) Others have determined to act with purity of intention, seeing God in whatever happens in order to do or to endure everything with Him in view. This is very difficult to grasp. To summarize, the practice of always doing God’s Will is much better than all that, for it includes openness to God’s Will and purity of intention, as well as all the other ways practiced and recommended; and, if there’s any other practice that leads to holiness, it will be found to a high degree in this one. Who is more open to God’s Will than someone who does it in everything, who doesn’t seek himself in anything, and who doesn’t even want things he could have unless it’s because God wants them? Is anyone freer and better disposed to do the Divine Will than that person? And how can purity of intention be better practiced than by doing God’s Will? Is there anyone who has more perfect purity of intention than to will and to do whatever God wills and in the way He wills it? If we compare all these practices, we’ll find that God is more glorified by our doing His Will than by all the others, and that there’s no one who honors Him more than the man who devotes himself in a special way to this holy practice. That’s one reason for us to really give ourselves to God to observe this Rule.

“Here’s a second reason, namely, that it’s certain that works done in a human, petty manner, without our giving them a noble purpose, such as doing God’s Will, are dead works. What is it but lifeless actions, if we participate in the Divine Office, meditate, preach, and work with no direction? It’s worthless currency, lacking the image of the Prince, for God takes works into account only when He sees himself in them and they’re dedicated to Him.

“Our father Adam was a good tree in the garden of the earthly paradise, producing naturally fruits pleasing to the eyes of his Lord; but when the devil made him commit sin, his will was perturbed. Separating itself from God’s Will, it made him incapable of producing anything of himself that might please God; and we who come from that tainted stock are, humanly speaking, just as powerless, with the result that what proceeds from that, actions stemming from the old Adam, are not at all pleasing to God, no, not at all, because
they're natural actions that have no connection with God, since they're not guided by Him.

“If there are theologians who think that what isn’t done for God is sin, why wouldn’t we think that, if it isn’t sinful, it should at least be considered useless? Now, to see that our actions and inactivity are good, that what we do and fail to do have the conditions required to please God, the Rule gives us the means, when it orders us to do always and in all things the Will of God, and it states that each individual will strive, as far as possible, to make this practice his own. If we have sufficient grace from God and enough trust in His goodness—which He doesn’t fail to give us—shouldn’t we give ourselves to Him at this very moment to please Him and to act, from now on, in Him and through Him? Deus virtutum: He’s the God of hosts. So let’s practice these virtues, let’s do everything for God! If there were some in the Company who were faithful to that, if there were a large number of them, if all of us were among that blessed number, O Sauveur, what a blessing! O mon Dieu, how pleasing the Mission would be to You! Divine Goodness, You know it would! And we know, Messieurs, that our works are worthless if they’re not vibrant and animated by the intention of doing them for God. That’s the teaching of the Gospel, prompting us to do all to please Him. We have to give great praise to His Infinite Majesty for the grace it has granted to the Company of adopting this very holy and always sanctifying practice. Yes, from the very beginning, all of us have desired to enter this way of the perfect, which is to honor Our Lord in all our works; and if that hasn’t been done as perfectly as it should be done, there’s no need to seek the cause of it, it’s this wretched man who hasn’t given the example of it.

“The example of Our Lord is our third reason. It was His practice to do always the Will of His Father in everything, and He said that’s why He came on earth—not to do His own Will, but the Will of His Father. O Savior! O Goodness! What a contrast, what depth You give to the practice of Your virtues! You are the King of Glory, yet You come into the world only to do the Will of the One who sent

\[2\text{Cf. Ps 80:5. (NAB)}\]
You. You know, brothers, how dear this sacred affection was to the heart of Our Lord. *Cibus meus est,* He said, *ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* What nourishes, delights, and strengthens me is to do the Will of my Father.

"Since this is the case, Messieurs, shouldn’t we consider ourselves blessed to have entered a Company that makes special profession of practicing what the Son of God practiced? Shouldn’t we often lift our hearts to Him to know the height, the depth, and the breadth of this practice, which leads to God and fills us with Him, which encompasses all good things and helps us to give up the bad ones. *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* O my Savior, that’s what You did! Saint John’s practice was penance; he was filled with the desire to do it and to get others to do it; that’s why he came into this world. And You, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, You came into it filled with this love of doing Your Father’s Will and of inculcating it in us. Elijah had this ardor and admirable zeal for the glory of his God; he was burning with enthusiasm to impress human hearts with respect and awe; and You, my Savior, were animated with that great, incomparable desire that God’s Will be done by all creatures. That’s why you inserted into the Lord’s Prayer, *fiat voluntas tua.* That’s the prayer You taught Your disciples; it’s what You willed everyone to ask and to do. To do what? The Will of the Eternal Father? Where? On earth as in heaven. And how? As the angels and saints do it: promptly, totally, constantly, and lovingly. I’m sure there are no priests here who have said Mass—or anyone who has done other actions holy in themselves—except to honor the majesty of God; yet, it may happen that God rejects our offerings because we did our own will on those days. Isn’t that what the prophet declared on the part of God: ‘I no longer want your fasts; you think you are honoring me and you are doing the opposite because, when you fast, you are doing your own will, and so you spoil the fasting?’ The same can be said of every work: doing your own will spoils your devotions, your ministries, your penances, etc. For the past twenty years, I’ve never

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3My food is to do the will of the one who sent me. Cf. Jn 4:34. (NAB)
read Isaiah, Chapter 58, without becoming very deeply moved, but, despite that, I'm no better.

"What, then, should we do so as not to waste our time and efforts? We should never act through our own interest or whim, but accustom ourselves to doing God's Will in all things—in all things, you see, and not just in some. It's sanctifying grace that makes the action and the person pleasing to God. What a consolation to think that, when I keep my Rules, when I carry out my ministry, I'm obeying Superiors and raising my heart to God to offer Him all those things, and, by so doing, am making myself constantly pleasing to God! So, then, it's sanctifying grace we should request, possess, and put to good use; otherwise, all is lost.

"Many will say to me," said Jesus Christ—and I was talking to you recently about this—'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy, expel demons, and work many wonders in Your name?' 'I never knew you,' He will reply to them; 'be gone, you evildoers.' 'But, Lord, are You calling evildoing the prophecies and miracles we've done in Your name?' 'Get away from me, you villains, I don't know you.' 'And who, then, will enter the kingdom of heaven?' 'It will be those who do the Will of my Father, who is in heaven.' Our Lord will never say 'I don't know you' to someone who has always tried to follow His Will. On the contrary, that's the person He'll have enter into His glory. O Savior, grant us the grace of being filled with that love, so that we won't bear any wild fruit but that all we produce may be done for and through You in order to be pleasing in your Father's eyes. Please help us to be faithful in this and always to do our work according to Your Will.

"Let's give ourselves to God, my dear confreres, to be attentive to this and to stand firm in it; for that will give us good reason to praise God. In what light will He not look on the Company in general and each man in particular? Oh bien, in nomine Domini! Those are plenty of reasons obliging us to make our own the practice of doing God's Will in all things and to cause us to resolve to

\[\text{Cf. Mt 7:21-23. (NAB)}\]
follow this teaching of Our Lord, *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* Let’s see now in what it consists.

“‘I’m convinced that I have to practice it, but how?’ We should realize that all the works we do—or leave undone—are either commanded, forbidden, or indifferent, and the indifferent ones are such because they’re neither forbidden nor commanded. That’s how we can know God’s Will. All the things a person does, I repeat, are either works ordered or forbidden, or are neither one nor the other. As for works commanded or forbidden, God wills that we do the former and don’t do the latter: here’s something commanded, I have to do it; here’s something forbidden, I have to give it up. We must always do them, provided they’re commanded by God, directly or indirectly—by God himself or by the Church. We must carry out whatever He commands us; we must do all that the Church orders; she is His spouse, and He is that father of the family who wants the children to obey their mother as they would obey Him. We’ll be doing God’s Will in that, if, directing to Him the action we’re commanded to do, each of us says or intends, ‘I want to do that in order to be pleasing to God,’ or ‘I don’t want to do the forbidden action, so as to please His Goodness.’ If we act in that way, we’ll be doing without fail the Will of God. How does a child do his father’s will, and a subject the will of the King? By doing what they order and avoiding what they forbid; the child does it to honor his father, and the subject to obey his King; and both of them do their wills when they carry out their words and orders. So, my dear confreres, you’ll be doing God’s Will when, doing what He commands and not doing what He forbids, you have the intention of glorifying that admirable Father and lovingly obeying that King of love. But, to really give life to this practice, you have to say, ‘My God, I’m doing this or avoiding doing that because it’s Your good pleasure.’ That’s the heart of the matter.

“I said that the Church commands, and we must obey her as the spouse of Jesus Christ; for in that capacity she has the right to make laws and oblige the faithful to observe them; yes, she obliges us to observe what’s ordained by the Councils, Popes, and Bishops. It
may seem that there's nothing meritorious in acting that way, but we can, nevertheless, make them good by offering them to God, even natural actions like eating, sleeping, etc., and doing them in the name of Our Lord, as the Apostle says.\(^5\)

"In all these ways, then, we're doing God's Will: (1) by doing what's commanded and not doing what's forbidden, not only by God, His Church, our Rules, and our spiritual and Church Superiors, but also by the King, Governors, Magistrates, police officers, and judges established by God for temporal matters. To obey them is to do God's Will because God wants it that way; (2) by doing, in indifferent matters, actions that contribute more to mortifying the old man; and (3) by doing in the sight of God those that are neither pleasing nor displeasing to body or spirit—even natural things, although the inferior part may crave them—when necessity obliges us to do them.

"There's a fourth way of knowing God's Will, and it's by inspiration; for often He enlightens our understanding and gives impulses to our heart to be inspired by His Will; but we need the grain of salt not to be deceived in this. Among the multitude of thoughts and inspirations that come to us, some are apparently good, and yet they don't come from God and are not according to His pleasure. So then, we have to examine them carefully, have recourse to God himself, ask Him how that can be done, and ponder the reasons, the purpose, and the means to see if everything is seasoned according to His good pleasure. We should also propose them to wise persons and get the advice of those in charge of us, who are entrusted with the treasures of God's wisdom; in doing what they tell us, we'll be doing the Will of God.

"A fifth way of knowing and doing it is to reflect and to do things that are rational. One may present itself that is neither ordered nor forbidden, but is conformable to reason and, consequently, in accord with God's Will, which is never contrary to reason, and we should even do it according to the intention of the Church, which has us ask this grace of God by this prayer: *Praesta, quaesumus*,

\(^5\)Cf. 1 Cor 10:31. (NAB)
omnipotens Deus, ut, semper rationabilia meditantes, quae tibi sunt placita et dictis exequamur et factis: we entreat You, Almighty God, that, always meditating on what is reasonable, we may do, in word and act, the things that are pleasing to You. So, according to this prayer, to do something that seems reasonable is to do God’s Will. That always means with the grain of salt of Christian prudence and the advice of those who direct us, because it may happen that what is involved is reasonable in itself but not in its present circumstances of time, place, or manner; in that case it shouldn’t be done.

“It should be noted that we do God’s Will actively when we do it in all the ways we’ve mentioned. We’re doing it passively as well, by assenting to God when He does His Will in us, as in the unexpected things that happen without our thinking of them—some consolation that surprises us; we hear news, let’s say, of the important conversion of a prominent person or of an entire country, or that God is being well served by persons we love, or that peace is made between two families or two provinces at odds with one another, whose dissension was scandalous to the Church—we have to welcome all that as coming from the hand of God, and rejoice about it in spirit as Our Lord did when He thanked His Father for having revealed His secrets to the simple. On the contrary, when something unpleasant happens to us, or an illness, a loss, a calumny, etc., we must also welcome that as coming from God because it’s His pleasure to try us in that way, and He’s the one who sends all these ordeals; non est malum in civitate quod non fecerit Dominus.6 When Our Lord meditated in the Garden of Olives on the torments He had to suffer, He looked upon them as willed by His Father, and we must say as He did, ‘O Lord, not my will but Yours be done.’ So, since God’s Will is known to us through these unexpected events, whether traumatic or comforting, we can practice His passive Will by accepting them as coming from God because it’s up to Him alone to give us death or life. God’s Will is, then, active and passive; it’s active when we do it by the observance of His precepts and the

6There is no evil in a city that the Lord has not done. Cf. Am 3:6. (NAB)
practice of things that are pleasing to Him; and it's passive when we allow Him to do these things himself within us without any action on our part. This isn't very clear, but time is too short for me to explain it better. We'll have a few conferences on it and then you'll see more clearly what God's Will is and how it should be practiced in every way. Meanwhile, I hope you'll get into the habit of offering God everything you do or suffer and say to Him, 'My God, it's Your Will that I prepare to give a sermon, to offer Holy Mass, to do a certain action; or that I'm tempted, sluggish, distressed; or that I'm upset or at peace, sad or happy. I will this, Lord, and I will it because it's Your Will.' Now let's look at some means to make this holy practice easier.

'The first means to start doing this is taught us in the Lord's Prayer, Fiat voluntas tua sicut in caelo et in terra; for, since Our Lord put these words in the daily prayer, He wants us to ask every day for the grace to do His Will on earth as it's done in heaven, unceasingly and perfectly, with simple, unchanging conformity to the Will of Our Lord. So let's ask Him often to be pleased to have us conform to all He wills and will have us do, and this will be a good means for us to obtain the grace of adopting this holy practice.

'The second means is to get into the habit, beginning tomorrow, or even right now, of not only saying this prayer, but also of doing what it says; for example, offering God your patience in listening to this poor man who's speaking to you, saying to Him, 'Lord, to glorify You, I want to hear and to do whatever is indicated to me on Your behalf.' You see, my dear confreres, it's important to actuate our will in this way and to accustom ourselves to renew our intention frequently, particularly when we get up in the morning: 'My God, I'm getting up to serve You; I'm going to meditation to please You, to hear or say Mass to honor You, to work because You will it.' Lastly, we have to strive to raise our hearts to Him in our principal actions in order to consecrate them entirely to Him and to do them in conformity to His Will.

'But, Monsieur, I can't remember that; I go for hours, half days, and entire days without thinking of God or consciously offering Him what I'm doing.' If there are any men like that among us,
they should humble themselves profoundly for it, be distressed at losing the merit of such actions, or at least of the pleasure God would have received if they had been offered to Him. To make up for this fault, each individual, at the beginning of the day, should make Him a general offering of all the works of the day; in addition, it's a good idea to repeat this offering once or twice during the morning and the same after dinner, saying to Him, 'My God, please accept all the impulses of my heart and body; draw them to yourself; I offer them to You with my Rules, my ministry, and my sufferings.' The more we do that, my dear confreres, the easier it will become and the greater benefit we'll have from it. It should be done at least four times a day. By this means, we'll deepen our love, and love will help us to persevere and grow in this holy practice. So, we need practice, Messieurs, we have to get into the practice of what I've just told you, in order to really practice God's Will.

"Mortification is also necessary because we have to be very firm with ourselves in order to renounce freely what we give to God, and it's by this virtue that we overcome ourselves. By it we can give up the pleasures and conveniences of life. It prompts us to do what human nature would avoid and what God asks. This, Messieurs, is what we have to set about doing properly, getting into the habit of mortifying ourselves interiorly and exteriorly in everything that appeals to human nature. That's the third means we have in order to make our own this practice of doing constantly the Will of God. Gradually, it will take hold of us and become a habit, or, to put it better, become a grace from God, with the result that, just as many people, by repeated acts, habituate themselves to it, we'll finish by being at home with it and always energized by it. How many people never lose sight of God! We see some among us always walking and acting in His presence. How many people in the world do this! Recently I was with someone whose conscience was bothering him because he was distracted three times in one day from thinking of God. Those people will be our judges and condemn us one day before the Divine Majesty for our forgetfulness of God—we who have nothing else to do than to love Him and to witness our love for Him by our attention and services.
Let’s ask Our Lord, Messieurs, to grant us the grace of saying as He did, *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* Oh, Fathers and Brothers, let’s do our best, beginning right now and at meditation tomorrow, to give ourselves to God in everything, always, and everywhere, in order to be hungry and thirsty for this justice. Let’s think about that; let’s clarify in particular what I told you in such a haphazard way and in such poor order; let’s excite our will to say and carry out these divine words of Jesus Christ, ‘My food is to do His Will and to perfect His work.’ It was Your pleasure, Savior of the world, Your ambrosia, Your nectar to do Your Father’s Will. We are Your children, who throw ourselves into Your arms to imitate Your practices; give us this grace. Since we can’t do it ourselves, we ask it of You, we hope for it from You, and we do so with confidence and a great desire to follow You. O Lord, if You are pleased to give this spirit to the Company so that it may work to become ever more pleasing in your sight, You’ll fill it with zeal to become like You; and this love is already helping it to live of Your life, so that each individual may say with Saint Paul, *Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus.* O how blessed is the Company! O how blessed all of us are! If we aim for that, we’ll attain it without fail. Oh, what happiness to have verified in us these words, *Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus!* For we’re no longer living a human life, we’re living a divine life, and we’ll live it, my dear confreres, if our hearts are filled with, and our actions accompanied by, this intention to do God’s Will. Now, if some can say that they’re already doing that, which is true, others can also say, as I do, ‘Am I not unfortunate to see my confreres living the life of Jesus Christ, being pleasing in the sight of His Eternal Father, while I’m living a sensual, animal life, deserving to be barred from their conversation as the object of God’s displeasure?’ May it please His Goodness to have us adopt this sentiment so firmly in our soul that, being ashamed of our cowardice, we’ll work twice as hard to catch up with those most advanced on the road to perfection! May God grant us this grace!”

7*I live, no longer I, Christ truly lives in me.* Cf. Gal 2:20. (NAB)
March 1659

M. Vincent sent for M. Langlois, priest of the Company, to tell him that the Archbishop of Narbonne, who was only the Coadjutor at the time, had written to ask him to send the name of the person who would be in charge of the men he was going to send to Saint-Lazare for retreat and to be instructed in their functions in order to fulfill them properly and to be able to teach in elementary schools. He [M. Vincent] said that he had thought of him and had sent for him to ask him to do that and to be responsible for those persons, adding that he was going to inform the Coadjutor of Narbonne of this.

When M. Vincent asked M. Langlois to give himself to God to render this service to His Divine Majesty, M. Langlois excused himself, even saying that the priests of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet would do a better job of this than the Company because they ran elementary schools and, consequently, were better aware of the qualities required of a school teacher.

M. Vincent replied that, since they came to us for this, we shouldn’t refuse them, but that we also had to render this service to God and to the Church. He said he could make inquiries of some of those priests of Saint-Nicolas concerning the things they were accustomed to observe in similar circumstances and what a school teacher should do to carry out this duty well.

M. Langlois told M. Vincent that, as far as he was concerned, he was incapable of doing that and didn’t have sufficient virtue, since he wasn’t a prayerful person, and that someone else would do it better.

Conference 200. - Manuscript of Repetitions of Prayer.

1Louis Langlois, born in Paris on January 6, 1616, was ordained a priest during Lent of 1640, entered the Congregation of the Mission on June 15, 1644, and took his vows on November 8, 1646. He was Superior in Luçon (1660-62), after which he was stationed in Fontainebleau.

2François Fouquet (Cf. XI, 327, n. 6).

3The priests of Adrien Bourdoise (cf. XI, 6, n. 1).
"It's true," said M. Vincent, "that of yourself and acting on your own, Monsieur, you'll do nothing worthwhile and spoil things rather than do something commendable; so, you're right in saying that you'll spoil everything; however, Monsieur, God, is the one who will do all the good resulting from those exercises, and not you; for, of ourselves, Monsieur, we can do nothing but spoil everything. Or sus, Monsieur, go and do what you can for your part, and God will do the rest; encourage them strongly to give themselves to God in this ministry; and to stir them up to do so, make them see the benefits that will come to the Church and the honor God will draw from it."

Then M. Langlois said to him, "Monsieur, since you want me to do and undertake this, despite my inability and lack of virtue, I'll do whatever I can. I ask you, Monsieur, to kindly give me your blessing," which M. Vincent did.

Note: M. Vincent told M. Langlois and me that the Coadjutor of Narbonne and some others had thought it was a good work, useful to the Church, to train persons to be school teachers in the parishes where there are none.

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201. - SIMPLICITY AND PRUDENCE
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 4 and 5)

March 14, 1659

"My dear confreres, here are the fourth and fifth articles of the second chapter of our Rules, dealing with Gospel teachings, which will be the topic of this evening's conference.

"First: Jesus the Lord expects us to have the simplicity of a dove. This means saying things quite simply in the way we see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without any double-dealing or manipulation, our attention being focused solely
on God. Each of us, then, should take care to behave always in this spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with the simple, and that He conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of this world and reveals them to little ones.

"Second: But while Christ recommends the simplicity of a dove He tells us to have the prudence of a serpent as well. What He means is that we should speak and behave with discretion. We ought, therefore, to keep quiet about matters which should not be made known, especially if they are unsuitable or unlawful. When we are discussing things which it is good and proper to talk about we should hold back any details which would not be for God's glory, or which could harm some other person, or which would make us foolishly smug. In actual practice this virtue is about choosing the right way to do things. We should make it a sacred principle, then, admitting of no exceptions, that since we are working for God we will always choose God-related ways for carrying out our work, and see and judge things from Christ's point of view and not from a worldly-wise one; and not according to the feeble reasoning of our own mind either. That is how we can be prudent as serpents and simple as doves.

"If time permits, we're going to talk about these two virtues. These Rules speak for themselves, brothers, and each of you understands them better than I, who, by wanting to tell you something to help you understand them better, am going to try your patience. O Sauveur, we're talking about simplicity! So, the simplicity recommended by the Rule is the topic of our conference.

"Let's look at the reasons we have to give ourselves to God to practice this virtue that's so loveable. First of all, He invites us to do so when He says, Estote prudentes sicut serpentes et simplices sicut columbae.1 When Our Lord told the Apostles He was sending them like sheep among wolves, He told them at the same time that they had to be as prudent as serpents and simple as doves. Then He added, 'Beware, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will be led before gover-

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1Be prudent as serpents and simple as doves. Cf. Mt 10:16. (NAB)
nors and kings for my sake; but, when they hand you over, do not worry about what you are to say or how you are to speak; for, at that moment, you will be given what you are to say; the Holy Spirit will speak in you.2 He mentions prudence first and then simplicity. The first is about going like sheep into the midst of wolves, where they ran the risk of being ill-treated. ‘Be prudent,’ He tells them. ‘Be on the alert, and, nevertheless, be simple;’ cavete ab hominibus;3 be mindful of prudence; however, if you’re brought before judges, don’t worry about what you should say. That’s simplicity. You see that Our Lord links those two virtues, so He wants us to use them on the same occasion; He recommends both of them to us and leads us to understand that prudence and simplicity go well together when they’re understood properly. That’s the teaching of Jesus Christ; it’s directed to us, who want to practice the evangelical counsels and should embrace this one with reverence, love, and a strong resolution; consequently we should ask God often for these virtues, which He recommends, and work earnestly to acquire them.

“Simplicity is so pleasing to God! You know that Scripture says that His pleasure is to converse with the simple, the simple of heart, who act plainly and simply: Cum simplicibus sermocinatio ejus.4 Do you want to find God? He’s speaking with the simple. O my Savior! O my dear confreres, you who feel the desire to be simple, what a happiness! What a happiness! Take courage, since you have God’s promise that His pleasure is to be with simple people.

“Another thing that recommends simplicity to us in a wonderful way are those words of Our Lord, Confiteor tibi, Pater, quia abscondisti haec a sapientibus et prudentibus, et revelasti ea parvulis.5 I acknowledge this, Father, and thank You that the teaching I learned from Your Divine Majesty, which I am spreading among the people, is enjoyed only by the simple, and that You don’t allow the prudent of this world to understand it; You’ve hidden it from them, if not the words, at least the spirit.

2Cf. Mt 10:17-20. (NAB)
3Beware of people. Cf. Mt 10:17. (NAB)
4Cf. Prv 3:32. (D-RB)
5I confess to you, Father, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to little ones. Cf. Mt 11:25. (NAB)
"O Sauveur! O mon Dieu! That should really frighten us. We run after knowledge as if our entire happiness depended on it. Woe to us if we don't have it! We do have to have enough of it; we have to study, but in moderation. Others seek an understanding of business matters, of passing for clever persons skilled in engaging in business in the world. They're the ones from whom God keeps the insight into Christian truths: from the wise and learned of the world. To whom, then, does He give it? To simple people, to good people. We see that verified in the difference we remark in the faith of peasants and our own. What I retain from my experience of this is the discernment I've always made that true religion—true religion, Messieurs, true religion—is found among the poor. God enriches them with a lively faith; they believe, they touch, they taste the words of life. You never see them in their illnesses, troubles, and food shortages get carried away with impatience, or murmur and complain; not at all—or rarely.

"They usually remain at peace during trials and tribulations. What's the reason for that? It's faith. And why? Because they're simple, God gives them in abundance the graces He refuses the rich and wise of this world. But to that let's add that everyone loves simple, candid people, who don't use subtleties or tricks, who are straightforward and speak sincerely, with the result that whatever they say comes from their heart. When they're at court, they're respected there, esteemed by all; in a well-regulated Company, each individual shows them special affection, for, although everyone doesn't act frankly, nevertheless, even such persons don't fail to love this in others.

"For all these reasons, we should give ourselves to God to make ourselves pleasing in His eyes by this virtue of simplicity. There are some in the Company who do this, and it's very obvious. Oh, how obvious it is! They're striving to acquire this virtue and they preach it by their example.

"'But, Monsieur, what is it? I don't know how to practice it.' There are some who claim there are two kinds of simplicity: one purely natural and silly, found in certain persons with poor judgment or discernment, which comes rather from . . . I wouldn't dare
say this—than from reason. Talk to them, and you see that they're dull-witted. That's worthless simplicity—or at least it's not a virtue.

"There's another kind that has a certain relation with God. Oh, the beautiful virtue! God is a simple being, who receives nothing from anyone else; He's a sovereign, infinite essence, with no admixture; He's a pure being, who never changes. Now, this virtue of the Creator is found in some creatures with whom He shares it, and is lived by them in the manner indicated in the Rule.

"It's given another definition, namely, that it's a virtue which keeps at a distance from us things that don't correspond to the simplicity of Adam when he was in the state of grace, nor to that of the second Adam, Our Lord, or the Apostles and other saints, when they were living on this earth. Their works and speech had no artifice in them, and no other object but God. According to these definitions, simplicity is concerned with seeing that actions and words are straightforward and sincere.

"I'm well aware that people think of simplicity in general as truth or purity of intention: truth, because it sees that our thoughts conform to the words and other signs by which we express them; purity of intention, because it makes all our acts of virtue tend straight to God. However, when we think of simplicity as a particular virtue, properly so-called, it includes not only purity and truth, but also its characteristic of keeping from our words and actions all deceit, craftiness, and duplicity; it's in this sense that our Rule speaks about it and that I intend to speak to you about it. And to do this more clearly and in a more helpful way, we'll divide it in two: simplicity in words, and simplicity in actions.

"Simplicity in words consists in saying things as we have them at heart—note this, as they are at heart, as we think them. Anything else is called cunning, slyness, duplicity, which are contrary to the

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6The root of this thought can be found in *La Perle Évangélique* by an anonymous Flemish author, who had a strong influence on Benet of Canfield and Saint Francis de Sales. The latter wrote that there seemed to be "no difference between truth, purity [of intention], and simplicity." (Cf. *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1821, t. 2, p. 181.) Influenced, in turn, by these two spiritual guides, Saint Vincent referred to simplicity as "my gospel." Cf. *Vincentiana*, vol. 49, no. 4-6 (July-December 2005), Richard McCullen, C.M., "My Gospel...Let then Simplicity Live...," p. 326.
virtue of which we’re speaking, a virtue requiring us to say things as they are, without reflecting too much on this or that, speaking sincerely and very plainly, and, in addition, with a pure intention of pleasing God. It’s not simplicity to reveal all sorts of thoughts, for this virtue is discreet and is never contrary to prudence, which helps us discern what’s good to say from what is not. So then, our tongue has to express outwardly the things we say in the same way as we think them in our mind; otherwise, we should keep silent about them. During a conversation, the opportunity may arise to propose something good in its substance and circumstances; we have to speak up quite simply; but sometimes there are good things to be said that, because of certain circumstances, may be harmful, so, if we state the substance, we have to omit the circumstance. Holy Scripture is perfectly pure in itself, and can be helpful in all kinds of discussions; but, if it’s used in a joking way, that’s wrong; or, if it’s used to mislead someone, that’s forbidden; or, when what we relate from it is for our own exaltation, that’s a sham. Let’s always use good things for good purposes, or not say a word. Those three occasions are misleading and show that, when things are contrary to God or the neighbor, or for my own commendation, I shouldn’t express what’s in my heart.

“The poor late wife of the General of the Galleys7 asked me more than a hundred times what simplicity was, and she was the simplest person I ever met. She couldn’t open her mouth or do anything except in simplicity of heart; but she knew how to separate harmful and useless circumstances from the nature of things, for she was also one of the most prudent. She had a high degree of simplicity and prudence, yet she had no idea of this. There are persons like that who have certain virtues, but God hides it from them because He judges it advisable; and the person who’s unaware of this is truly simple; on the contrary, the one who thinks he’s virtuous, is not.

“So, Messieurs, getting back to acts of simplicity, if we speak, let it be done simply and never with double meaning, never for some sensual or temporal self-interest, or to win someone over to

7Mme de Gondi.
our way of thinking, never for something that’s for our own praise or advantage, but always to please God. It would be wonderful, brothers, if the Mission were like that, wonderful before God and wonderful before everyone. There’s nothing more pleasing than this to attract good people.

“So much for what concerns our speech. As for the other part of simplicity, which pertains to actions, its characteristic, as we mentioned, is that it causes us to act sincerely, straightforwardly, and always with God in view, in business matters, ministry, and exercises of devotion, excluding any kind of hypocrisy, deceit, and empty pretense. For example, someone gives a present to another person and pretends that he’s doing it through friendship; however, it’s really so that the other will give him something of greater value in return. That’s permissible, according to the world and perhaps according to God; still, it’s contrary to simplicity, which can’t bear our acting one way but having another in view. If this virtue causes us to speak according to our interior thoughts, it also causes us to act the same way, with Christian frankness and uprightness, and to do it for God, for that must always be our aim.

“In line with that, persons who, through human respect, want to appear other than they really are, don’t have this simplicity in what they do. This applies also to their clothing when it’s elaborate or covered with jewelry and lace trimmings. Having rooms that are well appointed, decorated with statues, paintings, and superfluous furniture is also contrary to this virtue, as is having a great many books for show, taking pleasure in vain or useless things and in a variety of necessary things when one suffices; giving polished homilies in a pompous style, and, lastly, having in view something other than God in our exercises. All that is contrary to Christian simplicity in action. So, this is the simplicity the Rule requires.

“That brings us to prudence. You know the definitions given by theologians and the various senses in which it’s taken in Scripture. I’m not going to speak to you about that. Prudence in itself, however, is really just as it’s described in the Rule; its workings concern words and actions; it’s the duty of the prudent person to speak prudently, and not indiscreetly, about all things, and not disparagingly about any of them. O Sauveur! Where can we find persons like that
who speak only with the proper reserve, when it's suitable, and in discreet language! In a word, this virtue requires us to say what we have to say discreetly and with good judgment.

"His duty is also to do what he does prudently, wisely, and for a good reason, not only with regard to the substance of the action, but also considering its circumstances, with the result that the prudent person acts properly, at the right time, and for the right purpose. The imprudent person, on the contrary, doesn't consider the way of acting or the timeliness or the goal he should pursue, and that's where he's at fault, whereas prudence, acting with discretion, does everything with weight, number, and measure.

"Now, assuming it to be true that simplicity has as its object words and actions, it's the same for prudence; it governs words and actions; and just as simple persons should say only things that are good in their nature and circumstances, and remain silent about those that are contrary to God, harmful to the neighbor, or tend to their own praise, prudent people—even though they are prudent—have to have the same reserve, circumspection, and discretion.

"So, what's the difference between those two virtues? There isn't any; their nature and effects are the same. Prudence and simplicity have the same goal, which is to speak and act well, and one can't exist without the other. I know, however, that a difference can be found by distinction of reason; but actually they have only one and the same substance and purpose. Human, worldly prudence has wealth, honor, and pleasure for its goal and is totally opposed to true prudence and Christian simplicity, which distance us from attachment to those apparent, perishable benefits to help us to embrace solid, permanent benefits; they're two good, inseparable sisters. Oh, anyone who knows how to deal with them properly will accumulate great treasures of grace and merit! So practice them, Messieurs; win the day. But who's going to win the day? It will be those who constantly aspire to Our Lord and work to acquire them; they're the ones, by the grace of God.

"Prudence has another aim, which is to choose the means to attain the goal to which one aspires. The aim of Christian prudence is to take the shortest, surest ways to perfection. Let's forget about
political and temporal prudence, which tends only to temporal, and sometimes unjust, successes and uses only uncertain, human means; let’s talk about that holy virtue Our Lord recommends to those who want to follow Him; it’s the one that helps us to attain the goal to which He wants to lead us, which is God. It’s the function of prudence to produce this happy outcome; through it we discern what’s good and what’s better for that, and causes us to use divine means for divine things.

“People can choose means proportioned to the goal they set up for themselves in two ways: the first is through reasoning, by which they envisage doing this or that, things that natural intelligence indicates to them; the other is through the teachings of faith, using the means God taught us on earth. Take, for example, a young man who applies to be admitted to a Community; before entering, however, he goes to consult a theologian to get his advice. ‘I feel urged to give myself to God in a certain Company,’ he tells him, ‘but I’d rather not do it without some advice.’ In order to make a proper judgment concerning his vocation, the theologian has to use the infallible principles of Our Lord, who says, ‘Blessed are those who leave father, mother, brothers, sisters, property, pleasures, etc., and follow me.’ If he bases his judgment on that, he’ll judge according to God; but, if he follows his own judgment and says, ‘My friend, what you’re planning is very serious, and you’re still young; religious life is austere; wait awhile; you have a father and mother who’ll be distressed if you leave them; I don’t think you should rush into this.’ To make a judgment in this way is, in our way of thinking, a prudence that’s according to the world, ignoring the Gospel and saying to the Son of God, ‘You don’t understand anything, Lord; you haven’t considered how hard it is to give up everything.’ So, to judge things correctly and make good use of prudence, we have to form our judgment on Christian teachings, which are always sure, and not on the misleading maxims of worldly persons. ‘Sell what you have,’ says Our Lord, ‘give it to the poor and follow me.’ Someone comes to you and says, ‘I’m undecided; what’s the surest

\[8\text{Cf. Mt 19:29. (NAB)}\]

\[9\text{Cf. Mt 19:21. (NAB)}\]
thing for me to do: to keep what I have and remain as I am, or to embrace poverty and the evangelical life?'

"To use our intelligence and reason well, it must be our inviolable rule to judge everything as Our Lord did; but, I repeat, always and in all things, and to ask ourselves, if need be, 'How did Our Lord judge this? How did He act in a similar situation? What did He say about it? I have to adjust my way of acting to His teachings and examples.' Let's be determined to do that, Messieurs, let's walk on this path with assurance; it's a royal rule; heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will not pass away. If we act contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and go against His guidance, that's where the danger lies, that's where those fail miserably who think they can sail against wind and tide, guided by the star of their own reason.

"Oh, if God grants us the grace of adopting this practice of never judging with human reasoning because it never arrives at the truth, never attains God or divine reasons, never; if, I repeat, we consider our reason alone as deceptive and we act according to the Gospel, let's bless Our Lord, my dear confreres, and strive to judge as He did and to do what He has recommended by word and example. Not only that, but let's enter into His mind so that we may enter into His workings. Doing good isn't everything; we have to do all that in His spirit, that is, with perfection, with the purpose and appropriateness with which He himself did them. So then, prudence consists in judging and acting as Eternal Wisdom judged and acted.

"Or sus, Messieurs, or sus, or sus, we should be content if we act like that; but if we don't, we have good reason for regret and improvement. So you see that those two virtues are closely connected; they're almost one and the same. Let's bless God for having called us here to make them our special practice. The Son of God practiced them to an eminent degree in all situations; as, when the adulterous woman was brought to Him to be condemned, He was unwilling to

10Cf. Mk 7:37. (NAB)
act as a judge, and yet He wanted to save her. What was He to do? ‘Let him among you who is without sin,’ He said to the Jews, ‘cast the first stone.’

“Simplicity and prudence, you see, are in those words. Simplicity corresponds to the impulse He had in His heart to save that poor creature and to do the Will of His Father; and prudence is found in the way he acted to succeed in His plan. In this he knew how to unite those two virtues perfectly. It was the same when they tempted Him regarding the tribute to Caesar. ‘Should it be paid?’ they said to him; ‘What do you think?’ Our Lord, on the one hand, wanted to see that the honor due to His Father was rendered. On the other, he wanted to do no injustice to that of Caesar, without, however, ordering the tribute to be paid him, so as not to pass judgment on the question in the presence of those people, who would have said that he favored monopolies. So what’s He going to say to them? He asks to see the coin of tribute and, hearing from their mouths that it was the image of the Prince that was engraved on it, He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God what belongs to God.’ The simplicity of that reply is admirable, for it corresponds to the intention Jesus Christ had in His heart to see that the King of heaven and the King of earth received the honor due them, and it prudently avoids the trap those wicked men were laying to take Him by surprise.

“O Savior, You who practiced these virtues to such a high degree, grant us the grace of entering into them in order to please You, and to practice them to honor You. We know, Lord, that through them You glorified Your Father, and that those who have the happiness of working to acquire them are pleasing to You. Grant that they may be the virtues of the Priests of the Mission, and may there be sincerity and discretion in their words and actions!

“We see them in those priests of the Tuesday Conferences, connected with this house, who act simply and prudently, and who, having sometimes taken as the subject of their talks the spirit of

1Cf. Jn 8:7. (NAB)
2Cf. Mt 22:21. (NAB)
their Society, have shown that the spirit of simplicity is present in it. Now, my dear confreres, if those priests, who are not so bound to God as we are, have such a simple, prudent spirit; if those who have less obligation to strive for holiness than we do because of our vocation and vows, show, nevertheless, in their way of acting that they have these virtues, with what greater reason should we work to acquire them, and what good reason we have to hope that God will give them to us by His grace, if we take care to apply ourselves to this! Is there anything so easy, so just, and so commendable as to distance ourselves from those pretended, double-dealing, inconsiderate, and foolish actions? But how? By the constant practice of this simplicity and prudence, which are the remedies for it. And as humiliation, according to Saint Bernard, is a true means of becoming humble, so also, by the frequent acts we make of these two virtues united in this way, we'll soon become both simple and prudent. It's always understood that this will be done with the grace of God, which we should often ask of Him.

"Let's turn now to Our Lord, who is simplicity personified and, all together, say to Him, 'O gracious Jesus, You came into this world to teach simplicity, to do away with the contrary vice, and to teach us divine prudence in order to destroy that of the world. You see before You a Company that longs only for the grace to observe Your teachings, to model itself on Your way of acting, and to advance in the ways of holiness You have prescribed for it. This is all it desires and asks. Give us a share, Lord, in these divine virtues, so prominent in You; fill each of us with this desire to become more simple and prudent with Christian prudence. This is the prayer we make to You in unity of heart and with the trust children have in their father. Please present to the majesty of the Eternal Father our desires and intentions, our words and works, that He may be ever glorified by them. Amen.'"
March 28, 1659

“A minor health problem I had today made me wonder if I’d still be able to try your patience this evening by explaining the sixth article of our Rules, which follows the one we discussed recently.

“Up to now, we’ve covered five articles of the second chapter, the first of which concerns the Gospel teachings the Company must adopt, and we said how it has to give itself to God to be nourished by this ambrosia from heaven in order to live the way Our Lord lived, and how we must direct all our conduct toward Him and model it on His. If we do, we’ll be conforming our lives to the life of the Author of this admirable teaching, which He practiced first himself.

“He gave as the first teaching to seek always God’s glory and His justice—always and before all else. Oh, how beautiful that is, Messieurs, to seek first of all the reign of God in ourselves and to procure it in others! How far would a Company that lived this teaching of advancing God’s glory more and more further its own happiness! What good reason would it not have to hope that everything would turn to its advantage! If God were pleased to grant us this grace, our happiness would be incomparable. I knew a wise man of the world—but wise in the wisdom of God—our benefactor the late Commander de Sillery, who had this practice. He used to say to me, ‘Every day and in everything, we have to consider where things are going.’ Now, if, among sensible persons who have common wisdom, there are some who wonder if they’re walking on the right path and ask themselves, ‘Where are you going?’ how much more should those who make profession of following the Gospel teaching, especially the one of seeking in all things the glory of God, ask themselves, ‘Why am I doing that? Is it for self-gratification? Is it because I have an aversion to other things? Is

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202. - GENTLENESS
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 6)

Conference 202. - Manuscript of Conferences. This conference is found nearly in its entirety in Abelly (op. cit., bk. I, chap. XIX, pp. 79ff.; bk. III, chap. XII, sect. 15, pp. 191ff.).

1Noël Brulart, Commander de Sillery (cf. XI, 234, n. 3).
2Cf. Mt 6:33. (NAB)
it to please some insignificant creature? But isn’t it rather to con­sider first of all the glory of God and to seek His justice?” What a life, Messieurs, what a life that is! Is that a human life? No, it’s an­gelic, since it’s because of my love for God that I’m doing what I do, and refraining from doing what I do not do.

“The addition of the article that follows, on God’s Will, which is the soul of the Company and one of the practices it should have most at heart, is intended to give each one of us in particular a very easy, excellent, and infallible means of holiness, causing our ac­tions to be no longer human or angelic actions, but actions of God, since they’re done in and through Him. What a life, Messieurs, what a life Missioners will have! What a Company, if it has that as its basis!

“Next comes simplicity, which causes God to delight in a soul in which it dwells. Let’s just consider those among us in whom the stamp of this virtue is more obvious. Isn’t it true that they’re the kindest, that their sincerity wins us over, and that we enjoy dealing with them? But who wouldn’t, since Our Lord himself is pleased with simple persons?

“Likewise, prudence, understood correctly, makes us pleasing to God, since it inclines us to things that concern His glory and helps us to avoid those that turn us away from it. It not only helps us to refrain from duplicity in word and action, but causes us to do everything with wisdom, circumspection, and honesty, in order to reach our goals through the means the Gospel teaches us, not for a time, but for always. That’s where the prudent constantly walk. Oh, what a life! Oh, what a Company that will be!

“If you add gentleness and humility to that, what will we lack? Gentleness! Gentleness! What a beautiful virtue! That’s what we’re going to talk about now, and about humility, if time permits. They’re two sisters who get along well together, just like simplicity and prudence, which can’t be separated.

“I ask you, then, what will become of the priest and the Brother who seek the kingdom of God, embrace the holy practice of His Will, practice Christian simplicity and prudence and, lastly, the gentleness and humility of Our Lord? What will all of us become, if
we’re all faithful to this? What will the Mission be as a Company then? God can help you to understand; as for me, I can’t explain it. At meditation tomorrow, spend your time reflecting on what such a Company is like and what kind of man has this practice.

"Here’s what the Rule says about gentleness: We should all make a great effort to learn the lesson Jesus Christ taught us: ‘Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart.’ We should remember that he himself said that by gentleness we inherit the earth. If we act on this we win people over so that they will turn to God. That will not happen if we treat people harshly or sharply. And we should also remember that humility is the route to heaven. A loving acceptance of it when we are humiliated usually raises us up, guiding us, as it were, step by step, from one virtue to the next, until we reach heaven.

"I’m not going on to humility; we don’t have enough time to discuss it this evening.

"So then, this is a lesson, a lesson from Our Lord Jesus Christ, who’s teaching us that we should learn from Him that He’s gentle and humble of heart. ‘Learn from me,’ He says. O Savior, what an expression! But what an honor to be Your pupils and to learn this lesson that’s so short and dynamic, but so excellent that it makes us like You! O my Savior, don’t You have the same authority over us that the philosophers had in the olden days over their followers, who were so closely attached to their teachings that it was enough to say, ‘The master said this,’ for them to believe it and never deviate from it?

"If then, the philosophers, by their reasoning, could produce that effect of having such great credibility among their disciples that what they said was followed by acts with regard to human matters, how much more does Our Lord, Eternal Wisdom, deserve to be believed and followed in divine matters? O Sauveur! O my dear confreres! What answer would we give Him, if He called us right now to account for all the lessons He’s given us? What will we say to Him at the hour of death, when He reproaches us for having

\(^3\text{Cf. Mt 11:29. (NAB)}\)
learned them so badly, we who are His pupils, to whom He’s taught the truths that bring about efficacious grace, when we strive to put them into practice? And yet, it will happen that we haven’t benefitted from them and haven’t shared His sentiments, but have failed to do what He told us to do.

“‘Learn from me to be gentle,’ He says. If it were simply a Saint Paul or a Saint Peter who, on their own, urged us to learn gentleness from Him, perhaps we could be excused from this; but, my dear confreres, He’s God made man, who came to earth to show us what we should be like in order to be pleasing to His Father. It’s the Master of Masters who’s teaching us. Teaching us what? ‘That I am gentle.’ And what else? ‘That I am humble.’ My Lord, give us a share in Your great gentleness; we ask this of You by Gentleness itself, who can refuse nothing.

“Gentleness, Messieurs, has several acts, which can be reduced to three main ones. The first act has two functions, the first of which is to repress impulses of anger, outbursts of that fire that makes the face red, troubles the soul, and causes a person to be no longer what he was. A serene countenance changes color and becomes dark or greyish or flushed. What does gentleness do? The characteristic of this virtue is to put a stop to that and to prevent a person from giving in to those bad effects. The gentle person still feels the emotion but resists it so it doesn’t get the better of him; it may happen that he becomes a little flushed, but he soon gets control of himself. We mustn’t be surprised to see ourselves assailed by this passion; natural impulses anticipate those of grace, but the latter prevail over them. So then, we shouldn’t be surprised at these attacks but ask for the grace to overcome them, assured that, even though we may feel some revolt in ourselves contrary to gentleness, it has the property to repress this. That, then, is the first act, which is wonderfully beautiful, and so beautiful that it prevents the ugliness of vice from manifesting itself. A certain resilience in minds and souls not only tempers the heat of anger, but stifles the slightest feelings of it.

“Oh, wretched man that I am! I’ve been studying this lesson so long and have still not learned it! I lose my temper, I change, I complain, I find fault. Just this evening I berated the Brother at the door,
who came to tell me that someone was asking for me, saying to him, 'Mon Dieu, Brother! What are you doing? I told you I didn't want to speak to anyone.' I pray that God—and that Brother—will forgive me! At other times I'm very brusque with some of them and speak loudly and harshly. I haven't yet learned to be gentle. Oh, wretched man that I am! I entreat the Company to put up with me and to forgive me. A person who has this virtue doesn't fall into these wretched failings; and even if he does feel some bitterness, it still has only gentle results.

"Here's another function of this first act of gentleness: while it's useful at times to express anger, to shout, to tell someone off, or to punish someone, it causes souls who have this virtue of gentleness not to do these things because of a fit of anger, but because they think they should be done, like the Son of God, who called Saint Peter 'Satan,' and who said to the Jews 'Begone, you hypocrites,' not just once but several times; we see this word repeated in a single chapter ten or twelve times. On other occasions, He drove the buyers and sellers from the Temple, overturned the tables, and gave other signs of an irate man. Were these fits of anger? No, He possessed gentleness to a supreme degree, and it governed all His emotions. In us, this virtue causes us to master our passions, but in Our Lord, who had only propassions, it simply caused Him to advance or delay acts of anger, according as it was expedient. If then, He was severe on certain occasions—He who was basically gentle and benign—it was to correct the persons to whom He was speaking, to root out sin, and to get rid of scandal; it was to edify souls and for our instruction.

"Oh, what great success would a Superior have who acted that way! His corrections would be well received because they'd be based on reason and not on whim; if he gave a strong reprimand, it would never be done because of his quick temper, but always for the good of the person being admonished. Just as Our Lord should be our model, in whatever state we're in, those in leadership should consider how He governed, and pattern themselves on Him. He governed by love; but, if He sometimes promised a reward, at other times He also threatened a punishment. We have to do the same, but
always through this principle of love; we’re then in the state in which the prophet wanted God to be, when he said, *Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me.* That poor King felt that God was angry with him; that’s why he asked Him not to punish him in His wrath. Everyone feels that way—no one wants to be corrected in anger—therefore, they have to master anger and vengeance so that nothing proceeds from them that’s not done through love. There are few people who don’t experience the first emotions, as I said; but the gentle person gets over them immediately.

“So then, the first act of gentleness is to repress the opposite emotion as soon as we feel it, either by subduing the anger completely, or by using it so well, when necessary, that it’s in no way separated from gentleness. So, Messieurs, now that we’re speaking of this, let’s make the intention to recollect ourselves, lift our hearts to God every time some occasion presents itself of losing our temper, nip this desire in the bud, and say to Him, ‘Lord, You who see me attacked by this temptation, deliver me from the evil it’s prompting me to do.’ So then, let each of us make the intention of acting in this way. May God grant us this grace!

“The second act of gentleness is to have a very pleasant, cordial, and serene expression on our face for the persons who come to us, so that we may be a comfort to them. Some people, with a smiling face and cheerful disposition, please everyone, since God has gifted them with the grace of a cordial, gentle, happy manner, by which they seem to offer you their heart and ask for yours in return; whereas others, boorish persons like me, present themselves with a stern, gloomy, or forbidding expression; this is contrary to gentleness. For that reason, my dear confreres, a true Missioner will do well to pattern himself on the former persons and to act in such a way that he gives comfort and confidence to all those who come to him. You see from experience that this approachability attracts hearts and wins them over; and, on the contrary, the comment has been made of upper class persons who hold office that, when they’re too serious and cold, everyone fears them and keeps their

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4*Lord, do not reprove me in your anger. Cf. Ps 6:2. (NAB)*
distance. And, since we have to work with poor country people, with the ordinands, with retreatants, and with all sorts of persons, it's impossible for us to produce good results if we're like dry land that yields only thistles. We need a certain charm and a pleasant countenance so as not to scare anyone away.

"Three or four days ago I was greatly consoled at the joy I noted in someone who was leaving this house, in which, he said, he had experienced a gentle welcome, an openness of heart, and a charming simplicity (that was his expression), which had touched him deeply. Or sus, brothers, if there's anyone alive who should cultivate this way of acting, it's people who do what we do: missions, seminaries, etc., where it's a question of adopting this gentle manner to enter people's souls in order to win them over; for this can be done only with this affable and gracious exterior.

"O Savior, how fortunate were those who had the honor of approaching You! What an expression, what gentleness, what warmth You showed them in order to attract them! What confidence did You not give souls to approach You! Oh, what a sign of love! Saint Andrew was the first, and through him Saint Peter, then all the others. My Savior, what success the person who has this loving, delightful approachability would have in your Church! Sinners and the righteous would come to him, some to be set right and others to be encouraged. Isaiah says of Our Lord.... It's stated somewhere in Holy Scripture that Our Lord would be fed on butter and honey; this is to express to us His gentleness, which would be given Him to discern good from evil. How does that go? Does anyone remember?"

M. Portail got up and said, Butyrum et mel comedet, ut sciat reprobare malum et eligere bonum.5 M. Vincent thanked him and repeated the passage in French, "He will eat butter and honey, so that he will know how to refuse evil and choose good." Then he added, "I think only gentle souls receive the gift of discernment; for, since anger is a passion that troubles reason, it has to be the contrary virtue that imparts discernment. O gentle Savior, give us this

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5He shall be living on curds and honey by the time he learns to reject the bad and choose the good. Is 7:15. (NAB)
gentleness. By Your mercy, some men in the house—even many—practice it; but others don’t do it enough; give all of them that same grace, and grant me that of imitating them in this affable, gracious manner.

“The third act of gentleness is shown when, if someone offends us, we let it pass and ignore it or make excuses for him, saying, ‘He did that without thinking, he acted in haste; he got carried away by the first strong feeling.’ In a word, we turn our thoughts away from the supposed grievance, and if the person repeats those regrettable things to docile persons in order to make them bitter, they don’t even open their mouth to respond, pretending they don’t hear him.

“I heard that one day a Chancellor of France⁶ was coming out of the Council meeting, and, as he was mounting his mule (for in those days they weren’t yet using carriages), a man who had lost his lawsuit said to him, ‘O you wicked judge, you’ve deprived me of my property; God will punish you, and I call you to His judgment.’ History tells us that this seigneur went off, looking neither right nor left, and never said a word. If it was Christian virtue that caused him to swallow this bitterness in that way, what an example for us! And even if it wasn’t through this virtue but from a moral principle that he was able to endure this indignity, how embarrassed should we be for sometimes losing our temper over trifles!

“That happened to Chancellor de Sillery, who loved gentleness to an eminent degree, dating from the time of an incident that occurred when he was Counselor in the Parlement, where he saw two of his fellow lawyers attack one another with words and insults. Noticing their haggard, pale, and frightful faces, he made this reflection, ‘My word! Those men whom I’ve seen with human faces, I now see transformed into animals, they snarl, they foam at the mouth, and they treat one another like wild beasts.’ This made such an impression on him that, judging the enormity of the vice from the deformity of those enraged men, he made the intention to work constantly at patience and gentleness.

⁶Nicolas Brulart, Marquis de Sillery, Chancellor of France and brother of Commander Noël Brulart de Sillery.
“Now, if that example had such power over the Chief Justice of the kingdom that it made him endure the shameful reproach of that litigant, without showing him any resentment—which is certainly admirable for someone of his rank—and when human reasons were not lacking, nor easy means to punish such boldness, shouldn’t Your example, my Savior, have greater power over us? Can we see You practicing incomparable gentleness toward the greatest criminals without becoming gentle ourselves? Shouldn’t we be moved by the examples and reprimands we find in following You? Lamb of God, You who take away the sins of the world, make us like You in this.

“Gentleness not only helps us to excuse the affronts and injustices we receive, but it would even have us treat gently and with pleasant words those who do these things to us; if they were so outrageous as to slap us in the face, we should put up with it for God; and it’s this virtue that produces that effect. Yes, a servant of God who truly possesses it, even should he be mistreated, offers that rough treatment to God’s Divine Majesty and remains at peace.

“O my dear confreres, if the Son of God seemed so kind in His conversation, how much greater does His gentleness appear in His Passion, to the point that no angry word escaped Him against the deicides who covered Him with insults and spittle and laughed at His sufferings. ‘Friend,’ He said to Judas, who handed Him over to His enemies. Oh, what a friend! He saw him coming a hundred paces away, then twenty paces; but even more, He had seen this traitor every day since his conception, and He goes to meet him with this gentle word, ‘Friend.’ He acted the same way with everything else. ‘Who are you looking for? Here I am,’ He said to him. Let’s meditate on all that, Messieurs; we’ll find stupendous acts of gentleness, which surpass human understanding. Let’s also consider how He maintained this gentleness everywhere. They crown Him, they burden Him with His Cross, they stretch Him out on it, they hammer the nails into His hands and feet; they raise Him up and drop His Cross violently into the hole they had prepared for it; in a word, far from mingling any gentleness with all that, they treat Him as cruelly as possible.
“There He is in that horrible torment, a torment I ask the Company to judge by the weight of His body, the stretching of His arms, the roughness of the nails, the number and nature of His pierced nerves. What suffering, my dear confreres! Who can imagine a greater suffering? If you’re willing to taste all the excesses of His most bitter Passion, you’re going to wonder how He was able or willing to endure them, He who had only to transfigure himself on Calvary, as on Tabor, to make himself feared and adored. And, after admiring all this, you’ll say, like this gentle Redeemer, ‘See if there is any sorrow like mine!’"  

“What does He say on the Cross? Five words, and not one of them shows any impatience. He says clearly, ‘Eli, Eli, Father, Father, why have you abandoned me?’ But this isn’t a complaint, it’s an expression of tormented nature, suffering agony with no consolation. The superior part of His soul acquiesces gently to this; otherwise, having the power to overthrow this rabble and cause all of them to die and to free himself from their hands, He could have done it, but He didn’t. O Jesus my God! What an example for us who have committed ourselves to imitate You! What a lesson for those who are unwilling to suffer anything!  

“After that, my dear confreres, shouldn’t we encourage one another and love this virtue, by which God not only will give us the grace of repressing angry reactions in order to behave graciously toward our neighbor and to render good for evil, but also to endure patiently the sufferings, injuries, torture, and death itself that people might inflict on us? Grant us the grace, Lord, to benefit from those You endured with so much love and gentleness. Many people have benefitted from them, through Your infinite goodness, and perhaps I’m the only one here who hasn’t yet begun to be both gentle and longsuffering. Ask God, my dear confreres, ask Him to give me a share in this virtue of Jesus Christ and not permit me to stagnate forever in the faults I so often commit against gentleness. And because an old man rarely abandons his bad habits, please put up with me and don’t tire of asking Our Lord to change and pardon me.”

7Cf. Lam 1:12. (NAB)  
8Cf. Mt 27:46. (NAB)
203. - HUMILITY
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 7)

April 18, 1659

"My dear confreres, we've now reached the seventh article of the second chapter of our Rules. At the last conference on this topic, we said we were invited by Our Lord to learn from Him a lesson He himself taught us. 'Learn from me,' He said, 'that I am gentle and humble of heart.'

‘That I am gentle.’ We spoke about that at the time, but didn't get to the part, 'that I am humble of heart,' although I had intended to do so. There wasn't enough time, and, unfortunately, I don't make much progress. So, we left off at the second lesson, which we have to look at now. Here's what our Rule says about it: Now, this humility was very often recommended by Christ Himself, by word and example, and the Congregation should make a great effort to master it. It involves three things: (1) to admit in all honesty that we deserve people's contempt; (2) to be glad if people notice our failings and treat us accordingly; (3) to conceal, if possible, because of our personal unworthiness, anything the Lord may achieve through us or in us. If that is not possible, though, to give the credit for it to God's mercy and to other people's merits. That is the basis of all holiness in the Gospels and a bond of the entire spiritual life. If a person has this humility everything good will come along with it. If he does not have it, he will lose any good he may have and will always be anxious and worried.

"The meaning of this article of the Rule is so clear that everyone can understand it, and it needs almost no explanation.

"So then, my very dear confreres, it's a question of holy humility, which was so loved and so strongly recommended by Our Lord that we should adopt it as recommended by Our Lord and loved by Him. If I were to ask someone in the Company to

Conference 203. - Manuscript of Conferences. We find another redaction of this conference in Abelly, who published a long excerpt from it (op. cit., bk. III, chap. XIII, sect II, pp.21ff.).

1Cf. Mt 11:29. (NAB)
speak—no matter whom—he'd give us a number of experts and reasons for this, and I could give you a few as well; nevertheless, to honor what Our Lord said and felt about it, we'll simply say that He himself recommended it to us: 'Learn from me,' He said, 'that I am humble.' If it were an Apostle, if it were Saint Peter or Saint Paul who taught us this lesson, if it were the Prophets or some saint, we might say that they were disciples like we are; if it were philosophers . . . . Alas! They were ignorant of this virtue, and Aristotle, who spoke so eloquently of all the other moral virtues, said nothing about this one.

"Our Lord alone said and could say, Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde. Oh, what words! 'Learn from me,' not from someone else, not from a human being, but from a God; 'learn from me. . . .' What would you like us to learn? 'That I am humble.' O Savior, what an expression: that You are humble! 'Yes, I am, not simply exteriorly, through ostentation or boasting, but humble of heart, not by a slight or passing humiliation, but with a heart genuinely humbled before my Eternal Father, with a heart always humbled before men and for sinful men, always concerned with despicable and contemptible things, and always embracing them amiably, actively and passively. Learn from me that I am humble, and learn to be the same yourself.'

"All that, brothers, is so contrary to the spirit of the world and its practice, so far removed from the disposition and nature of each individual that, if God hadn't said and done it, no one would be willing to hear it, for everyone has such a high opinion of what he is interiorly and what he produces exteriorly that there's not a single one of them who doesn't naturally want to be well thought of and who doesn't do everything to be esteemed, praised, and preferred to others. Through a certain spirit of nature spoiled by the first man, everyone falls into this evil inclination and walks into this wretched trap.

"Nevertheless, Messieurs, here's something strange: I've often asked in confession and in my visits as well, 'What virtue do you desire the most? Which one has the greatest attraction for you?' and I've noticed that almost everyone has replied, 'Humility.' "It's a
virtue I really love,' people tell me, 'but, even though I love it, I'm still filled with pride and am bothersome to others, whom I put beneath myself; but I can't even stand myself and shouldn't be trying to raise myself up as I do.' Why is that? Because, even though we have a natural inclination to pride, we're also inclined to humility because it's beautiful in theory; or, at least, since two contrary inclinations can't exist at the same time in the same person, we'd like to have this inclination for that virtue. And how does that happen? Because the grace received in Baptism gives this desire. Yes, the Spirit of Our Lord gives the same penchant for virtue that nature gives for vice.

"If I ask you, my dear confreres, what virtue you love the most, and I ask myself the same thing, all of us will say humility, and yet, if someone asks you, 'How do you find yourself acting? Do you have this virtue?' 'No, I find myself just the opposite; I'm inclined to exterior actions that make me look good, I seek to be honored, I want people to listen to me, I weigh my words and polish my sentences, in a word, I make the best of myself.' 'But don't you know that this is preaching yourself and not Jesus Christ, that those lofty sermons that are only idle talk are making you useless to the people?' 'Yes, I do, but all the same, I have to win the esteem of the world.' Oh, what blindness! Oh, what a misfortune! O Messieurs, if only Our Lord in His goodness were pleased to get us away from this detestable practice and ground us in the practice of holy humility, if only He were pleased to grant us that sanctifying grace of giving us the love of our own contempt, what a great grace that would be! Mon Dieu! How precious it would be to us!

"We have to admit that we have a curious attraction for the contrary vice and that the evil spirit has a secret, very powerful influence over human beings, so that, despite our knowledge of the beauty and holiness of humility, we still allow ourselves to get carried away by the violence of pride. But, mon Sauveur, my dear confreres! Isn't it time to resist this? The Son of God has told us to be humble, and says in addition, 'Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.' This is a teaching of salvation that comes from heaven;

\[\text{Cf. Mt 23:12. (NAB)}\]
and isn't it amazing and a surprise that we can believe the truth of these words and yet refuse to do our part to make them effective?

“We see that in another place Our Lord says, ‘Whoever humbles himself will be exalted, and whoever exalts himself will be brought low.’ Yet, there are those who try to pass for learned men, with strong minds and good judgment, for wise men, for good Superiors and vigilant Officers; and they don’t see that it’s those people who’ll be humbled and brought low. *O Sauveur!* What madness!

“*Or sus,* Messieurs, shouldn’t we admit that there’s something wrong in the man who, knowing the advantages of humility, still doesn’t do all in his power to hide himself in the bowels of the earth, who doesn’t fear feelings of pride, esteem, and the praise of others, and who doesn’t consider himself the least of all? *O my Savior,* how the lesson in the words, ‘Learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart,’ has also been taught us by Your actions!

“What is His life, Messieurs, but a series of practices of humility? It’s a continual humiliation, active and passive. He loved it so much that He never abandoned it on earth. Not only did He love it while He was alive, but also after His precious death, leaving a crucifix as an immortal monument of the humiliations of His Divine Person, appearing as a criminal and a man hanged [on a cross], and willing that the Church place Him before our eyes in that state of ignominy, since He died in it for us. He willed that our Benefactor be represented to us as a wicked man and that the Author of life suffer the most shameful and infamous death imaginable. *O my Savior,* what love You had for this virtue! Why did You give yourself over to such extreme abjection? It’s because You’re well aware of the excellence of humiliations and the malice of the contrary sin, which not only makes the other sins worse, but vitiates works that are not bad in themselves—and even those that are good, even the holiest ones.

“So then, His entire life was filled with humiliations: For the admirable body formed by the Holy Spirit to live such a long time within a virgin! To be willing to have it said that He had been refused lodging and was obliged to stay in a stable, and that, after having received some homage from heaven and earth, from angels
and from men, to be immediately disregarded and forced to flee in poverty to Egypt as an infant—what am I saying—as a weak and powerless God.

"If time permitted, this would be the place to visualize Our Lord's life as a continuous act of esteem and love of contempt; His heart was filled with this; and anyone who might dissect it—as was done formerly with saints who were opened up to see what they had in their heart, where signs of what they had loved most during life were often found—would undoubtedly find that, on the adorable Heart of Jesus, holy humility was especially engraved; and, perhaps it will be no exaggeration if I dare say, preferably to all other virtues.

"Mon Dieu, my dear confreres, now that the time has come when His Divine Goodness causes us to speak of this, let's all ask Him—but humbly—to give us the grace of sharing in His humility and to succeed in practicing it, like Him who did it constantly. Happy will we be if it can be said of each of us what Saint Paul said of Our humbled Lord, *Humiliavit semetipsum, formam servi accipiens!*^3

"Eternal Father, You who willed that Your Son be clothed with our flesh in order to be like us, *in similitudinem hominum factus et habitu inventus ut homo,*^4 clothe us with His virtue of humility, so that we may be like Him.

"O Savior, what a desire, what ardor, what a thirst You had for this virtue, since You worked at it constantly, strove to abase yourself everywhere, and encouraged all creatures to contribute to your humiliation! Who could imitate You? But who could even speak of this virtue? Lord, may You yourself give us the grace to speak about it to one another; human words fall upon our ear without penetrating to the interior, but a single word of Yours, spoken to the ear of our heart, will cause us to give up any thought of the futile renown by which most people lose the merit of their actions. Many appear good, but they're filled with that smoke of self-esteem that causes them to have neither weight nor consistency but disappear like vapor.

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^3*He humbled himself, taking the form of a slave.* Cf. Phil 2:7-8. (NAB)

^4*Made in human likeness and found human in appearance.* Cf. Phil 2:7. (NAB)
“You know, my God, that this renunciation of honor is so contrary to nature that, if You don’t speak to us, we’ll never begin it as we should. So then, speak to us, Lord, speak to us yourself; we’re here as so many servants who are listening to You. The children of Israel wanted Moses, and not You, to speak to them. They feared that the splendor of Your majesty would cause them to die; but we, on the contrary, entreat You to speak to us so that we may live, and live of the life of Jesus Christ. So then, my dear confrères, say to God, ‘Speak to us, Lord, speak to us yourself, You, and not this poor man who’s talking to us, for what he tells us is so common and ineffective that we’re not moved by it. Only Son of the Father, say to us once and for all, “Learn humility from me,” and grant that this expression may produce what it signifies.’

“In what does it consist? It consists, Messieurs, in loving contempt, in desiring abasement, and, when it happens, rejoicing in it for the love of Jesus Christ. That’s difficult, but is there anything grace can’t do, and we as well? Love of our own abjection and what I’ve just said are the same thing. So then, we have to be glad to be known as weak-minded, harsh by nature, lacking virtue, subject to all sorts of failings, glad that people insult and ignore us, treat us as ignorant persons, reproach us for our faults, and tell everyone we’re depraved and unbearable.

‘Monsieur, what are you saying? All that is far removed from our past practices and present disposition.’ Durus est hic sermo. True, this is really hard; but, when we say that it should be done for love of God, and that God has attached great advantages to the practice of humility, for example, that the last will be first, that those who make themselves the least will be the greatest, and that those who humble themselves will be exalted, it encourages us to acquire this virtue. So, I want to welcome it, with the help of God, because it’s pleasing to Him. We’ll be doing something very acceptable to Him if we all determine to do this and really practice it—not for just a while, but for always, repeating often our intention.

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5This saying is hard. Cf. Jn 6:60. (NAB)
6Cf. Mt 19:30. (NAB)
7Cf. Mt 18:4. (NAB)
to honor and glorify God, to please Him, and to love Him. Nothing is more touching than God’s interest, nor more tender than the thought of His goodness and good pleasure, and nothing stronger than to say, ‘It’s for a God who loves me that I want to humble myself; it’s for Him that I want to love my abjection.’ We have to reach that point, Messieurs; each one of us has to tend to it, and may all of us lead the Company to it.

“It’s one thing for an individual to feel drawn to self-contempt, but that’s not enough; he also has to be attached to it with regard to the Company. We shouldn’t welcome humiliations only for ourselves personally, but for all in general, being glad when people say that the Mission is of no use in the Church, that it’s composed of poor people and does badly whatever it does, that its ministries in rural areas are unsuccessful, its seminaries don’t attract people, and its ordination retreats are without method. You see, brothers, if we have the Spirit of God, we have to accept that the Company have the reputation we just mentioned and be placed beneath every other Company, far from wishing that marvelous things be said of it, or that people know it’s doing this and that, that important persons think highly of it and Bishops have a good opinion of it. Oh, may God preserve us from such foolishness! Only the spirit of the world and the malice of pride can suggest such thoughts to us. On the contrary, we should desire and rejoice that it’s actually despised, and love this contempt, regardless of what human nature and worldly prudence have to say about it, for as long as it pleases God to make that last and no matter how great it may be.

“As for being first in importance, virtue, usefulness, and good name, we should leave these to everyone, always speaking well of other Communities—never badly—and attributing to them all the successes and good things that are done. You’ll find persons who contradict this, but don’t believe them, they’re destroyers and flatters. Think highly of all states and all the holy Orders in the Church, but esteem them in God for their merit, love them with all your heart, and don’t think you’re doing a great thing by preferring them to nobodies like us.

“Our Lord is giving many in the Company the grace of acquiring this virtue swiftly, animating their actions with the desire of their
own self-emptying and doing everything to remain hidden and to humble themselves. Grant all of us the grace, my God—all of us—to have no other desire, and that humility may be the virtue of the Mission. O holy virtue, how beautiful you are! O Little Company, how loving you will be if God gives you this grace!

"Take careful note of this: if ever you’ve heard others talk about some good thing that was done in the Company, you’ll see that it’s because they saw in it some small trace of humility, some lowly, abject actions, such as instructing peasants and serving poor persons. If you see ordinands leaving the house edified, it’s because they noted a humble, simple way of acting in it, which is a novelty for them and something charming and attractive to everyone. There was one man at the last ordination retreat who expressed, and left behind in writing, the sentiments he took away with him from this house because of some touch of humility he remarked.

"When the Church, which is aware of the importance of this virtue, wants to proceed to the inquiry about a saint in view of his canonization, among the questions it’s accustomed to ask, I think one of the first is this: ‘Was he humble?’ If, then, one of the first requirements of this process is humility, mon Dieu, brothers, why don’t we put it among the first—or even make it the very first—in our heart and in our examinations of conscience, knowing that it’s the basis of all the other virtues?

"If God is pleased to put all of you in the humble disposition He asks of you, how many graces will He give you, both for your own sanctification and for the salvation of the neighbor! So then, let’s ask Him, not only each individual for himself, but for all of us together, for the acknowledgment of our wretchedness, a strong aversion for all self-esteem, praise, or good name, and a love of our own contempt.

"Our Lord wasn’t only humble in himself, but also with regard to His little band, which He made up of a few poor, rustic men, unlearned and unpolished, who didn’t even get along with one another, who, in the end all deserted Him, and who, after His death, were treated like Him: banished, despised, accused, condemned, and tortured. Let’s all help one another, my dear confreres, to share
in their humiliations; they were the first to receive the instruction and example of their Master; let’s not be ashamed to follow them. He himself is the one who’s still speaking to us. At this moment He’s saying to you as He did to them, ‘Learn from me that I am humble of heart; act as you’ve seen me act; for, from the very first step I took right up until the end, I showed you how to practice humility; it’s what I’ve always taught you.’

“The other day I was with some gentlemen from outside, and one of them said, ‘I don’t know what humility is, except from the way the philosophers describe it—a courteous modesty, a respectable attitude, deferential behavior, etc.’

“But, Monsieur, someone said to him, who knows better the nature of virtue than Our Lord? Who knew better than He the depth of humility, the strength it has to attract the other virtues, and that, without it, a Christian is deprived of the embellishments of grace he should have?’ Things went further than that. . . . It’s better for me to keep silent.

“The Apostles composed a Creed, Credo in Deum Patrem, etc., not only to agree on their beliefs, but also to distinguish Christians from Jews and unbelievers, so that, when they met someone and were asked, ‘Who are you?’ they would reply Credo in Deum; Credo in Jesum Christum.

“If we were free to take humility today as the sign of a Missioner, Messieurs, so that he would be distinguished among other Christians and other priests more by this virtue than by his reputation, what a grace so much in keeping with our state Our Lord would be giving us! Let’s pray that, if someone should ask us about our state, He may allow us to say, ‘It’s humility.’ Let this be our virtue. If someone says to us, ‘Who goes there?’ we can say, ‘Humility!’ May this be our password!

“Our Rule states that this humility should have three conditions, the first of which is self-contempt. Actually, Messieurs, if each of us really makes an effort, we’ll all discover how reasonable that is. Yes, after we’ve carefully examined ourselves on the corruption of our nature, the fickleness of our mind, the darkness of our understanding, the disorder of our will, and the lack of purity of our
affections, and when we’ve thoroughly studied our works and our output, we’ll find that it’s all worthy of contempt. ‘Quoi! All the sermons we’ve given, the confessions we’ve heard, the care and pains we’ve taken for our neighbor and other interests!’ Yes, if we review the best things we’ve done, we’ll find that we’ve acted poorly as to the manner, have gone astray as to the purpose of them, and, all things considered, have done more evil than good.

“Things can’t be otherwise, my dear confreres, for what can be expected of human weakness? What can nothingness produce? What can sin do, and are we anything other than that? If then, each individual really looks at himself, he’ll see that he deserves only contempt, not simply in certain things but in all things in general. We can be certain, Messieurs, that we’re worthy of scorn and always contemptible because of our own opposition to the being and holiness of God and our remoteness from the life and actions of Jesus Christ. And what convinces us of this truth is the natural, constant inclination we have toward evil, our incapacity to do good, and our experience that, even when we think we’ve succeeded well in some activity or have been judicious in our discernment and advice, the contrary happens; and God allows us to be disdained for them.

“Let’s examine ourselves carefully, and we’ll find that, in whatever we think, say, and do, either in the substance or in the circumstances, we’re filled with and surrounded by reasons for disgrace and contempt. Let’s examine ourselves carefully—really carefully—we’ll find ourselves not only worse than other people, but worse than the demons. Some in the Company believe that they’re worse than the demons in hell; for, if those miserable spirits had at hand the means we do to become better, they’d use them thousands of times better than we do. And, in fact, haven’t they said to certain persons, ‘Oh wretched person that you are! There you are, in a state to honor God, and you’re offending Him! If we didn’t have this perversity for it and this propensity to evil from which we can’t extricate ourselves, if it were possible for us to do penance, if His Son had granted us the grace of dying for us, if He had given us the good thoughts, the assistance, and the time you have to mend your ways and to serve Him,
and, above all, the example of His extreme humiliations, how very differently we’d act from the way you’re doing! Quoi! You believe in God and you live so badly! Quoi! You receive the Sacraments so often and new graces every day, and you’re no better for it! O heavens! O earth! Be disconcerted by such great insensitivity as ours and such ingratitude for God’s benefits! Without a doubt, Messieurs, we’re worse than the demons!

“The second condition our humility must have is to accept that others know our faults and look down on us for them. To tell the truth, that’s not pleasing to the old man, and you might all say to me, ‘Durus est hic sermo; this is really hard.’ Nevertheless, we have to reach that point; we have to accept the scorn people may show for our state, our person, our manner of acting, or the way we talk. Our Lord could have avoided the mockeries, insults, and reproaches He received from the Jews, but He didn’t. God forbid, Messieurs, that we’re so weak that, when we have to suffer some embarrassment, we reject it and make excuses, for holy humility can’t allow that!”

At that moment the clock struck, and M. Vincent paused to ask if it was nine o’clock. Being told that it was, he showed his surprise because he still had a lot of things to say. And he added, “What are we going to do? We’ll have to stop there; God will tell you the rest tomorrow at meditation, where you’ll understand His words much better than mine. Pay attention to what He recommends to you about this virtue and ask Him to help you to understand it.

“Should it please Him to inflame our hearts only with the desire for humiliations, that will be quite enough, even though we won’t know humility like Our Lord did, who, by practicing it, saw the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of it. He also understood its relationship with the perfections of God His Father and the insignificance of His creature and of sinful man. We’ll never see that except in a very obscure way; nevertheless, in our darkness, let’s be confident that, if we begin to love humiliations, God will give us this virtue and increase it in us by the acts He’ll help us to make of it. One humiliation draws another, and the first degree of humility serves to take the next step to the second, and the second to the third, fourth, and fifth.
“O Savior, O Savior, You said of the humble Publican that his prayer had been heard! O my dear confreres, if He gave this testimony of that man, who was a blameworthy person, for what should we not hope, if we’re humble? And what about the Pharisee? He was a man separated from the people by his position, which was like a religious Order among the Jews; he gave thanks to God, he fasted, and he satisfied His justice. Yet, God reproves him; and why? Because he attaches importance to his own works, thinks highly of them, is complacent about them, and thinks he himself has done them.

“So then, we have a righteous man and a sinner; for the righteous man the virtues were vices and the cause of his damnation because he lacked humility; and, on the contrary, for the sinner, one single act of humility was a means of salvation. He stands at the door and beats his breast; he doesn’t dare to lift his eyes to heaven, and, even though he’s blameworthy, he still goes away justified.

“Humility brings all the other virtues to the soul, and, from the sinner that a person was, he becomes pleasing to God by the fact of humbling himself. Even if we’re villains, if we have recourse to humility, it changes us into righteous men; and although we should be like angels, if we lack this humility, our fate is sealed; even though we may have the other virtues, they’ll be taken from us because of the lack of the one we don’t have, and we become like the damned, who have none of them. Regardless of how charitable a man is, if he’s not humble, he has no charity; and without charity, even should he have enough faith to move mountains, or should give all he has to the poor and his body to the flames, all that would still be useless to him.

“My dear confreres, let’s leave with this thought: ‘Even if I have all the virtues, but don’t have humility, I have nothing but sin, and I’m only a proud pharisee and an abominable Missioner.’

“My Savior, help us to really understand this truth, help us to see the excellence of this virtue, help us to love it and, by loving it, may we reject all vain thoughts. Let’s begin, my dear confreres, starting right now, to see how beautiful it is and how pleasing it is in those who strive constantly to humble themselves, how peaceful they are,
and how they’re esteemed. On the contrary, what a lowly opinion we have of those who run after honor and work to be esteemed; isn’t it true that they torture themselves to no avail, that most people despise them, ridicule them, and make light of them? We’ll see all that and yet will have so little sense as to run after these diversions of blind and corrupt nature!

"It’s characteristic of humility to prevent us from aspiring to any esteem but Yours, my God, You who give things their value. Human beings don’t know the worth of them. Isn’t it foolish and more than foolish to prefer the esteem of the world to Yours, the shadow to the substance, a lie to the truth?

"Savior of my soul, fill us with those affections that humbled You so much, with those affections that caused You to prefer insults to praise, and with those affections that made You seek the glory of Your Father in the midst of your own shame. May we begin this very moment to reject everything that doesn’t tend to Your honor and our contempt, everything that smacks of vanity, ostentation, and self-esteem; may we strive from now on to perform acts of true humility; may we renounce once and for all the applause of deceived and deceitful persons and vain ideas of the good results of our works; lastly, my Savior, may we learn, by Your grace and example, to be truly humble of heart."

204. - MORTIFICATION
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 8 and 9)

May 2, 1659

"We've come to the eighth article on Gospel teaching, which states: Jesus Christ said, 'Anyone who wants to come after me must deny himself and take up his cross each day;' and Saint Paul
added, in the same vein: 'If you live according to your unspiritual na­
ture you shall die, but if, by the Spirit, you mortify it you shall live.'

Each one, therefore, should be most conscientious in accepting the
overruling of his personal wishes and opinion, and in disciplining
the gratification of his own judgment and each of his senses.

"If the ninth article, which follows, isn’t the same as this one, at
least it bears a close relation to it. It goes like this: In the same spirit
each one is to avoid over-attachment to relatives. Christ indicated
this when He refused to have as a disciple anyone who did not
"hate" his father, mother, brothers, and sisters. He promised a
hundredfold in this world, and eternal life in the next, to all who left
family for the sake of the Gospel. All this goes to show what an
obstacle to full Christian living blood relationships can be. We do
not stop loving them, however, but it will be with a spiritual love
and according to the spirit of Jesus Christ.

"So, my dear confreres, that’s the topic of this evening’s confer­
ce, and it speaks for itself. This Rule is so obvious and under­
standable that it would be trying your patience to speak to you about
something so clear, and to attempt to add to it would be to confuse
its meaning.

"This is a counsel Our Lord gives to those who want to follow
Him and who present themselves to Him for that purpose. ‘Do you
want to come after me? Fine! Do you want to conform your life to
mine? Fine again! Do you realize, however, that you have to begin by
denying yourselves and continuing to carry your cross?’ Now, that’s
not given to everyone, but only to a few; and, that’s why so many
thousands of persons who followed Him in order to listen to Him,
abandoned Him and went away, not being found worthy of being His
disciples because they weren’t prepared to follow Him in the way
Our Lord said they should. They weren’t ready to overcome them­
selves. ‘I will this,’ He told them, ‘come, but two things must be
done: first, deny yourselves, that is, leave that old Adam behind; and,
second, carry your cross, and do it every day; based on that, see if
you’re capable of following me and of remaining in my school.’

\(^2\text{Rom 8:13. (NAB)}\)
“So then, we have to deny ourselves; this is a necessity for anyone who wants to be a disciple of that Divine Master. We’ll see in what ways we deny ourselves; and I’ll be drawing part of what I say from the Rule, which points out four of them, and part from Saint Basil,\(^3\) whose words on that are very moving.

“What, then, does it mean to deny ourselves? The Rule states that it’s to renounce our own judgment, our will, our senses, and our relatives. What a life, Messieurs, to deny ourselves totally for love of God, to bring our judgment into harmony with that of our neighbor, submitting ourselves to those we should through virtue, and conforming to God’s judgment of things! That’s how Our Lord acted. By judgment is understood knowledge, intelligence, and understanding. So, Our Lord was willing to have people know that His judgment was not His own but that of His Father by these words: *Mea doctrina non est mea, sed ejus qui misit me;*\(^4\) my knowledge and understanding are not from me, but from my Father; I consider the judgment He makes of things, and I judge them the same way. O my dear confreres! O my dear confreres! What a victory for a Christian to submit his insights and reason for love of God! What is that? It’s Our Lord’s practice to renounce His own ideas. Who denies himself better than the person who submits his own judgment? A question is proposed and each individual gives his opinion on it. Now, to deny oneself on such an occasion doesn’t mean refusing to say what one thinks about it, but he has to submit his reasons, and the person who submits his judgment prefers to follow another person’s judgment rather than his own. Our Lord, who was Wisdom personified, didn’t exercise His own judgment but submitted himself to His Father. And for us to be true Missioners and His disciples, we have to submit our judgment to God, to our Rules, to holy obedience, and, through condescension, to everyone; and that’s what virtue is. I was saying just recently that it was Saint Vincent Ferrer’s\(^5\) opinion that the means of sanctifying oneself was to con-

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\(^3\)Basil the Great of Caesarea (329-79), a Father of the Greek Church and a Founder of monasticism.

\(^4\)My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me. Cf. Jn 7:16. (NAB)

\(^5\)Saint Vincent Ferrer (cf. XI, 6, n. 2).
form oneself to the judgment of others by renouncing our own. So then, like Our Lord, let’s bring our judgment into harmony with God’s judgment, made known to us through Holy Scripture. As for our own, let’s not exercise it except in things in which neither our Rules nor Superiors have anything to say. So then, *in nomine Domini*, we can form our reasoning on what is most conformable to the spirit of the Gospel.

“To renounce our own will: *Quae placita sunt ei, facio semper,* I always do God’s Will. That’s what His Son Our Lord, Wisdom itself, said and did. If it pleased His Divine Goodness to grant us the grace of doing always the Will of God, of the Rules, and of obedience, then we’d be worthy of being in His school; but, my Lord, as long as we delight in our own will, we’ll be in no way prepared to follow You, nor merit bearing our sufferings, nor have any part with You, as we will have if we truly renounce our own will for love of God.

“Third, we have to mortify our interior and exterior senses; we must keep perpetual watch over them and take special care to subject them to God. O wretch that I am! How dare I say this, I who am so far removed from this practice, always so undisciplined with regard to seeing and hearing, and so preoccupied with the gratification of taste! Grant me the grace, my God, of pardon for the past and mortification for the future. Curiosity to see things is frequent and dangerous; I’ve been tried by this passion. And what power curiosity to hear things has to distract our mind! If there are any who allow themselves to get carried away by these unruly desires of seeing and hearing, they should ask Our Lord fervently to grant them the grace of renouncing that. Curiosity caused the downfall of our first father, and he would have actually been lost if he hadn’t found himself by penance, as is said in the Book of Wisdom. Curiosity to touch things can also have unfortunate consequences. Or sus, we have to watch over ourselves so as never to let go of the rein of our passions or gratify our senses.

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6*I do always the things that are pleasing to him.* Cf. Jn 8:29. (NAB)
“The Rule also states something that seems harsh, yet we have to bow our head to it; the Son of God said very clearly that, in order to deny ourselves, we must hate our relatives, but that means, if they try to prevent us from going to Him; for, when they lead us to Him, or don’t keep us from doing it, He doesn’t require this hatred of us, but when they turn us away from this; then qui non odit patrem suum et matrem et uxorem et filios et fratres et sorores, adhuc autem et animam suam, non potest meus esse discipulus: anyone who does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, cannot be my disciple. This, strictly speaking, is not to hate them, but only to act as if we hated them—I mean to leave them, to disobey them, etc., if they try to prevent us from obeying God and following Our Lord Jesus Christ.

“I think, Messieurs, that Our Lord means this the way I said, that relatives who oppose the happiness of children who want to give themselves to God must be forsaken; it’s in that case that we have to forsake the affection of relatives. ‘But, Monsieur, Our Lord didn’t do that, he always stayed with Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, he had a good relationship with his relatives.’ Yes, but those holy parents always submitted their understanding and desires to that Divine Child; they were consistent in their actions and affections for Him through the instinctive power of the adorable wisdom and eternal Will of His Father, who had established Him as the director and guide of Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin. And our relatives, on the contrary, are often so far from this submission to God’s plans that they try to prevent us from following them; and then we have to hate them and leave them. ‘But they don’t do that.’ All the better; we must love them in Our Lord, not to be attached to them by affection because they’re good, but because they’re detached, so that we may become better by following our common Savior, who alone is perfect.

“The Canons state that parents in dire need have the right to make claims on their children, wherever and in whatever state they may be, in order to be assisted by them in their suffering state, when

7Cf. Lk 14:26. (NAB)
it’s a necessity of nature, and that the children may even leave religious life, after asking permission of Superiors, whether they obtain it or not. That’s to be understood, as I said, in cases of genuine, and not imagined, necessity. Then they may leave and go to help them, and later return to the place and state they left, as many persons have done; there are many examples of that. Often, however, parents may pretend to need you; they’re not comfortable; they’d like to be better off. It’s not the present need that’s urging them on, but fear of the future because they don’t have confidence in God; or, if they’re poor because of their social class, they’d be very glad to be able to live without having to work. Even if that’s the case, we have to be content to pray for them and to contribute in any other way we can to their consolation and relief, so that they may love and serve God. But we have to plan this in such a way that we don’t get carried away by the desire to see them, for, if, under the pretext of procuring their salvation, we put our own in jeopardy, we leave the ministry in which God wants us to be, and, instead of leaving our relatives, we go in search of them, we leave Our Lord for them, and then we fall into the unworthy situation He warned us about in these words, ‘Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.’\footnote{Cf. Mt 10:37. (NAB)} You see, to anyone who wants to be His disciple He says very plainly that this means distancing oneself from one’s relatives. Doesn’t God himself say to Abraham, ‘Leave your homeland and your relatives,’\footnote{Cf. Gn 12:1. (NAB)} which the holy man did immediately?

“Oh, what obedience! But, Divine Goodness, by that You willed to show us that native land and relatives are impediments to our holiness. Our Lord also showed us this when He said to one of His disciples, who asked Him to go to bury his father, ‘Let the dead bury their dead,’\footnote{Cf. Mt 8:22. (NAB)} and He wouldn’t allow another, who wanted to go to sell what he had and give it to the poor, to leave Him. ‘Follow me,’ He said to both of them. From this we should realize that there are grave disadvantages to going back to our own region, once we’ve
left it for the service of Our Lord; and experience has shown us this only too well both within and outside our Congregation. In the beginning we lost several men because of our leniency in letting them go home; for, once they were there, the presence of those objects they had formerly loved caused them to return to their original thoughts, and they found themselves once again with those tender feelings of youth and with troublesome affections contrary to piety and fear of the Lord; at the least, they got involved in family matters, feelings of adversity or prosperity, useless sufferings or vain joys; and they became caught up in them like a fly who has fallen into a spider’s web, from which it can’t escape.

"I call myself as witness to this truth. From the time I was still in the home of the General of the Galleys, 11 and before he made the first establishment of our Congregation, it happened that, when the galleys were at Bordeaux, he sent me there to give a mission to the poor convicts; I did so by using members of some religious Orders of the city, two for each galley. Now, before leaving Paris on this journey, I was talking with two friends concerning the order I had received about this, saying to them, 'Messieurs, I’m going off to work near the place where I was born; I’m wondering if it would be good idea for me to make a visit home.' Both of them encouraged me to go. 'Go on, Monsieur,' they said, 'your presence will console your relatives; you can speak to them about God, etc.' The reason I wondered about doing this is that I had seen several good priests who had done wonders when they had been away from home for some time, and I noted that when they went to see their family, they returned completely changed and became useless for the people. They got totally involved in the affairs of their families, which occupied all their thoughts, when previously they were busy only with their ministries.

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and were detached from flesh and blood. 'I'm afraid of becoming attached like that to my relatives,' I said. And, in fact, after spending eight to ten days with them to instruct them in the ways of salvation and to steer them away from the desire for possessions—even to telling them they should expect nothing from me and that, even if I had chests of gold and silver, I wouldn't give them anything because a priest who has anything owes it to God and to the poor—the day I departed, it was so painful for me to leave my poor relatives that I did nothing but weep all the way back, and wept almost constantly. Those tears were followed by the thought of doing something to assist them and to better their situation, to give this to one, that to another. My mind was deeply moved and I was sharing in this way what I had and what I didn't have. I say this to my own shame, and I say it because perhaps God allowed that to make me understand better the importance of the Gospel counsel of which we're speaking. This troubling passion for improving the lot of my brothers and sisters plagued me for three months; it was a constant weight on my poor mind. In the midst of that, when I found myself somewhat free, I prayed that God would be pleased to deliver me from that temptation, and I prayed to Him so much about this that He finally had pity on me and took away those tender feelings for my relatives. And, even though they had to ask for alms, and still do, He gave me the grace of entrusting them to His Providence and to consider them happier than if they had been well off.

'I say this to the Company because there's something important in this Rule, based on the Gospel, which excludes from the disciples of Jesus Christ all those who do not hate father and mother, brothers and sisters, and which, in line with that, exhorts us to give up any inordinate attachment to our relations. Let's pray for them, and, if we can be of service to them in charity, let's do it, but let's hold fast against nature, which, being always inclined in that direction, will turn us aside, if possible, from the school of Jesus Christ. Let's be steadfast.

'So, here are four ways to deny ourselves: (1) Renounce our judgment; (2) our will; (3) our senses; and (4) our relatives. That's what the Rule recommends, and the grace we must ask of God.'
"Saint Basil relates all this and says that this renunciation extends to forgetting our past life; otherwise, we'll think about the days of our youth, the expressions of tenderness we've experienced, or the annoyances we've had. In whatever sense it may be, we must renounce the memory of all that, for nothing stirs up the appetite for forbidden things more than the thought of their false comforts. So then, in order to truly renounce all those dangerous allurements of our poor youth, we have to forget all those allurements.

"The fifth way to deny ourselves, says this saint, is to renounce pomp: 'The devil and all his pomps,' he says. 'But, Monsieur, we're poor priests who have already given that up, we have only simple clothing, cheap furniture, and nothing that smacks of pomp.' We can have a pompous spirit, Messieurs. Alas, yes we can! To strive to give beautiful sermons, to have people talk about us, to boast about the good we've done, to become puffed up with pride—all that is to have a pompous spirit, and, in order to combat it, it's better to do a thing less well than to take pleasure in having done it really well. We have to renounce vanity and applause; we have to give ourselves to God, my dear confreres, in order to distance ourselves from self-esteem and the praises of the world, which cause us to be pompous.

"Recently, a preacher was talking to me about this. 'Monsieur,' he said, 'as soon as a preacher starts looking for honor and popularity, he's handing himself over to the tyranny of the public; and, thinking to have himself noticed for his fine talks, he becomes a slave of reputation.' We can add to this that the man who churns out magnificent thoughts in a pompous style is opposed to the spirit of Our Lord, who said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' In this, Eternal Wisdom shows how much Gospel workers should avoid grandeur in words and actions, and adopt a humble, plain, ordinary way of speaking and acting. It's the devil who hands us over to that tyranny of wanting to succeed, and who, seeing us inclined to go about our work simply, says to us, 'That's too common; it's too dull

12Cf. Mt 5:3. (NAB)
and most unworthy of Christian majesty.' What a ruse of the devil! Watch out for that, Messieurs; give up those vanities. I ask you, by the depths of the heart of Our Lord, to renounce that worldly, diabolical ostentation; keep before your eyes the very humble and opposite manner of Our Lord.

"He could have made a great display of His works and given a supreme efficaciousness to His words, but He didn’t. ‘You will do what I am doing,’ He said to His disciples, ‘and much more.’¹³ But, Lord, in doing what You did, why do You will them to do more than You? It’s because, Messieurs, Our Lord wants to allow himself to be surpassed in public actions in order to excel in humble and secret ones. He wants the good results of the Gospel and not worldly fame; and for this purpose, He did more by His servants than by himself. One time, He willed that Saint Peter would convert 3,000 persons, and another time 5,000, and that the entire world be enlightened by the Apostles. As for himself, even though He was the Light of the World, He preached only in Jerusalem and the environs, and He did it knowing that He’d succeed there less than elsewhere. Yes, He went to the Jews as those most capable of despising and contradicting Him. So, He did little, but His poor, ignorant, uncouth disciples, animated by His virtue, did more than He did. Why? Because He willed to be humble in that.

"O Messieurs, how far we are from that! Why don’t we always yield the advantage to others and choose the worst and most humiliating for ourselves? For, assuredly, that’s what’s most acceptable and honorable before Our Lord, who is everything we should aspire to be. Let’s take this into consideration for His sake. Take this public action that I’m doing; I could prolong it to great length; I won’t do that. I’ll omit some things that might give it a certain appeal and help me to make a name for myself. Of two thoughts that may come to me, I’ll present the lesser one in order to humble myself, and I’ll hold back the best one to sacrifice it to God in the secret of my heart. Our Lord is found and is pleased only in humility of heart and simplicity in words and actions; it’s futile to look for Him.

¹³Cf. Jn 14:12. (NAB)
elsewhere. If you want to find Him, my dear confreres, give up the
desire to make an impression, ostentation in mind and body, and, in
a word, all the vanities and attachments of life.

"Saint Basil includes a sixth way of self-renunciation: to give up
the passion for being well, for taking good care of ourselves, for
doing the impossible to keep ourselves fit. Actually, this concern
for living well, this fear of suffering, and this weakness some have
for devoting their whole mind to good things in the care of their
insignificant life, are great obstacles in the service of God. Those
persons don’t have the freedom to follow Jesus Christ. We’re His
disciples, and He finds us chained up like slaves. To what? To a
little health, an imaginary cure, an infirmary where nothing is lack­
ing, a house that pleases us, an outing that entertains us, a time of
rest that has laziness written all over it. ‘But the doctor told me not
to strain myself so much, to go get some fresh air, to have a change
of residence.’ Oh, what wretchedness! Do important people leave
their usual residence because they’re sometimes not feeling well; or
a Bishop his diocese; or a Governor his post; or a citizen his town;
and does a merchant leave his business? Do Kings themselves do
that? Rarely. If they’re sick, they stay where they are. The late
King\textsuperscript{14} was ill for four or five months at Saint-Germain, and he
stayed there without budging; in the end he died a beautiful, very
Christian, death. Attachment to life isn’t without its pretext. \textit{Immisit
in faciem ejus spiraculum vitae.}\textsuperscript{15} ‘It’s a gift from God,’ someone
will say, ‘it has to be preserved.’ Yes, but what’s trying to be main­
tained is self-love; that’s why Our Lord said, ‘Whoever saves his
life will lose it.’\textsuperscript{16} And elsewhere He adds that a person can make no
greater act of love than to give his life for his friend. Isn’t God our
friend? Isn’t our neighbor as well? Wouldn’t we be unworthy of en­
joying the existence God gives us, if we were to refuse to use it for
such worthy reasons? Knowing that we have our life from His
liberal hand, we’d be doing an injustice not to spend it according to
His plans.

\textsuperscript{14}Louis XIII, whom Saint Vincent attended on his deathbed.
\textsuperscript{15}He instilled into his face the breath of life. Cf. Gn 2:7. (NAB)
\textsuperscript{16}Cf. Mk 8:35. (NAB)
"Another way to deny ourselves is *spoliare veterem hominem et induere novum*,\(^{17}\) that is, take off the old man and clothe ourselves with the new. In accord with that, every day, when we're vesting for Holy Mass, we say, *Exue me, Domine, veterem hominem et induere me novum*,\(^{18}\) etc. We do that, Messieurs, when we try to rid ourselves of our passions and imperfections, *exue me, Domine*, when the man who was filthy is purified. I was proud; I withdraw from that by acts of humility; and in that way I strip myself of old habits. When I eliminate my past negligence and struggle against my present laziness, what am I doing? I'm purging myself of that old leaven, which corrupts all the dough, and am giving life to my actions by the vigilance and intention I bring to this. Thus, working like that all our life—not only to correct our vices and evil inclinations, but also to regulate our lifestyle and activities to be on a level with those of the new man, Our Lord Jesus Christ—is to divest ourselves constantly of the old Adam and to clothe ourselves with the new. In a word, *exue me, Domine, veterem hominem et induere me novum*.

"Saint Paul says that by Baptism we clothe ourselves in this way with Jesus Christ: 'You are baptized in Jesus Christ, you have clothed yourselves with Jesus Christ;' *quicumque in Christo baptizati estis, Christum induistis.*\(^{19}\) What are we doing when we establish mortification, patience, humility, etc. in ourselves? We establish Jesus Christ there; and those who strive for all the Christian virtues may say, as Saint Paul did, *Vivo ego, non jam ego, vivit vero in me Christus*: 'It is no longer I who live, it is Jesus Christ who lives in me.'\(^{20}\) I was living, *vivo ego*; it's no longer I who live, *vivit vero in me Christus*.

"May it please God to grant us the grace of becoming like a good wine grower who carries a knife in his pocket, with which he cuts off anything he finds harmful to his vine! And because it buds more

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\(^{17}\)Cf. Col 3:9-10. (NAB)

\(^{18}\)Strip me of the old man, Lord, and clothe me with the new.

\(^{19}\)Cf. Gal 3:27. (NAB)

\(^{20}\)Cf. Gal 2:20. (NAB)
than he wishes and constantly produces useless shoots, he always has his knife ready and often keeps it in his hand to cut off anything superfluous as soon as he notices it, so that the strength of the sap from the vine stock may rise fully to the shoots that are to bear the fruit. That’s how we have to constantly use the knife of mortification to cut off the evil output of corrupt nature, which never tires of growing branches of its corruption so that they might prevent Jesus Christ, who is compared to the stock of the vine and who compares us to the vine shoots, from having us bear abundant fruit by the practice of the holy virtues.

"The man who always prunes his vines is a good wine grower, and we, too, will be good disciples if we constantly mortify our senses, work to subdue our passions, to submit our judgment, and to control our will, doing all that in the ways we’ve mentioned. Then we’ll have the consolation of saying, ‘I divest myself of the old Adam and do all I can to clothe myself with the new.’ Courage, brothers, courage! When God, who is the master of this vineyard, has removed from our souls whatever is useless and evil, He’ll cause us to live in Our Lord, like branches that bear fruit, in order to bear even more. We’ll have a little difficulty in the beginning, but He’ll grant us the grace of overcoming one thing, then another—today an impulse to anger, tomorrow a repugnance to obedience. Courage! Pleasure follows pain, and the greater difficulty the faithful find in self-renunciation, the greater joy they have in mortifying themselves, and their reward is great in proportion to the work entailed.

“So then, it’s by mortification that we have to remove from ourselves anything that displeases God; it’s what helps us to carry the cross with Our Lord and to do it every day, as He commands, if we mortify ourselves each day. The sign that a man is following Our Lord is to see whether he mortifies himself continually. Let’s work at that, my dear confreres, so that not a day goes by that we don’t perform at least three or four acts of mortification; and by our doing this, it will be true to say that we’re following Our Lord, that we’ll be worthy of the title of His disciples, and that we’ll be walking on
the narrow path that leads to life. By our doing this, He’ll reign in us during this mortal life and we with Him in eternal life.

“What did You do all Your life, my Lord, except to battle continually against the world, the flesh, and the devil? Did You always do Your own Will, did You ever consider Your own judgment, did You ever listen to sensuality? No, never; in You there was nothing but continual mortification and absolute renunciation in all things. Please, Messieurs, consider His poverty, see that it went so far as not even to have a stone on which He could lay His head; look at His food, His frugality in eating dry bread. As for honor, look how He fought against it, and pattern your own life and practices on that.

“Messieurs, let’s keep this example before our eyes and never lose sight of the mortification of Our Lord, since, in order to follow Him, we have the obligation to mortify ourselves after His example. Let’s model our affections on His, so that His footsteps may be the rule of our own in the way of holiness. The saints are saints because they walked in His footsteps, denied themselves, and mortified themselves in everything. So, Messieurs, there’s reason to hope that the Divine Goodness will give us the spirit of mortification, will remove from us all that displeases Him, and afterward will give us the virtues that will make us pleasing in His eyes. But, my dear confreres, let’s work at this ardently and faithfully, with love and patience. In that case, we can be sure that God will grant us the grace to carry our cross constantly, to follow Jesus Christ closely, and to live of His life in time and in eternity. Amen.”