May 16, 1659

"My dear confreres, since I wasn't sure yesterday if I'd be able to speak with you this evening, you were given another topic for the conference, of which the discussion would be far more useful—with each one mentioning what Our Lord had given him—than anything I could say to you, which would only try the Company's patience. However, I intend to speak to you about openness to God's Will, as found in the Rule, Chapter II, Art. 10, on Gospel teaching.

"Each one should show great eagerness in that sort of openness to God's Will which Jesus Christ and the saints developed so carefully. This means that we should not have a disproportionate liking for any ministry, person, or place, especially our native land, or anything of that sort. We should even be ready and willing to leave all these things gladly if our Superior asks it, or even hints at it, and to put up with any disappointment or disruption this causes, without complaint, accepting that, in all this, the Superior has done well in the Lord.

"So we're going to speak about the virtue of openness to God's Will [indifference], to which our Rule directs us. This is certainly right, for how could the Company attain holiness, if it doesn't acquire openness to God's Will and detachment from all things? How will it achieve the intended purpose of going to instruct poor people, withdrawing them from sin, and, with God's blessing, putting them in a state of grace, if we aren't open to God's Will, which draws down the same grace we want to diffuse among them? How, moreover, if we're attached to the world and ourselves, to our pleasures and self-esteem, how, I repeat, could we work for the sanctification of the clergy, which consists in turning away from these things? No one can give what he doesn't have: *Nemo dat quod non habet*. We want to lead others to detachment from earth's..."
greediness and nature's gratification. *O Sauveur!* How shall we do this, if we ourselves are attached to them? But how can we seek the kingdom of God and its justice, if we're tied to something else that strips us of the means and the freedom to seek them? How can we do God's Will, which is one of our Rules, if we follow our own will in things that are displeasing to Him, particularly comforts, honors, and pitiful self-esteem? But how can we renounce ourselves, according to Our Lord's counsel, if we're attached to these things? How can we detach ourselves from everything, if we don't renounce the slightest thing that blocks us? Do you want a remedy for this, Messieurs? Openness to God's Will must set the captive free; this virtue alone draws us away from the tyranny of the senses and the love of creatures. Therefore, you see how necessary this virtue is and what an obligation we have to give ourselves to God to work at acquiring it, if we don't want to be slaves to ourselves and slaves to an animal—because he who lets himself be led by his sensual nature doesn't deserve to be called a man, but an animal.

"Today I was reading the reflection of a saint, who says that openness to God's Will is the height of holiness, the sum of all virtues, and the destruction of vices. Openness to God's Will must necessarily be akin to the nature of perfect love, for it's an activity of love, inclining the heart to all that's better and destroying everything that keeps it from this, like fire, which not only aims at its center, but consumes anything that holds it back. So, my dear confreres, if openness to God's Will detaches your hearts from earth, they'll be afire with the practice of the Will of God. When they stop loving other things, they will necessarily be filled with God's love. It's in this sense that openness to God's Will is the source of all virtues and the death of all vices.

"Let's say what it is. It must be differentiated into two parts: first, the action of openness to God's Will, and second, the state of openness to God's Will.

"An indifferent action is a voluntary, moral act, which is neither good nor bad. Some think there's no such act, meaning that, if an action isn't good, it's bad. But, be that as it may, we presume here an intermediate possibility: a voluntary action that's con-
cerned with what’s neither good nor bad. We have an obligation to nourish ourselves; that’s why we eat. This act isn’t classed as a virtuous act. There’s nothing bad in it, provided the substance of the action isn’t spoiled by any excess or is something forbidden. Walking, sitting, standing, or taking one road or another are of themselves indifferent actions that are neither meritorious nor blameworthy, if there are no evil circumstances. So much for indifferent actions.

“As for the state of openness to God’s Will, it’s a state in which a virtue is found whereby a person detaches himself from creatures in order to be united to the Creator. It’s not only a virtue; it is, in some way, a state that encompasses it and in which it acts; it’s a state, but one in which this virtue must be active, by which the heart detaches itself from the things that hold it captive. Where is the loving heart? It’s in the thing it loves. Consequently, our heart is held captive where our love is; it can’t escape, it can’t rise any higher, it can’t go right or left; it’s stopped right there. The miser’s heart is where his treasure is; and our treasure is where our heart is. What’s regrettable is that the things keeping us enslaved are usually very base things. Eh quoi! A trifle, something we imagine, a sharp word said to us, a less-than-gracious welcome, a slight refusal, the mere thought that we’re not held in much account—all this hurts and upsets us to the point that we can’t get over it. Our self-love binds us to these imaginary hurts; we don’t know how to cope, it’s always working on us. And why? Because we’re held captive by this passion.

“It’s characteristic of openness to God’s Will to take from us any resentment and desire, detaching us from ourselves and from every creature; that’s its purpose. That’s the happiness in which it places us—provided it’s active and working. And how? We have to strive to know ourselves and say to ourselves, ‘Now then, my soul, what are your attachments? What do we prize? What captivates us? Do we have the freedom of the children of God, or are we bound to possessions, comforts, and honors?’ We must examine ourselves to discover our bonds in order to break them. To tell the truth, Messieurs, the efficacy of meditation should aim at our becoming
well aware of our inclinations and attachments, making the resolution to struggle against them and to correct ourselves and then carry out well what we’ve resolved. First, to examine ourselves, and when we feel tied down to anything, to work at detaching ourselves from it and to free ourselves by resolutions and acts opposed to it. Surely we have good reason to fear falling into those wretched bonds from which we can’t escape. *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* What misery!

"I knew a gentleman—I’ve said this before—a gentleman from Bresse, named M. de Rougemont, who had been in a lot of quarrels; he was a tall, well-built man, often engaged in fighting, having been called to act as a second for other gentlemen who were dueling, or challenging on his own those persons who crossed him. He told me this, and you wouldn’t believe how many people he had beaten, wounded, and killed. Finally God touched his heart so efficaciously that he entered into himself, and, recognizing the unfortunate state in which he was, determined to change his life, which he did. After this change, having remained some time in the beginning stage of his progress, he made such great strides that he asked permission of the Bishop of Lyons to keep the Blessed Sacrament in his chapel, in order to be able to honor Our Lord there and better to foster his piety, which was remarkable and known to all. That gave me the desire one day to go to see him at his home, where he told me about his devotional practices, including, among others, his detachment from creatures. ‘I’m convinced that, if I’m not attached to anything,’ he said, ‘I’ll go to God, who is my only desire; and, to do that, I’m careful to see whether the friendship of any nobleman, relative, or neighbor holds me back; if self-love hinders me from going forward; if my possessions or vanity are tying me down; if my business or pleasures are an obstacle to me; and when I realize that something is diverting me from my Sovereign Good, I pray, I cut, I make short work of it, and free myself from this bond; those are my practices.’

“He told me the following in detail, and I’ve always remembered it: One day, while traveling, he was thinking of God as usual; he examined his conscience to see if, since the time he had re-
nounced everything, he still had any attachment. He ran through his business affairs, his possessions, his connections, his reputation, honors, and the trifling enjoyments of the human heart. He mulled over them, and finally, he hit upon his sword. 'Why do you carry it?' he thought. 'But how could I bear to lose it? Quoit! To take off this dear sword, which has served me so well on so many occasions, and which, after God, has rescued me from a thousand dangers! If someone attacked me again, I'd be lost without it. But some quarrel could also arise, in which, if you were wearing a sword, you might not be able to resist using it, and you'd offend God once again in that. O mon Dieu, what shall I do?' he said. 'Can the instrument of my shame and my sin take hold of my heart? I find that this sword alone is a burden to me. Oh! I'll no longer be so cowardly as to carry it.' And at that moment, finding himself facing a large rock, he got down from his horse, took the sword, and struck the rock—bang, bang, bang! Finally he smashed it to pieces and left. He told me that this act of detachment, breaking that iron chain holding him captive, gave him such great freedom that, although it was against the inclination of his heart, which loved that sword, he never again was attached to anything perishable; he prized only God.

"What a great lesson, Messieurs, and what a great embarrassment for a wretch like me, who remains attached now to one thing, and then to another! I don't reflect on this, or, if I do, I don't make enough effort to be freed of it. This is a great source of shame for me, and for those like me, who never examine themselves to see to what they're attached, or never ask themselves, 'What holds sway over me, and what's this hodgepodge of objects and attachments that uselessly take up my time and my thoughts?' Or, if they do reflect on this on certain occasions, they simply stop at that, and, instead of freeing themselves from this bondage, become more enslaved, with the result that they can't get out of it. What a pity, Messieurs, that people see us always groveling on the ground, always with our stomachs against the earth, always stagnating in our faults and wretchedness! That's what must be said of those who don't strive for openness to God's Will, who make no progress in virtue, who always have the same stumbling block and don't try to
remove it. Who won’t be afraid that God will abandon us, Messieurs? Who has ever seen a slave like Him? Why don’t we have His zeal for freedom? O Savior! You’ve opened freedom’s gate for us; teach us to find it; make known to us the importance of our freedom; help us to have recourse to You in order to reach it; enlighten us, my Savior, to see to what we’re attached, and please place us in libertatem filiorum Dei.²

“My dear confreres, when God sent His Son into the world to redeem us, He made us His children. The cowardly man, who allows himself to be subjugated by creatures, becomes a slave and, losing that freedom of the children of God, seems to blaspheme eternally, as if he were saying that God isn’t his Father, or that He’s less lovable than the thing he loves and this pleasure that captivates him.

“But to what was the Son of God attached? Do you know how submissive He was to His Father’s Will? He makes this comparison, through the Prophet-King: like the submission of a beast of burden to its master. He’s alluding to His perfect resignation in that of this animal, which has no choice or desire. You do what you want with it; it’s always ready to set off and go, to take on a saddle or a pack, to be hitched to the plow or to stand still; it’s indifferent to everything, allowing itself to be led around, without the slightest attachment to its stall, and with no inclination to go to one side or another. It isn’t attached to anything. Haven’t you seen, in passing, mules standing in front of a door? Five or six of them stand together, waiting for their driver to come out, and when he gets there, they leave. They turn right or left, doing whatever he wishes, even coming to a stop. They’re attached to nothing. Ut jumentum factus sum apud te.³ ‘That’s how I am,’ Our Lord says, in order to convey to us how He was ready to do anything God wanted of Him. Oh, what flexibility! Oh, what self-surrender! What happened to Him? Et ego sum semper tecum.⁴ He was always with God. ‘Because I’ve done your Will, Lord, and never my own, you were with me.’

²In the freedom of the children of God. Cf. Rom 8:21. (NAB)
³I was like a brute beast in your presence. Cf. Ps 73:22. (NAB)
⁴And I am always with you. Cf. Ps 73:23. (NAB)
“What does the person do who is perfectly submissive to the orders of Providence? He acts like the beast of burden that gives itself to whatever is wanted, when it’s wanted, and in the manner desired. And what do I do when I surrender myself in this way? I attract God to myself because I have no will of my own. Tenuisti manum dexteram meam, et in voluntate tua deduxisti me, et cum gloria suscepisti me.5 You’ve taken me by the hand and led me where You willed. If I’ve done any good, it’s You who have guided me. I’ve committed myself to the least sign of Your Will. Why? Because I’ve become a beast of burden for You, my God. I’ve given myself over to hard work, scorn, sufferings, and all the dispositions of Your good pleasure; and because of that, Lord, You’ve made use of me for the things that have been pleasing to You.

“Don’t you see, brothers, how successful those persons are who are open to God’s Will? They consider only God and God leads them. You’ll see them tomorrow, this week, all year, and their entire life at peace, fervent, and continually oriented toward God. They always pour forth on souls the gentle and beneficial effects of God’s work in them. If you compare a person who’s open to God’s Will with those who are not, you’ll see, on the one hand, his brilliant, intelligent ways of acting, and they’ll always be very fruitful. Within the person himself we see only progress, strength in his words, blessings on his undertakings, grace in his advice, and good repute in his actions. Et in voluntate tua deduxisti me. You’ve led me, Lord, by the way of Your Will. You’ll see, on the other hand, persons attached to their own satisfaction, who have only worldly thoughts, servile conversations, and dead works. The difference, then, between one and the other comes from the fact that the latter are united with creatures, but the former separate themselves from them, and that nature acts in base persons, but grace acts in those who raise themselves to God and whose only desire is to do His Will. That’s why the latter can say, in a certain sense, like Our Lord, Et cum gloria suscepisti me: You’ve received me with glory; You’ve given me power over heaven and earth; I’ve acted like a

5You have taken hold of my right hand, and have guided me by Your Will, and have received me with glory. Cf. Ps 73:23-24. (NAB)
beast of burden toward God and others. I’m so stupid that I don’t know if I need to use the masculine or feminine article with ‘beast of burden.’ *Or sus*, blessed be Our Lord! Because He had this spirit of submission and openness to God’s Will, He had His Father with Him, leading Him by the hand in the way of His Will, filling and surrounding Him with the splendor of His glory.

“Let’s ask Him, my dear confreres, to grant us the grace of placing ourselves in that state, in order to be always under God’s guidance, that He may take us by the hand and lead us before His Majesty. O my Savior, don’t let us have any bonds, no more than a beast of burden that doesn’t seek to carry one thing rather than another, to belong to a rich master rather than to a poor one, or to be in this region rather than in that one! Everything is fine with it. It waits, it goes, it suffers, and it works both night and day; nothing surprises it.

“*Mon Dieu!* That’s beautiful; I’d really like to do the same, but I see plainly that I’m held captive. I have a hard time detaching myself from the things I love—not being able to preach or to be of service, to be satisfied, to have a good reputation. I’d find it very hard to submit myself to all sorts of persons; nevertheless, with Your grace, my God, I can do everything. I’m not asking to be an angel, or like an Apostle. In a certain sense, I am already. O my God, what I desire is simply the pliant disposition You give to animals, the courage to suffer You give to soldiers and their fidelity to military life. O my dear confreres, shame on us to see ourselves outdone by hapless soldiers and poor animals in things so pleasing to God that His own Son willed to carry them out in person! Shame, Messieurs! Don’t listen to this wretch who’s speaking to you, the most unworthy of all men to aspire to that blessed state, because of the poor use I’ve made of my freedom and God’s graces, since I’ve loved things other than Him. Let’s give ourselves to His infinite goodness, Messieurs, confident that He’ll purify us from that earthly attachment in which we’ve been wallowing. We have to work at being open to God’s Will by detaching ourselves from our judgment, our will, our inclinations, and anything that’s not God. It’s an active virtue, and, if it doesn’t act, it’s not virtue. We have to work at it, my
dear confreres. We have to exert ourselves often, always—and
tomorrow at meditation. Why not?

"The Rule goes on to say that Our Lord had great respect for and
practiced the openness to God’s Will that we just saw. It adds that
the saints, by their example, have also taught us this. O Saint Peter,
you said rightly that you left everything, and you showed it when
you recognized Jesus Christ on the shore: Dominus est! For that
Apostle immediately pulled off his garment, jumped out of the
boat, and started to swim. He didn’t hold on to anything. Dominus
est! He came to Him detached from everything. O mon Sauveur!
What detachment! He prized his Master alone and not his boat, his
garment, or his life.

"O Saint Paul! O great Saint Paul who, from the moment of your
conversion, had this infused grace of openness to God’s Will!
Domine, quid me vis facere?6 ‘I’m here, ready to do what pleases
You. I’m not holding on to anything.’ ‘Lord, what do you want me
to do?’ What admirable words! They indicate a detachment as com­
plete as it is astonishing. What an abundance of graces suddenly
poured into this vessel of election! What a wonderful moment,
which changed a persecutor into an Apostle! Oh, what great insight
was then given him! By cutting him off from the law, his
commission, his fortune, and his opinions, it causes him to say all at
once, Domine, quid me vis facere?

"Surely the Rule is right in saying that Our Lord and the saints
valued and practiced openness to God’s Will, and all of us are
obliged to imitate them. Yes, my dear confreres, this virtue is neces­
sary for Missioners because they don’t belong to themselves but to
Our Lord, who has sent them and wants to make use of them. Why?
In order to do what He did and to suffer like Him. ‘As My Father has
sent Me,’ He said to His disciples, ‘I send you; and just as they per­
secuted Me, they will persecute you.’

"Furthermore, speaking of Saint Paul, He said, ‘Ostendam illi
quanta oporteat eum pro nomine meo pati.’ I will show him how

much he has to suffer for My name. And indeed, what did he not endure; it’s amazing! It’s incredible how much he suffered in his person, his honor, and his ministry. This heart of Saint Paul, so accepting and generous, was persecuted in various places. He was forced to escape from Damascus through a window; elsewhere he was flogged and cast into the sea; sometimes he was stoned, often imprisoned, despised, pursued, and, in the end, was martyred. He was destined to suffer: Ostendam illi quanta oporteat eum pro nomine meo pati. I’ll show him how much he has to suffer. And so he did. Yes, what he suffered is extraordinary, extraordinary, extraordinary!

“But what shall we say about Abraham, the leader of the truly obedient and perfectly detached? God commanded him to leave his country and his relatives. ‘Leave your land, abandon everything, and go.’ He does so without objecting or delaying. What compliance, my dear confreres, what openness to God’s Will! But, my God, You don’t stop at that. You probed into his heart, to see if he was capable of going further. ‘Yes,’ God said to His servant, ‘I want another proof of your love: I want you to sacrifice your son to Me.’ The patriarch had no doubt about whether or not he should do it. ‘Let’s go,’ he says. He takes everything needed to sacrifice him; he takes Isaac and his sword; they walk on and reach the designated place. The pyre is ready, the father’s arm is raised, and the boy is at his feet awaiting the blow. How open Abraham is to God’s Will! How far above natural feelings he is and how free in his actions and affections, since he’s so prompt in submitting them to the strangest and least expected of God’s orders!

“But don’t you admire the obedience of the son as well as that of the father? Just look at his virtue; he doesn’t ask questions about what has been planned in his regard. He lets himself be led and tied up; he goes on his knees; he surrenders his life. It suffices for him to know that his father wills this. O mon Dieu! O my dear confreres! What good reason we have to fear that the children of our under-

standing are far removed from this self-denial! Are these insights, this knowledge, and this learning we have or claim to have really brought into subjection? Are you prepared, brothers, to sacrifice them to God? Let's take a close look at ourselves, and let's suppose a Superior says to us, 'Let's stop at that; you've studied enough; change houses; do something else.' That may happen to some of you; how will you feel about it? How will you feel, brothers, if you're asked for your Isaac? Will you cut the throat of this thirst for knowledge, of the pleasure of being in this place and not in another, of this stubbornness in wanting one thing and rejecting another? Examine your conscience sincerely; you'll find that you're not open to God's Will. Eh, bon Dieu! There have been some in the Company who, because they weren't sent to study after their seminary as they expected, grumbled, complained, and made such a fuss that it's really sad. But, Monsieur, but, my dear brother, didn't you come here to do God's Will and not your own, to obey and not to study? Oh bien! You're not going to study. This child of your mind is keeping you attached; this immoderate attachment is holding you prisoner. Go, learn how to free yourself and to be open to God's Will; let that be your lesson.

"Some have the passion for becoming priests before the time; others, for preaching, for debating, for being engaged in a certain work, for coming and going; there are few who don't have their beloved Isaac; but we have to give him up; we have to empty our hearts of any love other than that of God, and of any will other than that of obedience. Or sus, I think I can see that all of you are disposed to do this, and I hope God will give you that grace. Yes, my God, I hope from Your goodness, which sees my attachments, that You'll speak to me first of all; and I, who see that I'm incapable of mending my ways, will say in my old age, like David, 'Lord, have mercy on me.' For you, brothers, who are in a position to work at acquiring virtue, strive for that of openness to God's Will, for, if it pleases God that you obtain it, you'll have the source of virtues and the death of vices.

"Before coming to the means for practicing it, if you want another reason to have a great love for it, the truth is that the person
who’s open to God’s Will belongs wholly to God, God is everything to him, and everything else is nothing. Say to him, that’s white, and it’s white; say black, and it’s black; come back, and he comes back; work, and he works. He’s always ready to do anything, even without being told.

“Do you know the thought that occurs to me when someone talks about the needs of the far-off foreign missions? We hear about them; we feel attracted to them; we think that M. Nacquart, M. Gondrée, and all those other Missioners who died as apostolic men for the institution of a new Church are happy. Indeed, they’re blessed, for they’ve saved their souls by giving their lives for the faith and for Christian charity. That’s beautiful; yes, it’s something holy. Everyone praises their zeal and courage; and then that’s it. If, however, we had that openness to God’s Will, or if we didn’t hold on to a certain trinket we like and to a certain something we’ve put aside, who wouldn’t volunteer for Madagascar, for Barbary, Poland, or wherever else God is pleased to be served by the Company? But if we don’t do it, it’s because we’re holding something back. There are sickly old men who have asked to be sent there and who have asked it even if they have a serious disability. Oh, that’s because their hearts are free; they go in spirit wherever God wants to be known, and nothing detains them here except His Will! If we weren’t entangled in some wretched bramble, we’d all say: ‘My God, send me, I give myself to You for any place on earth where my Superiors will think it suitable for me to go to announce Jesus Christ; and, even if I should die there, I’d be disposed to go and would present myself to them for that, knowing that my salvation lies in obedience, and obedience lies in Your Will.’

“The means of obtaining from God this openness to His Will is continual mortification, both interior and exterior. I’m not going to give you any other. Our primary concern is to see whether we have a greater inclination toward one thing than toward another, and which ones attract us more closely to them, in order to be on the watch for this, you see, so as to work continually at distancing our-

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9Nicolas Gondrée (cf. XI. 263, n. 8).
selves from them, and to retrench and suppress anything we've set our hearts on, so we can divest ourselves of all created things and mortify our senses and passions always and everywhere.

"Let's make the intention today, and begin tomorrow, to combat our satisfactions and attachments, one after the other. Have no doubt, my very dear confreres, have no doubt that, if you're faithful, Our Lord will help you to succeed; thus, from being slaves to ourselves and to things that we like apart from God, we'll attain the freedom of His children, subject only to the Will of this Heavenly Father. Lex justo non est posita. Persons open to God's Will are above every law; they're in a different category from others, and, like glorified bodies, they pass through everything and go everywhere—nothing stops or delays them. O Sauveur! how happy we'd be if we were as detached as beasts of burden, like You, Lord, who compared yourself to a beast of burden, in order to adapt yourself to the greatest flexibility imaginable! We entreat You, our Liberator, to grant us at least the grace of sharing in this disposition, confident that we'll never again lose our freedom or abandon the practice of holy openness to God's Will! We'll always have this openness in our understanding and will, where nothing will enter that may distract us from carrying out all that You ordain. In doing this, You'll be leading us by the hand, helping us to do Your Will, and, in the end, bringing us into glory. Amen.

"I recommend to your prayers the Bishop of Meaux, who has been dying for the past two days and is suffering greatly in this state. This will be like a lamp in the Church that has gone out, one that enlightened both the people and the clergy by his great gentleness, wisdom, moral leadership, and steadfastness. He was very good to our Company, and we were fortunate that he brought us into his diocese and maintained us there. Providence had permitted that we be withdrawn from Crécy, and when this good Prelate saw that, he took the matter in hand. Because God gave the Company the

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10 The law is not meant for the righteous person. Cf. 1 Tim 1:9. (NAB)
11 Dominique Séguier (1595-1659), brother of Chancellor Pierre Séguier, was named Bishop of Auxerre in 1631 and transferred to Meaux in 1638. He resigned in 1659 and died in Paris on May 16 of the same year.
grace to prefer leaving everything rather than offend the person who had established us there, we wanted to depart in order to satisfy him, and to do so for the love of God alone, with nothing else in mind. In the course of the trial, this good Bishop gave me to understand that we should intervene in it in order to be re-established there. I asked him to excuse us for not wanting to litigate against our benefactor. He put us there of his own accord, and now wants to dispose of his foundation in a different way. That’s fine; we want him to do as he pleases. ‘So then, you’ll play that role,’ he said to us, ‘and I’ll play another. I’m going to act in opposition to that man’s plans.’ And, in fact, he bore the expenses of this case and supported and pleaded our cause and, in the end, he was successful. We have been upheld; and the capital that the founder wanted to divert to the general hospital has been awarded to us. Providence likewise permitted that, when the founder saw that we had preferred to withdraw, in deference to him, rather than to defend ourselves, he came here to this house to express his regret for what he’d done. Not only that, but he told me something else. . . . It’s better not to say what it was.

“We have, therefore, good reason to pray for this good Prelate. Beginning this evening, we’ll raise our hearts to God and pray that, in His mercy, He may be pleased to welcome him. We’ll send someone early tomorrow morning to find out if he has died; and in that case, we’ll offer our Masses for his intention.

“I also recommend the great needs of the Company. God is putting it to the test in the ways His Goodness knows; may it please His Infinite Goodness that we’ll make good use of this!”

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12 Pierre Lorthon, secretary of King Louis XIII. When the house was first established in Crécy (1641), Pierre Lorthon had promised the Congregation of the Mission a revenue of four thousand livres from five large farms he had obtained from the King and Queen. On further reflection, he preferred to give two thousand livres to the hospital in Crécy and to keep the balance for himself. This resulted in a lawsuit between Lorthon and the Bishop of Meaux, Dominique Séguié, which did not close until 1659, in favor of the Missioners. As mentioned here, Saint Vincent would have preferred to renounce everything rather than take a benefactor to court. Deprived of the resources on which he was counting, he left only one priest and a Brother at Crécy. The priest said Mass daily in the chapel, heard the confessions of those who came to him, and visited the sick of the parish who asked for him.
May 23, 1659

"My dear confreres, the eleventh article of the chapter on Gospel teachings reads as follows: Christ the Lord wished to lead a communal style of life, so that He would be like other people and in that way win them over more easily to God the Father. All of us, then, as far as possible, are to maintain uniformity in everything; we should look on this as the safeguard of good order and of the holiness which comes of being together. In the same way we should avoid anything out of the ordinary, as it can be the cause of jealousy and disagreement. All this applies not only to food, clothing, bedding, and so on, but also to methods of direction, teaching, preaching, exercising authority, and even spiritual practices. Only one thing is needed for this uniformity to be maintained constantly among us, namely, the most exact observance of our Rules and Constitutions.

"You see, my dear confreres, that the gist of this article concerns uniformity; everything else is directed toward that. Now, since we have to speak of this virtue or state of uniformity, we'll restrict what the Rule states, more or less, to our little method, and we can say first of all what it is (that's where I think we should begin), then the reasons we have for giving ourselves to God to be of one mind and to have only one heart and soul, and we'll give a means for this.

"I wondered whether I should explain the Rule word for word, or speak to you according to this division, and I felt that the material required being treated in the latter way.

"The meaning of the term uniformity speaks for itself; it's so clear and obvious that no one can have any doubt about it, particularly those who have done their studies.

"Uniformity is a state or a virtue, or both together. Considered in an individual, uniformity is a virtue that causes the person to act in conformity with his state in life; considered in a Company, it's a state which, uniting all the individuals, forms of several members one living body with its own functions.
“So then, Missioners are of one mind if they all have only one same spirit that animates them; and they’re uniform if they have only one soul that has the same faculties in each of them.

“What do you understand by faculties?” I mean understanding, will, and memory, which are the faculties or powers of the soul, and should be similar in each one of us; so, strictly speaking, uniformity means having the same judgment and will regarding the things that concern our vocation.

“Now, in this relationship or similarity that is ours because of this union, natural characteristics should be distinguished from moral actions; for it’s difficult for physical characteristics to be alike: no two faces are ever the same, no more than the way two people walk, talk, and gesture is the same; they’re always a little different. Nature creates these differences, and God’s power is admirable in these variations distinguishing one person from another.

“As for moral actions, however, unanimity must be found in them because the virtues that produce them reside in the soul; all of us must have one and the same soul and, consequently, one and the same judgment, will, and ways of acting.

“But how can this be, Monsieur? We differ in our opinions and in the way we judge; one man sees things differently from the other; one has learning and the other does not; one has a keen mind, and someone like me is obtuse. Given our differences in intelligence, how can we not have different opinions?” It’s true that it’s almost impossible to be all alike with regard to knowledge; but with regard to the purpose of our vocation, which is to tend toward our own holiness and to work for the instruction of the people and the promotion of the clergy, we have to agree in judgment, judge in the same manner, and make ourselves similar in practice; also, as the Rule states, we must all be of one mind in placing a high value on our exercises, and one same heart, as far as possible, in loving them, conforming our judgment and will, then, to the Rules, and using the means that lead to this.

“Perhaps the extremes can help us to understand better this state of which we’re speaking. One extreme of unanimity is to divide and separate: one person pulls to one side, another pulls to the other;
each one acts according to the way he understands the matter. The other extreme is to yield to negligence, caprice, and the disorderly actions of the neighbor.

“Our virtue lies in the middle; it consists in the union of our judgment and conformity of our will to attain holiness and to serve persons who are poor; and this is achieved by the common means the Rules point out to us. So, it helps us to avoid equally separating ourselves from this unity and aligning ourselves with those who separate or distance themselves from it. It causes us to be of one mind in all the Community practices. God knows the benefits that will come to us from this, if we make good use of it. It causes us to have the same will and non-will among us, along with a holy condescension for each other’s opinions, provided they’re not contrary to virtue. Lastly, it can’t tolerate arguments or quarreling, but attaches us to the spirit of the Rules, which proposes to unite us with God and among ourselves and to be united with the people as well, in order to win them over to God.

“What motives do we have to preserve and increase this uniformity?

“We find many of them in Holy Scripture. The first is in Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, chapter 15, where he recommends ut unanimes uno ore honorificetis Deum et Patrem Domini Nostri Jesu Christi,¹ so that you may honor God the Father with one same heart and voice. In line with that, we must always be uniform and of one mind in order to praise and serve God, and be only one in heart, in harmony with everyone, agreeing to the same manner of honoring and pleasing Him. It’s a question here of the service of God, and each individual must adapt to it.

“Saint Paul also states in Philippians, chapter 2, Implete gaudium meum ut idem sapiatis, eadem caritatem habentes, unanimes id ipsum sentientes; ² ‘Complete my joy,’ that Apostle said, ‘have but one and the same heart in order to preserve charity.’ And, recommending to the faithful that they have only one heart

¹Rom 15:6. (NAB)
²Phil 2:2. (NAB)
and one soul in the practice of religion, he says, *Credentium erat cor unum et anima una:* ³ have the same faith and the same practices. *Idem sentientes,* ⁴ he tells us; do whatever you can to have the same affections, to judge things in the same way, to be in agreement and never to argue. If one man gives his opinion, let the others go along with it and approve it, considering it better than their own. Virtue requires this and, if you act like that, my dear confreres, people will see that you’re virtuous.

“Another passage states, *Unanimes collaborantes:* all working with one mind.⁵ We mustn’t only be united in our interior sentiments, but also in exterior ministries, all of us engaged according to our obligations; and since all Christians must concur in everything regarding Christianity, we, too, must cooperate in all the works of the Mission and conform ourselves to the order and manner of doing them.

“One of nature’s wonders is that each species of created things resembles the other in itself and in what it produces; for example, all the stocks of a vine show in general that it’s a vine; even each individual stock gives evidence of this, being the same as the others in form, bark, branches, and leaves; they all blossom at the same time; not only that, they all bear the same fruit and contribute all together to the production of the wine the master expects from them; they’re all of one accord. That’s how our Company should be with regard to God’s plans.

“Look at the different kinds of birds there are, and think about the individuals of each species; you’ll find that what one does, the other does. Take, for example, the pigeons of a dove cote: they look alike, they all have the same little ways of acting, they do the same things, and what one does, the other does; they all have the same characteristics. And look at the bees in a hive; they’re like a little community; they have the same form, the same activity, the same purpose.

³ *The community of believers was of one heart and mind.* Cf. Acts 4:32. (NAB)
⁴ *Thinking the same thing.* Cf. Phil 2:2. (NAB)
⁵ Cf. Phil 1:27. (D-RB)
“Now, all these animal species are uniform by instinct and, be­
cause moral actions go beyond instinct and are formed by reason, 
they must likewise aim more perfectly for uniformity, which, 
willed and ordained by God, should cause us to do through reason 
what animals do through instinct. What nature gives to animals, 
grace has to work in us. Yes, my dear confreres, we must give our­selves to God to have a holy union among ourselves that gives us 
the same spirit, will and non-will, and manner of acting. We have to 
ask God to give us one heart and one soul like the first Christians.
Grant us, Lord, the grace of not having two hearts and two souls but 
only one heart and soul, giving form and uniformity to the entire 
Company. Take from us our individualistic hearts and souls, which 
distance us from unity; take from us any individualistic way of 
acting, which isn’t in harmony with what’s done in common; may 
all of us have only one same heart, the principle of our life, and one 
same soul, which animates us to charity in virtue of that unitive, di­
vine strength that brings about the communion of saints.

“Another reason we have for practicing uniformity is that, by be­
coming man, the Son of God willed to take on an ordinary life in or­
der to conform himself to human beings and, in this way, to draw 
them closer to His Father; and He became, even more than Saint 
Paul, all to all, in order to win over everyone. He not only adopted 
our natural human ways, but, in a certain sense, our moral ones as 
well: an understanding like ours, a way of comprehending physical 
things the way we do, a will that led Him, as ours does, to what this 
understanding was showing Him as beautiful and good. He like­
wise judged natural things as we do; and that was apparent in the 
comparisons he used: the grain of wheat, which can’t germinate if it 
doesn’t rot; the seed cast on good ground, that bears a hundredfold; 
the merchant, who leaves his home and goes away; the green wood 
and the dry; and similar familiar things He said, which show that He 
had the same thoughts on them as we do. He also had the same man­
ner of acting; He walked like us and worked like us. In a word, in or­
der to insert himself better among us, He became like us; and, since 
resemblance develops love, He willed to appear and act like us in 
order to be loved. He willed to take on our nature in order that we
might be united to Him. He became man to show by His way of life how we should live. He was the image of His Father; and, as if that wasn’t enough for Him, He willed to join to this adorable image conformity with human beings, in order to win over all of them, as the Rule states.

“That reason alone should convince us, but there are so many others that treat of this that I’ll just recall one more that touches us closely: uniformity creates union in the Company, it’s the cement that binds us together, the beauty that makes us amiable and causes us, in fact, to be drawn to it; and this reciprocal love makes us strive to have the same ways of understanding, to want the same things, and to pursue the same plans.

“If, on the contrary, you take from among us this uniformity that creates a resemblance, you take away love; all that’s left is a disfigured body and complete desolation; where there are individualistic men, there’s division. What do those men do, who try to preach caeli caelorut, or to excel, or overestimate their own importance? They breed envy in others who see this individualism, which is not only a lack of uniformity, but creates disunion.

“Those who try to be different in the way they dress, in what they eat, or in other common needs upset those who follow the common way. O wretch that I am, I must be a burden to the whole house because I don’t do what others do. I have a private room and a special bed; when I was no longer able to come and go, I made use of the infamy (that’s what he called the little carriage he used, meaning that it was a disgrace for him and for the whole Company that a man of his class should ride in a carriage), and I’ve done other wretched things; I preach uniformity and I myself am anything but uniform. O Savior of my soul, please compensate for these failings by a powerful grace that will help me to serve the Company by some practices of virtue, above all, that of humility.

“So then, we should all be the same with regard to food, clothing, and lodging; and, in addition, uniform in our method of directing, teaching, preaching, and exercising authority, as also in our spiritual practices; these are the very words of the Rule.

6In a pompous style.
"Nevertheless, there’s a certain distinction to be made and some exception to this general uniformity, for everyone can’t follow the common way; for example, the sick and infirm can’t do what everyone else does; they need a room with a fire, people to serve them, and a special diet that’s appropriate for their condition. Is that being individualistic? No, because each man in turn is treated the same way when he’s sick, and uniformity is better observed by relieving patients in whatever way we can than in doing otherwise, since the condition they’re in demands it. By taking what’s given them and letting someone else tell them what to do, they don’t fail in uniformity in this, but are in conformity with the intention of the Rule and of the Community.

“There are other things that seem to be contrary to uniformity and yet are not, like differences in habits: the priests have long ones; the Brothers wear short ones. That’s because this is suited to their respective situations. Among the Brothers themselves there are variations: some wear black; others wear grey, and they do so by order of the Company, with which God has inspired this diversity. Why? Because, for the men who live in the house and are engaged in ordinary work, it’s correct to wear black, but for those who minister outside it’s advisable to be dressed in grey. From the beginning, we felt this was appropriate and have continued ever since; consequently, we don’t think there’s any lack of uniformity among our Brothers because of this difference in color, but, on the contrary, there’s uniformity because it’s by order of the Company.

“And not only should the Brothers act that way, but even the priests on certain occasions that have to do with the glory of God, obliging them to change their way of dressing and to be clothed like laymen. Haven’t we seen one of our men dressed in colored clothing, with a sword at his side, in order to go into England? If he had been recognized as a priest there, he would have been arrested, as has happened to others. So then, there are times when priests, religious, and even the Capuchins, dress like merchants or gentlemen, carrying a sword and wearing their hair long. Is that failing in the uniformity of their state or Order? Not at all, because it’s done through obedience and for a good reason, and is even part of uniformity."
“In line with that, Brothers, all of you should be ready to change your habit whenever it’s advisable; and those who have found it difficult to wear the grey habit should regret having insisted that the Brother who does the sewing clothe them otherwise. That happened a while ago to someone who asked him for a black habit, put pressure on him, and got one without the order of the Superior. I have to say that, when he was admonished of his fault, he showed remorse. I exhort you, as strongly as I can, Brothers, to wear black when the Superior permits, and grey, every time he orders you to do so; and those of you who are wearing the grey habit should realize the fault they’d commit by changing it without an order. No one should ever get impatient at being dressed that way and must not ask to change his clothing because of its color. I forbid the tailor ever to give the black habit to those who don’t have one, unless those in charge in the house tell him to do so. Eh quoi, Brothers! Does wearing grey make you any less Brothers? Does the habit make the monk, or do colors make the qualifications of persons? What makes you Coadjutors of the Mission? It’s the grace God gave you of calling you to it; it’s the happiness you have of serving God in it by the observance of Christian virtue; it’s the charity you show your neighbor. That’s the habit of a Missioner. We live together in order to fulfill the Law of God and not to wear this or that color. So then, live content in the state and in the habit in which you are.

“Surely, my dear confreres, we should believe that our peace and glory lie in virtue, and our virtue in a resemblance to Jesus Christ and uniformity among ourselves; that’s what banishes envy and discord and everything that divides hearts; that’s what makes us uniform in preaching, catechizing, hearing confessions, teaching, in leadership, and in our dealings with God and with our neighbor.

“Let’s make ourselves one in spirit; we’ll be in a paradise; I know of none on this earth except among those who adapt to one another so that everyone will be similar; I know of nothing in this world that can complete our happiness except uniformity among ourselves, which makes us like Our Lord and unites us to God. Oh, what a consolation if we have this grace! It’s a foretaste of blessedness. If we have the contrary, it’s a preview of hell, where there’s only hatred and division.
“If God in His goodness is pleased to grant us the mercy of loving one another, we’ll take care not to raise ourselves up or strive to surpass others, for that destroys friendship, stirs up envy, and generates aversions. If, until now, we’ve tried to excel, in the name of God, brothers, don’t allow this to happen any longer among us! If I’m capable of being high-minded in my reflections and speech, I’ll only go half as high; if I can do something extraordinarily well, or show off my knowledge or that I work harder than most people, away with all that! That’s not how Our Lord acted; as mighty as He was, He adjusted himself to the level of the weak. If I have two ideas, one beautiful and clever, and the other more common and less showy, I’ll take the latter and give up the former. Let’s settle for the average; let the scholar appear to have ordinary knowledge and let the strong man who works, labor humbly; for whatever is said or done for the poor people in a patronizing spirit is vain and useless; it goes over their head; the wind carries it away over the housetops, and what Caesar’s blood stained garment did, amid the loud cries of those who carried it, is like what those preachers do who make a display of novelties, curiosities, and strange things, in a grave or mournful tone of voice. And what do they do? They move natural sentiments a little but don’t give life to the dead or the lights of the Gospel to ignorant people. I have to say that there’s someone among us who shouts and carries on and, using puffed up language, seems to be trying to dazzle his hearers, instead of bringing them in a loving way to knowledge of God and of their duty. I hear that he’s doing his best to correct himself; if he does, he’ll have good reason to hope that God will bless him.

“Let’s endeavor, Messieurs, to preach with as little lofty language as possible and less eloquently, in order to adapt ourselves to others who preach, but are less learned and talented. I met a good Pastor near La Rochelle, who, hearing that the Fathers of Christian Doctrine in Toulouse preached simply so as to be clearly understood, had a great desire to hear them, especially since, until then,

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7This is a reference to Caesar’s funeral, at which Antony gave his eulogy of Caesar while holding up his bloodstained garment. When the crowd saw this, they went into a state of wild excitement.
he had seen preaching done only in a pompous way. That disturbed him because he saw that it was doing the people no good. He asked his Bishop's permission to go to see this holy novelty, which seemed in conformity with the custom of the early workers of the Church. 'The people,' he said, 'don't understand what's being preached to them; they're not able to grasp fine points of doctrine, subtle ideas, and the flowery rhetoric with which sermons are sprinkled, but they do understand a good story and some teaching of morality that's clear and well explained, on the level, and according to the needs, of the people.' That good man recognized the abuse and wanted to find the remedy for it. I knew him and so did M. Portail, who may recall what I'm saying to you. He died a saint. With the Bishop's permission, he left his parish and went to see those men of the Gospel, who preached so familiarly that even the most uncouth persons could understand and remember their instructions. That's how the Congregation of the Mission should act.

"Let me add this: not only should we preach in a familiar way, but we should be average preachers in order for all of us to be uniform; for each man can become average, but few can attain loftiness. The lofty mind can lower itself to an average level, and the lowly mind can raise itself to the same degree; this will banish far from us envy, rivalry, and gossip, and will build union and uniformity among us and in our exercises.

"If we want to have within us the image of the adorable Trinity and a holy relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let's establish ourselves in this spirit. What creates unity and single-mindedness in God, if not equality and the distinction of the Three Persons? And what creates Their love if not Their resemblance? And if there were no love among Them, what would be loveable in Them, said the Blessed Bishop of Geneva? So then, there's uniformity in the Blessed Trinity: what the Father wants, the Son wants; what the Holy Spirit does, the Father and the Son do and act the same way; They have only one power and one way of acting. That's the source of holiness and our model. Let's make ourselves uniform; we'll be many as if we were only one, and we'll have holy
union in plurality. If we already have a little, but not enough, let's ask God for what we lack, and see in what we differ from one another in order to try to resemble one another and be equal; for resemblance and equality engender love, and love tends toward unity. So then, let's all strive to have the same likings and to be in agreement regarding the things that are done or are allowed to be done among us.

"The means of having this union of hearts and uniformity of action is to keep the Rules. That says it all, my dear confreres. Everything in this observance aims at making us uniform, and if it's well observed, it will help all of us to do the same thing in the same ways and for the same purposes. Everything is marked out for us; and to see how each individual should be and should act, we have only to look into that mirror. One day, someone said to me, 'Look at the Carthusians, they're like cattle; they walk the same way; and if you see one, you see them all.' It's true, Messieurs, they're all men of prayer, people of consequence, all men of solid virtue, faithful to their Constitutions. Let's be similar, my dear confreres, in our meditations and spiritual practices, in the way we celebrate and serve Holy Mass, in observing recollection, in conversation, in the manner of giving missions, in teaching knowledge of salvation, and in directing retreatants and ordination retreats; in a word, let's make ourselves uniform in all our general and personal obligations, according to our Regulations.

"What can I say of the Church's thinking on this topic? Isn't the Church uniform in its practices? Isn't what's done in Rome done in France, Germany, Poland, the Indies, and elsewhere? Doesn't it have the same Sacrifice, the same Sacraments, the same ceremonies, and the same language everywhere? And, even though people complained in the beginning that Mass was being celebrated in a language they didn't understand, nevertheless, in order to be preserved in one and the same spirit, after having weighed everything and compared this difficulty with the inconveniences that might result if each country had Holy Mass in its own language, the Church wanted everyone to be unanimous and uniform in all these things. It willed that all nations be conformed to the usage it
established, despite the complaints made about this. And why? Because, in addition to the fact that God is honored by this universal practice, great abuses are avoided by this conformity. Oh, if you had only seen, I don’t want to say the ugliness, but the diversity, of the ceremonies of the Mass forty years ago, it would have made you ashamed! I don’t think there was anything uglier in the world than the different ways people were celebrating it: some began the Mass with the *Pater noster*; others would take the chasuble in their hands and say the *Introibo*, and then they’d put on that chasuble. Once I was at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where I noticed seven or eight priests who all said Mass differently; one did it one way, the other another way; the diversity was worthy of tears. *Or sus,* God be blessed that His Divine Goodness has been pleased to gradually remedy this great disorder! All of it hasn’t been set right, for, alas, how much variation in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries is still apparent! How many poorly formed priests there still are who lack instruction or are unwilling to follow the correct way that should create the uniformity indicated by the rubrics!

“O Savior! You so loved uniformity that not only did You become man to have it along with other men, by conforming yourself to their way of acting, but You also recommended to all Christians, in speaking to Your disciples, to be only one among themselves, in the same way that You were only one with Your Father. In conformity with that recommendation, You were willing to adapt yourself to the will and inclinations of each individual and to all that good and bad people desired of You in Your life and in Your death. O good Jesus, please give all of us this virtue of being in agreement in understanding, will, and action, and being in conformity in teaching catechism, preaching, and in all the observances of the Company.

“Let’s hope, my dear confreres, that in so doing we’ll enjoy the immortal glory enjoyed by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because we’ll be united by the same bond of love that unites Them. So then, let there no longer be two wills in the Company, but one single will; not two hearts, but one single heart; not a difference of opinion, but uniformity in everything. What else will we then have but peace, union, and paradise!”
"My dear confreres, here's the twelfth article of the second chapter of the Gospel teachings contained in our Rules: Charitable behavior toward the neighbor should always be characteristic of us. We should try, then: (1) to behave toward others in the way we might reasonably expect to be treated by them; (2) to agree with others, and to accept everything in the Lord; (3) to put up with one another without grumbling; (4) to weep with those who weep; (5) to rejoice with those who rejoice; (6) to yield precedence to one another; (7) to be kind and helpful to one another in all sincerity; (8) finally, to be all things to all people so that we may win everyone for Christ. All of this is to be understood as in no way going against the commandments of God, or Church law, or the Rules or Constitutions of our Congregation.

"So then, my dear confreres, this evening's conference is about charity toward our neighbor or, to put it better, about the acts that proceed from this charity and the works it should produce.

"This charity is obligatory; it's a divine precept, which embraces several others. Each of us knows that the Law and the Prophets are included in the love of God and neighbor. Everything refers back to that; everything is directed to it; and this love has such strength and is so privileged that anyone who possesses it fulfills the laws of God because they all relate to this love, and this love helps us to do whatever God asks of us; qui enim diliget proximum legem implevit."

"Now, that concerns not only love of God but love of the neighbor for the love of God. Notice, 'for the love of God,' which is so great that human understanding can't grasp it; enlightenment from on high is needed to raise us up in order to show us the height and depth, the breadth and excellence of this love.

Conference 207. - Archives of the Mission, text of Brother Bertrand Ducournau. Part of this conference was published in Abelly (op. cit., bk. III, chap. XI, pp. 107ff.) with rather extensive modifications in format. The copy in the Manuscript of Conferences is closer to Brother Ducournau's text.

1 For one who loves another [the neighbor] has fulfilled the law. Cf. Rom 13:8. (NAB)
“Saint Thomas puts forward this question, namely, who has the greater merit, the one who loves God and neglects the neighbor, or the one who loves the neighbor for the love of God? He himself gives the solution to this dilemma, concluding that it’s more meritorious to love the neighbor for the love of God than to love God without reference to the neighbor. He proves it in the following way, which may seem paradoxical: ‘To go into the heart of God,’ he says, ‘to confine all one’s love to that place, is not the most perfect because the perfection of the Law consists in loving God and the neighbor.’ Give me a man who loves God alone, a soul elevated in contemplation, who never thinks about his brothers; that man, finding it very agreeable to love in this way a God who appears to him the only thing loveable, stops at savoring this infinite source of sweetness. And then you have another who loves the neighbor, no matter how rough and crude he may be, but loves him for the love of God. Which of these loves, I ask you, is the purest and least self-interested? Doubtless it’s the second, and in this way it fulfills the Law most perfectly. He loves God and the neighbor; what more can he do? The first loves only God, but the other loves both. We really must give ourselves to God to imprint these truths on our soul, to organize our life according to this spirit, and to do the works of this love. There are no people in the world more obliged to do this than we are, nor any Community that should apply itself more to the external practice of heartfelt charity.

“And why? Because God has raised up this Little Company, like all the others, for His love and good pleasure. They all aim to love Him, but they love Him in different ways: the Carthusians by solitude, the Capuchins by poverty, others by chanting His praises; and we, my dear confreres, if we have love, we should show it by bringing people to love God and the neighbor, to love the neighbor for God and God for the neighbor. We’ve been chosen by God as instruments of His immense, paternal charity, which is intended to be established and to expand in souls. Ah, if we only realized what this holy zeal is! We’ll never see it clearly in this life; for, if we did, how differently we’d act—at least a wretched man like me would.
"So, our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people’s hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love. What do we have to desire but that it may burn and consume everything. My dear confrères, let’s reflect on that, please. It’s true then, that I’m sent not only to love God but to make Him loved. It’s not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor doesn’t love Him. I have to love my neighbor as the image of God and the object of His love, and to act in such a way that people, in their turn, love their Creator, who knows them and acknowledges them as His brothers, whom He has saved, and that by mutual charity they love one another for love of God, who has loved them so much as to hand over His own Son to death for them. So then, that’s my obligation. O mon Dieu! How many faults I’ve committed against that! How little I’ve realized the importance of my Rule and have paid so little attention to the active and passive charity to which God calls me! Each of us must be convinced of that before God. Let’s all say to Him, ‘O my God, I’ve been remiss on that point; forgive my past failings and grant me the grace of having Your holy love imprinted very clearly on my heart, and that it may be the life of my life and the soul of my actions, so that, being apparent outside of me, it may also enter and work in the souls with whom I come in contact.’

‘Now, if we’re really called to take the love of God far and near, if we must set nations on fire with it, if our vocation is to go throughout the world to spread this divine fire, if that’s the case, I say, if that’s the case, brothers, how I myself must burn with this divine fire! How I must be afire with loving those with whom I live and with edifying my own confrères by the exercise of love, and inspiring my dear confrères to practice the acts that proceed from it! At the hour of death, we’ll see the irreparable loss we’ve suffered—if not all of us, at least those who don’t have this brotherly love and don’t live it as they should. How can we give it to others if we don’t have it among ourselves? Let’s take a good look to see if we do have it—not in a general way but each individually—and whether it’s present to the degree it should be; for, if it’s not burning, if we don’t
love one another as Jesus Christ has loved us, and produce acts like His, how can we hope to take this love all over the world? We can’t give what we don’t have. How can a Company inflame hearts with true charity, if the Company itself doesn’t have it?

“This would be the place to explain that virtue according to our ordinary method and to say what it is; but let’s put that aside; everyone knows that, so let’s look at it from its effects.

“What is its first one? What does a heart animated by it produce? What stands out with it, as opposed to a man who doesn’t have it and has only natural inclinations? To do to each individual the good we would reasonably want him to do to us summarizes charity. Is it true that I do to my neighbor what I’d like him to do to me? Ah, that’s the real test! But how many Missioners have at least this interior disposition? Not many! O mon Dieu! Where are they? There are many like me who pay no attention to doing for others what they’re quite pleased to accept for themselves; and not having this love, there’s no charity; for charity causes us to do for our neighbor the good that a person has the right to expect from a faithful friend.

“Let’s look at the Son of God; what a heart of charity He had; what a fire of love! Please tell us, Jesus, who pulled You away from heaven to come to endure the curse of earth and the many persecutions and torments You suffered? O Savior! Source of love humbled even to our level and to a vile agony, who showed, in that, greater love for the neighbor than You yourself did? You came to lay yourself open to all our misfortunes, to take the form of a sinner, to lead a life of suffering and to undergo a shameful death for us; is there any love like that? But who else could love in such an outstanding way? Only Our Lord, who was so enamored with the love of creatures as to leave the throne of His Father to come to take a body subject to weaknesses. And why? To establish among us, by His word and example, love of the neighbor. This is the love that crucified Him and brought about that admirable work of our redemption. O Messieurs, if we had only a little of that love, would we stand around with our arms folded? Would we let those we could assist perish? Oh, no! Charity can’t remain idle; it impels us to work for the salvation and consolation of others.
“This first effect enlightens our understanding; that enlighten-ment leads to esteem; and esteem moves the will to love, causing the person who loves to be convinced of the honor and affection he should have for his neighbor, to be filled with it, and to show it by word and works.

“Can someone who has this esteem and affection for the neigh-bor speak ill of him? Can he do anything that might displease him? Having these sentiments in his heart, can he see his brother and friend without showing his love for him? From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and, ordinarily, exterior actions give witness to what is within the person; those who have true charity interiorly will manifest it externally. It’s characteristic of fire to give light and heat, and it’s characteristic of love to show respect and kindness to the person who is loved. Have we felt less esteem and affection for certain persons? Do we not, from time to time, allow thoughts of this more or less? If that’s the case, we don’t have that charity which dismisses the first feelings of contempt and the seed of aversion; for, if we had that divine virtue, which is a participation of the Sun of Justice, it would dispel the mists of our corruption and make us see what’s good and beautiful in our neighbor in order to honor and cherish him for them. I admit that, if there has sometimes been a certain lessening among us in that area, God has now looked on us with the eyes of His mercy.”

Here M. Vincent, raising his eyes to heaven in a sentiment of gratitude, repeated, “God has looked on us with the eyes of His mercy; He has taken pity on us by removing from the Company a few troublesome men who were the cause of this lessening of love, with the result that someone said to me recently, ‘You know, Monsieur, I think we’re living in this house like children, in the freedom of innocence and the mutual practice of sincere friendship; we don’t hear any boasting or taunting; we respect one another; no one opposes the others.’

“O Savior, You who have banished from the Company acts con-trary to this first effect of charity, preserve it in that cordial union in which, by Your grace, it now lives. Please don’t allow it to be changed by any breath of pride or by the spirit of division, which is on the watch
to ruin us, or that it may never find itself in the wretched state in which it was in the past. I say in the past, for Your Goodness withdrew it from that state long ago, so that twenty, fifty years from now, and forever, this Company may live in that cordial, mutual esteem.

"Please ask God frequently for this, Messieurs, and pray in solidarity with one another so that all Missioners may always love one another. Let's console ourselves by the fact that this is being done at present, and ask God not to allow them ever to grow lax in the practice of this brotherly love. Or sus, let's move on to the other effects.

"The second effect of charity is never to contradict others. We're with other people and are talking about something good; someone says what he thinks and someone else tactlessly says, 'That's not right; you can't prove it to me.' To do that is to hurt the person who's contradicted; and if he isn't really humble, he'll try to maintain his opinion, and this leads to arguing, which kills charity. I don't win over my brother by contradicting him but by accepting simply in Our Lord what he's put forward. Maybe he's right and I'm not; he's trying to contribute something to a simple conversation, and I turn it into an argument; yet, if I knew what he meant in saying what he did, I might approve it. Shame on the contradiction that divides hearts! Let's avoid it like a fever that makes us thirsty, like a devastating plague, like a demon that ravages the holiest Companies; let's drive out this evil spirit by our prayers, lifting our thoughts often to God, especially when we have the opportunity to see other people's point of view, so that He may grant us the grace to act that way, far from contradicting and hurting them. They're simply saying what they think, so let's accept it just as simply. If some of them slander or ridicule others (O Savior, don't ever allow that!), but if that does happen, don't rebuke them in public; no, don't do it. I don't think that's effective or according to Rule, to theology, or to Gospel teaching, but should be done individually and in private.

"This afternoon I was wondering if Our Lord had ever contradicted any of His disciples in the presence of the others; no example came to mind except His contradiction of Peter, when He said to him, 'O Satan!'\(^2\) and that was spontaneous; and one other time

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\(^2\)Cf. Mt 16:23. (NAB)
when he [Peter] boasted that he’d follow his Master to death. ‘Ah,’ He said, ‘you’ll deny me three times tonight!’

“Be that as it may, we see that Our Lord was very reluctant to contradict anyone, so why shouldn’t we be the same? He had the right to reprove His men publicly because He was the way and the truth; but we who can lose our self-control really have to restrain ourselves so as never to contradict those who speak, for fear of embarrassing them, sparking an argument, or fighting against the truth. Let’s give ourselves to God, Messieurs, to keep ourselves from doing that. If we have the opposite opinion, either let’s say nothing or simply say things as we see them, without attacking either the interpretation given them by others or the way they relate them, believing that they’re right in acting as they do. That’s how charity is kind, as Saint Paul states. That’s the second effect.

“The third is seen in the way we bear one another’s weaknesses. Whom can we call perfect? No one on this earth. But whom can we not call imperfect? Since everyone has faults, then who doesn’t need forbearance? Anyone who strives to know himself well will see many weaknesses and failings in himself, and will even acknowledge that he can’t help having them, or, consequently, trying the patience of others; just let him examine himself in body and mind. Sometimes we’ll find ourselves—each and every one of us—strangely opposed to a person who isn’t bad, but everything about him displeases us. The way he looks at things, listens, speaks, or acts, everything about him will seem flawed to us because of our own evil natural inclinations. Someone else will speak clearly and be grammatically correct, and we’ll find his ideas vague and his words insipid because of our antipathy for him, which, however, is involuntary; and if he happens to notice this, we’re glad that he doesn’t resent it, but excuses us for it. Why, then, will we not also hold him excused when he looks at us the wrong way or disapproves of our words and actions, for this dislike we have of him may be mutual? Sometimes we’re cheerful and sometimes we’re sad; someone may have seen us overjoyed yesterday, and to-

3Cf. 1 Cor 13:4. (NAB)
day he thinks we’re too gloomy. Since we’d like the other to put up with us in these extremes of our changing moods, isn’t it only right that we should bear with him in similar circumstances?

"Let’s put ourselves on trial; let each of us carefully examine the evidence, our bodily weaknesses, our undisciplined passions, our inclination to evil, our wild imagination, our infidelity and ingratitude toward God, and our behavior toward others; we’ll discover in ourselves more malicious acts and reasons for humiliation than in anyone else in the world; then we can say courageously, 'I’m the greatest sinner and the most unbearable of men.' Yes, if we examine ourselves closely, we’ll find that we’re a real burden to those with whom we come in contact; and if anyone has reached that point of being well aware of all his weaknesses, which is the result of the grace of God, rest assured that he’s also at the point needed to see the obligation he has to bear with others; he won’t see any faults in them, or, if he does, they’ll seem very small in comparison with his own. Thus, in the midst of his own weakness, he’ll bear charitably with his neighbor. What wonderful forbearance Our Lord has! You see that beam that supports all the weight of the ceiling, without which it would fall; He has likewise supported us in our falls, blindness, and sluggishness. It’s as if all of us were weighed down with ills and miseries of body and soul, and this kind Savior took it upon himself to undergo the suffering and shame of them. If we reflected seriously on this, we who are guilty of them would see how much we deserve to be punished and despised for them, for piling up fault upon fault every day—especially me, a wretched keeper of pigs, who do that by my bad habits and by my ignorance, which is so great that I hardly know what I’m saying.

"I’ve just said that, when we’ve reached that point of knowing ourselves well, we easily bear with one another... and now I forget what I was going to say or where I was... please bear with me. What are we doing by bearing with one another? We’re practicing alter alterius onera portate. What will you be doing when you bear with

4Bear one another’s burdens. Cf. Gal 6:2. (NAB)
your confreres? You’ll be fulfilling the Law of Jesus Christ. Let’s all say to Him, ‘My Lord, I no longer want to notice any faults but my own; grant that, from now on, enlightened by the splendor of Your example, I may carry everyone in my heart and bear with them with Your strength; grant me the grace to do this, inflame me with Your love.’

“I’m moving on quickly to the fourth effect of charity. By it, we can’t see someone suffering without suffering along with him, or see someone cry without crying as well. This is an act of love, causing people to enter one another’s hearts and to feel what they feel, far from those persons who have no feeling for the anguish of the afflicted, or the suffering of poor persons. Ah, how tenderhearted the Son of God was! They call Him to go see Lazarus; He goes; Magdalen gets up and goes to meet Him in tears; the Jews follow her, and they’re also crying; everyone begins to weep. What does Our Lord do? He’s so tenderhearted and compassionate that He weeps along with them. It’s this sensitivity that caused Him to come down from heaven; He saw that people were deprived of His glory, and He was moved by their misfortune. We must likewise be moved by our neighbor’s suffering and share his sorrow. O Saint Paul, how sensitive you were on this point! O Savior, You who filled that Apostle with Your Spirit and compassion, help us to say with him, Quis infirmatur, et ego non infirmor? Is anyone sick and I am not sick along with him?\(^5\)

“And how can I commiserate with his illness, if not by participating in it together in Our Lord, who is our head? All of us make up a mystical body, but we’re all members of one another. It has never been heard that a member, not even among animals, was insensitive to the suffering of another member, or that one part of a person’s body may be bruised, wounded, or injured and the other parts don’t feel it. That’s impossible. Every part of us is in such sympathy with one another and so interconnected that the pain of one is the pain of the other. Since Christians are members of the same body and members of one another, with even greater reason should they sympa-

\(^5\)Cf. 2 Cor 11:29. (NAB)
thize with one another. Quoi! To be a Christian and to see our brother suffering without weeping with him, without being sick with him! That's to be lacking in charity; it's being a caricature of a Christian; it's inhuman; it's to be worse than animals.

"Another effect of charity is to rejoice with those who rejoice. It causes us to enter into their joy. Our Lord intended by His teachings to unite us in one mind and in joy as well as in sorrow; it's His desire that we share one another's feelings. Saint John's Gospel relates that the blessed Precursor said, speaking of himself and of Jesus Christ, that the Bridegroom's friend is very happy to hear his voice. 'My joy,' he said, 'is complete; he must increase and I must decrease.' In the same way, let's rejoice when we hear the voice of our neighbor who rejoices, for he represents Our Lord to us; let's rejoice at his successes, happy that he surpasses us in the honor and esteem of the world, in talent, grace, and virtue. That's how we should share his feelings of joy.

"Let's likewise share in the things that sadden him; let's do through virtue what worldly people often do through human respect. When they're going to see someone who's sad because he has lost his father, his wife, or a relative, what do they do? They usually wear black; if they have feathers, flowers, or others signs of cheerfulness on them, they remove them and go dressed in mourning; when they get there, they have a sad expression and, going up to the bereaved person, they say to him, 'Alas! I can't tell you how sorry I am for your loss; I share it with you; I'm really devastated by it; I'm here to mingle my tears with yours,' and other similar words that show how they share this sorrow.

"Where did this custom originate? You know better than I that good Christian ceremonies are ancient, beginning with the Gospel and the Epistles of Saint Paul. The first Christians had the custom of visiting one another, sympathizing with and consoling one another. Those duties of friendship have come down to us and have a Christian foundation; that's what they did, and we still do it. Nothing similar is done among the Turks or the Indians, or even among the

*Cf. Jn 3:29-30. (NAB)*
Jews; they uncover their heads only to greet one another. Originally, then, these things were gestures of charity; unfortunately, they’ve been cut off from their source. The way they’re practiced now is usually an abuse of them because they’re done to impress others, to put on airs through self-interest or from natural affection, and not because of unity of spirit and the feeling the Son of God came to establish in His Church, by which the faithful, as the members of Jesus Christ and having the same spirit He did, are joyful or sad with the joy or the sadness of their brothers and sisters. In line with that, we should consider the misfortunes of others as our own.

“Those are five or six effects of charity, and here’s another: to be the first to show respect to the other. Why? Because otherwise it seems that we’re avoiding one another, acting the gentleman or the nobleman, or being aloof. This closes a person’s heart, whereas the contrary opens and expands it. Humility is a genuine effect of charity; when we meet someone, it causes us to be the first to show the person honor and respect and, by this means, wins his affection. Who doesn’t like a humble person? When a ferocious lion, ready to devour another animal that might try to resist him, sees it subdued, and, so to speak, humbled at his feet, he immediately calms down. What can we do but love a person who humbles himself? A Missioner who gets down on his knees before Bishops or Pastors, like a valley that draws moisture from the mountains, receives their blessing and benevolence. And if we practice respect among ourselves, we also practice humiliation because, since humility is the daughter of love, it promotes union and charity.

“The last effect of charity is the expression of our affection. We have to let one another see that we love each another sincerely. Being the first to show respect accomplishes this by offering cordially to be of service or by doing something pleasing for one another. ‘I’d really like to show you how much I appreciate you!’ And, after saying it with our lips, we should confirm it by deeds: to be of service to each and every one and actually make ourselves all to all. Having charity in our heart and words isn’t everything; it has to be put into action; then it’s perfect and becomes productive because it generates love in the hearts of those who practice it; it wins over everyone.
"When we practice all these acts, namely, (1) doing to others the good we’d reasonably want them to do to us; (2) never contradicting anyone and finding everything good in Our Lord; (3) bearing with one another without grumbling; (4) weeping with those who weep; (5) rejoicing with those who rejoice; (6) being the first to show respect to the other; (7) showing affection for them and cheerfully helping them; in a word, becoming all to all in order to win over everyone to Jesus Christ, what are we doing when we practice these things? We’re taking the place of Our Lord, who practiced them first. He took the last place; let’s do the same; he came to show His love for us and provided us ahead of time with His blessings. In the same way, let’s be the first to show our affection for our neighbor, not at the wrong time or indiscreetly, but appropriately, with moderation and in the proper way. In like manner, do all the other acts in their time and place, provided that, as the Rule states, they’re never contrary to the Law of God or to our Rules and Constitutions, for charity can’t allow that. Besides all that, let’s do good always and everywhere, as the occasions arise—which will be quite often; and the more we do this in the Spirit of Our Lord, the more pleasing we’ll be in His eyes. Lastly, Messieurs, if God is granting Missioners this grace, what do you think of such a Company? Their life is a life of love; it’s the life of angels, the life of the blessed. If God grants us this grace of loving one another, it’s a heavenly and earthly paradise. It’s been said that we live like children, but people will say, ‘Like the blessed and the angels live together.’

"O Savior, You who came to carry out this law of loving our neighbor as ourselves, You who practiced it so perfectly toward us, not only in our human way but in an incomparable manner, be, Lord, Your own thanks for calling us to this state of life and of continually loving our neighbor, yes, called to this love by state of life and by profession, actually practicing it or disposed to do so, even to the point of leaving every other occupation in order to be engaged in works of charity. Religious are said to be in a state of perfection; we’re not religious, but we can say that we’re in a state of charity because we’re constantly engaged in the actual practice of love or are disposed to be so."
“O Savior, how happy I am to be in a state of love for the neighbor, a state that, of itself, calls out to You, entreats You and offers You unceasingly what I am doing on behalf of others! Grant me the grace of being aware of my happiness and of truly loving this blessed state so that I may do my part to see that this virtue may become evident in the Company now, tomorrow, and always. Amen.”

208. - HOW TO BENEFIT FROM CALUMNIES
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 13)

June 6, 1659

If Divine Providence ever allows a house or member of the Congregation, or the Congregation itself, to be subjected to, and tested by, slander or persecution, we are to be extra careful to avoid any retaliation, verbal abuse, or complaint against the persecutors or slanderers. We should even praise and bless God, and joyfully thank Him for it as an opportunity for great good, coming down from the Father of Lights. We should even pray sincerely to Him for those who harm us and, if the opportunity and possibility present themselves, should willingly help them, remembering that Christ commanded us, and all the faithful, to do this: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for persecutors and slanderers.¹ And to get us to do this more willingly and more easily He said that we would be blessed in doing so and that we should be joyful and glad about it since our reward is great in heaven. And, more importantly, He was gracious enough to be the first to act in this way toward others so as to be a model for us. Afterward the Apostles, disciples, and numberless Christians followed His example.

“This article, Messieurs, the thirteenth regarding Gospel teachings, helps us to understand what God is asking of us when any per-

¹Cf. Mt 5:44. (NAB)
secution arises against us, and calumny attacks this Little Company in general, its houses, or the individuals that compose it.

"We'll divide this talk into two points: the first will cover the reasons obliging us to give ourselves to Our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may be pleased to grant us the grace to benefit from calumnies and persecutions; in the second point we'll give the means to achieve this goal.

"In order to establish firmly what I have to say to you in this little talk, we have to lay down as a foundation the fact that, if we're faithful to God, the Company in general will never lack calumnies and persecutions, nor will the houses, nor individuals. Omnes qui pie volunt vivere in Christo Jesu persecutionem patientur.\(^2\) Omnes—all, without exception. From this I give as the first reason that one of the greatest misfortunes that could happen to this Little Company would be if Divine Providence acted differently toward it and if Our Lord didn't purge it by suffering and bombard it with vexations. O Messieurs, what a great misfortune if it has no punishments, if God doesn't put it to the test! On the contrary, what a consolation if God judges us worthy of suffering and gives us the grace to suffer properly, since we have good reason to believe that suffering is an effect of the Divine Goodness in our regard, a consequence of the willingness He's had from all eternity to save us and a sign that God is with the Company, that He's pleased with it, and that He's served faithfully in it. Yes, Messieurs, when a Company is persecuted and calumniated it's a sign of its fidelity; and if we don't have this sign, if everything smiles on us, if the world applauds us, let's be afraid, Messieurs, let's be afraid.

"Oh, if God were pleased that we should be firmly established in the observance of our Rules, thoroughly convinced of the teachings of Jesus Christ, really disabused and disillusioned by those of the world, if we were totally faithful to carrying out the functions of our Institute, we wouldn't lack persecutions, and calumnies would come from everywhere to bombard us and help us to grow more and more in the holiness God asks of us. Eh! Isn't it a great misfortune

\(^2\)All who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Cf. 2 Tim 3:12. (NAB)
that this isn’t the case? Don’t we have good reason to think we’re doing nothing for His honor and are useless in His service? That’s what we should deplore, and fear that the Company may be in God’s bad graces, since He refuses it the grace He gives to those who serve Him faithfully.

“I said that calumnies and persecutions are graces with which God favors those who serve Him faithfully; and that’s my second reason. I’m well aware that God isn’t the author of calumnies or persecutions, but it’s certain that they never occur without His permission; non est malum in civitate quod non fecerit Dominus.3 There’s no evil in the cities, in the country, in the houses, or in individuals that God doesn’t cause— that is, that He doesn’t permit— for very valid reasons, even though we may not know what they are. Theologians explain in various ways this permission of God concerning sin. In our situation, calumnies and persecutions, in so far as they’re trials and exercises in patience and forbearance, are the very work of God, who wills, by these vexations, to detach His servants from anything that can hinder them from going to Him. That’s His plan; non est malum in civitate quod non fecerit Dominus. And when His Divine Goodness is pleased to test us, to send us occasions of suffering, we’ll have to lift our hearts to heaven to adore and praise the holy and ever adorable guidance of God over the Company, to receive calumnies and persecutions with joy as favors He grants us, and say with a full heart, ‘Come, dear calumny; come, lovable persecution; come, dear crosses sent from heaven; I intend to make good use of your visit to me on behalf of God.’ Poor human nature will suffer and grumble, but no matter; we have to suffer, and suffer joyously whatever God wills that we suffer.

“O Messieurs, if we had a lively faith, if we considered those connections with the eye of a Christian, not as vexations that come to us from others but as graces God is giving us, and if it should please His Goodness to clear our minds of the clouds of worldly maxims, which prevent faith from conveying its teachings to the depths of our souls, we’d have very different views and sentiments; and even if it were question of suffering insults and persecutions, we’d consider it a

3There is no evil in a city that the Lord has not caused. Cf. Am 3:6 (NAB)
great happiness and a blessed state to be calumniated and persecuted. And isn’t it, in fact, a happiness and a blessed state?

"‘Quoi,’ you’ll say to me, ‘being calumniated and persecuted is to be blessed! When people say that the Company does nothing worthwhile, is useless to God’s Church, is filled with ignorance and everything else, what more? If we go from insignificance to perversity, if we’re not content to say that we’re poor men without learning or talent, that we’re useless and lazy and if people go so far as to cast aspersions on our customs, if they say that Missioners are worthless people, and similar things, won’t it be a great misfortune for the Company to be disparaged in that way?’ No, Messieurs, no, that’s a happiness and a blessed state; it’s Jesus Christ who says it: Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam.4 Note those words: propter justitiam, that is, doing good and being faithful to God.

“When a Company, a house, or individuals give people reason to speak or act against it, we have to yield beneath the avenging hand of God, who leaves nothing unpunished and sooner or later chastises those who transgress His holy Law. In that case, Messieurs, the vexations suffered on the part of the world come from an irritated God; they’re the effects of His justice, and those to whom these things happen have good reason to weep rather than to rejoice, since they gave rise to those misfortunes they suffer on the part of others, who are only the agents of God’s justice. But, when calumny attacks those who serve God faithfully, and He gives the devil free rein to assail them, as He allowed him to afflict His servant Job, that’s a great happiness and a blessed state, since it’s a means God uses to sanctify them more and more.

“When the doctor orders a remedy to get rid of unhealthy body fluids, that’s called purging, and when a gardener lops off the live branches of a fruit-bearing tree, that’s also a purging called pruning, with the difference that the doctor purges to remove what’s bad, and the gardener prunes and cuts back the live branches of the tree so it will produce more fruit and fewer branches. In the same way, when God sends a Company persecutions, and it’s held in contempt and shame because its conduct isn’t what it should be,

4Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Cf. Mt 5:10. (NAB)
that's a purge; there may be excess and bad will in this on the part of others, but God, like a good doctor, intents by it to flush the unhealthy fluids from this body and reestablish this Company and that house in good order. That's a grace God gives them, even though they may not be in the blessed state about which we're speaking.

"If, however, another Company suffers on the part of others, without having given them any reason to persecute and calumniate it, the vexation it suffers isn't an effect or consequence of its disorders; it's like the gardener who cuts deeply so that the tree may have more fruit than leaves. This Company has two degrees of virtue, God wants to raise it to four; it has four, He wants to raise it to six; and to do so, He uses the knife of calumny and persecution. That's a blessed state, or the possession of one of the Beatitudes of the Gospel, for, by the expression 'Beatitude of the Gospel,' we mean the state or establishment of a soul in one of the principal teachings of Jesus Christ, in line with which it performs heroic acts of virtue, despite all the difficulties and vexations it experiences; it joyfully praises God instead of giving in to aversion and hatred of those who persecute it; and instead of becoming discouraged, it remains loyal and constant in fidelity to His service. This state is called Christian or Evangelical Beatitude, that is, the establishment of a Christian's happiness and a beatitude already begun that will be complete in heaven because the possession of that state in this life is followed by eternal happiness. Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.5

"If, from opposites, contrary consequences may be drawn, won't it be permissible to say, 'How unfortunate the Companies and houses that live tranquilly and have all that can be hoped for!' Yes, Messieurs, hold as a maxim that a Company that suffers nothing and is not tried by persecution is close to its ruin, and that, when everything goes right for it and it has whatever it can hope for, that's when all is not well in it.

"In view of these truths, let's be ready and waiting for the opportunities God will present to us to practice patience, and consider it a

5Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mt 5:10. (NAB)
great favor if it pleases His Goodness that we be calumniated and persecuted. But suffering for the sake of justice isn’t everything, we also have to suffer in the spirit with which Our Lord suffered. So, let’s see how we’ll have to act when we’re calumniated and persecuted—even when a stranglehold is used against us—and that’s my second point.

“First and foremost, we have to be prepared early on to accept this grace of meeting with the disfavor of the world by a faithful use of the little opportunities God provides us every day—confrontations, harsh words, contradictions, grumbling—we have to serve our apprenticeship in these less painful things in order to steel ourselves against bigger and rougher attacks; for, what likelihood is there that someone who becomes worried, is discouraged, or loses his temper for such trifling matters will remain steadfast and determined to put up with more severe attacks?

“Let’s examine ourselves, Messieurs, and see what use we make of the daily opportunities His Divine Providence allows to come to us. If we behave in a cowardly manner in this, how could we have the patience to put up with great sufferings? If we can’t tolerate a harsh word and someone looking askance at us now, how will we accept with a serene countenance—or even with joy—calumnies, shame, and persecutions? So then, Messieurs, let’s discipline ourselves in this matter and be cured of our sensitivity in minor encounters, so that God may grant us the grace of being steadfast and joyful in the greatest and most annoying ones.

“Second, when we experience calumnies and persecutions, we should practice carefully what our Rule lays down for us; it speaks clearly: Keep our mouths closed, it states, so as not to allow to escape any word of slander, impatience, and recrimination against those who calumniate and persecute us. *Obmutui et non aperui os meum, quoniam tu fecisti.* Is’t it only right to keep silent, since it’s God who’s sending us these visits? Is’t it reasonable to accept this cross with submission, since it’s His good pleasure? Shouldn’t we

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6*I was silent and did not open my mouth because you were the one who did this.* Ps 39:10. (NAB)
even praise and thank Him for the persecutions that attack us, since He permits them for our own sanctification?

"Third, it's also not enough to keep our mouths closed to words of impatience and complaint against those who persecute and calumniate us; we shouldn't even defend ourselves, either by word or in writing. 'Quoi,' someone will say to me, 'won't we be allowed to justify ourselves and disabuse those whom calumny might have prejudiced against us?' No, Messieurs, I can say nothing else to you except what's according to the spirit of the Gospel: patience and silence! These are elements of the Christian religion; we have to adhere to that. 'But some Companies in the Church act differently; they write, or have someone write, vindications and manifestos to justify their conduct and to preserve their reputation with the people; shall we blame them for that?' Not at all, we'll just hold fast to the Gospel and simply try to imitate Our Lord. 'Eh quoi! Don't others follow the Gospel and Our Lord?' Yes, they do, but they do it one way and we another; we all tend toward the same goal by different ways. There were various states in the brief mortal life of Our Lord; and this same life, in line with these diverse states, also has several attractions; all these states are holy and sanctifying; all are adorable and easy to imitate, each in its own way. The Companies in the Church of God consider Our Lord in different ways, according to the different attractions of grace and the lights and views He's pleased to give them—this one in one state, that one in another—and in this way they honor and imitate Him in various ways.

"Now, it pleased Him in His infinite goodness and mercy to give us no other views or attractions but His life of suffering, calumny, and contempt. We should go no further, and imitate Him in His lowliness and disgrace, in the outrages and persecutions He endured and in the way He endured them, that is, patiently and silently, and even joyfully and ardently.

"But that will be like passing sentence against us; our silence will be a tacit conviction, after which it won't be necessary to think about doing good for people.' We're mistaken, Messieurs, if we base the outcome of our little works on worldly esteem; that's attaching ourselves to the shadow and leaving the body behind. The
esteem and reputation we’re talking about is simply a radiance that’s the reflection of a life that’s good and holy; its foundation and support is virtue, which can’t be taken from us by calumnies or persecutions, if we remain faithful to God and benefit from them.

“Calumny can indeed eclipse the radiance of virtue for a time, but the virtue remains the same and will recover that luster when God is pleased to dispel the clouds preventing it from revealing itself to human eyes. So, let’s not worry about that. God wouldn’t allow His servants to be calumniated and persecuted if the persecutions and calumnies made them useless for His service. Like children, let’s follow our good Father, Jesus Christ, despised, ridiculed, and persecuted; let’s not dwell on the maxims of the world, which are always false; He’s waiting and listening to observe what we’ll say and what we’ll do in time of persecution. Until now, we’ve suffered very few things; God has spared us because He knows our weakness. Oh, if only He were pleased to make us worthy of suffering something for His service and to really put us to the test and sift us! For I think it’s necessary to draw some blood to diminish that heat I note in the Company; we have almost everything we desire; we need some vexation that will make us trust in God, be detached from ourselves, and filled with the joy that accompanies those who suffer. Omne gaudium existimate, fratres mei, cum in tentationes varias incideritis. Who will establish us in that perfect joy, omne gaudium, that is, in the source of true joy? That is, that every cause of joy is accumulated and enclosed in an afflicted and persecuted soul, and puts it in a blessed state.

“O Savior of our souls, You who have called us to practice Your teachings and to imitate Your wretched, despised life, put in us the dispositions needed to suffer, in the way You wish, the persecutions it pleases You to send us. Establish us in that blessed state You promised afflicted and persecuted persons. Grant that we may remain steadfast in persecution, without fleeing or trying to evade the attacks of the world. I ask this of You by the merit of Your own sufferings.”

7Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials. Jas 1:2. (NAB)
One day, as the late frosts had frozen the wheat and the vines, the
saint, speaking to his men, concluded his talk with the following
words:

"We should groan under the burden of the poor and suffer with
those who suffer, otherwise we're not disciples of Jesus Christ. But
what else shall we do? From time to time, the inhabitants of a be­
sieged town check the food supplies they have. 'How much wheat
do we have?' they say. 'We have this much. How many mouths to
feed? We have this many.' And, based on that, they ration the bread
each one should have, saying, 'On two livres a day we can go so
far.' And when they see that the siege is going on longer and the
food supply is dwindling, they reduce the bread to one livre, to ten
ounces, then to six, and to four in order to hold out longer and pre­
vent being overcome by famine. And what do they do at sea when a
ship happens to be storm-tossed and immobilized for a long time in
some corner of the world? They count the hardtack and check the
water supply, and, if there isn't enough to get to the place to which
they intend to go, they distribute less; and the more they delay, the
more they cut down the portions. Now, if town leaders and ships'
captains act like that, and if wisdom itself requires that they take
such precautions because otherwise they might die, why won't we
do something similar? Do you think the townspeople aren't cutting
back on their regular fare, and that the best houses, seeing that the
grape harvests are over for the year, aren't using their wine spar­
ingly for fear that none will be found easily next year? Yesterday,
some upper class people who live in the city and who came here to
this house, told me that most of the houses have stopped entirely
providing wine to the servants. 'Look after yourselves,' they tell
them, 'there's no more wine in this house except for the master.'

year, but states that "the frost had damaged the wheat and the vines." These words bring to mind
the year 1659.
"All that, my dear confreres, caused us to reflect on what we had to do, and yesterday I assembled the senior priests of the Company to ask their advice; in the end, we thought it appropriate to limit ourselves to a demi-setier a meal for this year. This will be hard for some, who think they need to drink a little more wine; but, since they’re used to submitting to the orders of Providence and to controlling their appetites, they’ll make good use of this difficulty, as they do for other mortifications, about which they don’t complain. There may be others who’ll complain about this because they’re attached to their own gratification—carnal, sensual men, inclined to their own pleasures, unwilling to be deprived of any of them and who grumble about everything that’s not to their liking. O Savior, preserve us from this spirit of sensuality."

210. - MORAL THEOLOGY, PREACHING, CATECHIZING, AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

August 5, 1659

"Today, Messieurs, we’re not going to have Repetition, but we’ll talk about something else that’s very useful for the Company and that we agreed upon among ourselves; so then, we’ll postpone to another time Repetition of Prayer, which, as you know, is one of the most necessary means we have for exciting one another to devotion. We have good reason to thank God for having given this grace to the Company, and we can say that no other Community has ever had this practice except our own.

"What I have to say to you, Messieurs, is that, as you see that there’s a seminary at Saint-Sulpice, at Saint-Nicolas, and at the Bons-Enfants, we should try to have one at Saint-Lazare—I mean to practice here the same things being done at those places, so that each individual may be taught what’s done in the seminaries and
that, when he’s assigned to it, he’ll know the proper way of proceeding in order to succeed in this area. I think most of the men here present have never had practice in all of those exercises; that’s why, since we have a little time remaining between now and the ordination retreat, we’ll make good use of it for this purpose.

“We usually practice here things we have in common with seminaries, such as Repetition of Prayer and the conferences on some topic of devotion, which we use for our discussion one day a week. With regard to chant and moral theology, which are also taught in seminaries, these, by the grace of God, are taught here, too, but maybe not in the same way. As for preaching and catechizing, you know we give very special attention to them; it has always been the custom of the Company, even from its origin, to take some time after the missions to work on preaching; and if we’ve failed in that, it’s been due to my wretchedness. I ask God to forgive me for it, wretched man that I am. Blessed be God!

“So then, we get practice in some of the things that are done in the seminaries, but there are others in which we don’t, like administration of the Sacraments, explanation of the method of preaching and catechizing, and moral theology, which is actually taught here, but lato modo—more spread out. Add to this the rubrics of the breviary and the missal. The late good M. Bourdoise was the first whom God inspired to open a seminary to have all the rubrics taught there. Before him that was unknown; there was no special place where they were taught. After a man did his theology, philosophy, some basic study, and a little Latin, he would go to a parish and administer the Sacraments in his own way; that’s what caused such great diversity. By the mercy of God, however, we see just the opposite today. And to tell the truth, Messieurs, if we found ourselves obliged to baptize someone, I don’t know whether many of us might not be very embarrassed. The other day I asked someone in the Company how he’d act in a certain circumstance. ‘Frankly, Monsieur,’ he said, ‘I don’t know how I’d proceed.’ As for me, even though I’ve been a Pastor, I must admit that I’d have a hard time with that right now. This is what has led us to determine to de-
vote the time remaining to us between now and the ordination re-
treat to do all the exercises done in a seminary.

“So, we’ll be working on moral theology, simple preaching, cat-
echizing, and the administration of the Sacraments; and since I’m
afraid we won’t have enough time for rubrics and chant, we can
leave them aside.

“For the moral theology matter, we’ll use the Entretiens des
Ordinands, especially since we’re close to the time of ordination.
It will be learned by heart and explained briefly, not disputativo
modo, but instructivo. I can tell you that, in the beginning of the
Company, only the Entretiens we have were used. The Bishops of
Boulogne and Alet, M. Olier, and a few other persons met for
several days to see what would be most necessary for the ordinands;
then, they wrote these Entretiens, which we have; they were found
adequate, and no other materials have ever been used. In the past, I
even asked some Doctors of the Sorbonne if a man who compre-
hended these Entretiens well could hear confessions in the villages
and elsewhere; I was told that the person would be competent to
hear confessions even in Paris, yes, in Paris. That’s why a copy of
the Entretiens is given to theology students and priests in the semi-
nary—I mean to those who have been there for at least two months,
for, as far as the others are concerned, they have to work at taking on
its spirit and detaching themselves from the world.

“I ask M. Cruoly, who’s teaching moral theology, but not in
the way we’re saying, although he does very well otherwise, to

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1The table of contents of MS. 85 in the library of Beaune and in the Bibliothèque Municipale of
Lyons, entitled Entretiens des Ordinands sur les matières de devotion, corresponds fairly
exactly with the outline for the Entretiens des Ordinands of Saint-Lazare found in Abelly (op.
cit., bk. II, chap. II, sect. III, pp. 219ff.). There is a strong probability that this is the version used
at Saint-Lazare by Saint Vincent. Another copy is found in the Sainte-Geneviève Library in Paris
(MS. 2946). At least one volume of Entretiens, entitled, Un portrait du prêtre: Les retraites de
dix jours pour les ordinands was published by Gérard Carroll and Irénée Noye (Paris, 2004).

2Not in an argumentative way, but an instructive one.

3François Perrochel. Bishop of Boulogne (cf. XI, 255, n. 13), and Nicolas Pavillon, Bishop of
Alet (cf. XI, 235-36, n. 5).

4Jean-Jacques Olier (cf. XI, 350, n. 1).

5Donat Crowley (Saint Vincent spells his name Cruoly), born in Cork (Ireland) on July 24,
1623, entered the Congregation of the Mission on May 9, 1643, took his vows in November 1645,
and was ordained a priest in 1650. He was among the group of Missioners sent to Picardy in 1651
give himself to God to drill the students and priests in the seminary briefly on these Entretiens, and explain to them the words or concepts they don’t understand. One of them—or half of one—could be taken each day. This study will be useful in educating those who aren’t prepared. I heard in the past that a person who really understood the Institutes⁶ would have a smattering of everything that concerns jurisprudence and could use it as a rule until he was more advanced. Likewise, a person who has a good grasp of the Entretiens would already have a firm foundation and, not to say, would be competent enough to teach in academies.

“As for the administration of the Sacraments, I’m going to ask M. Admirault,⁷ who has been living at the Bons-Enfants and has read these materials extensively, to be responsible for this. I haven’t yet spoken to him about it; nevertheless, I think he’ll be able to do it, despite his ailments; for, it’s mostly a question of practice and of not saying too much.

“For preaching, when the Company was just beginning we used to get together, and the Bishops of Bologne and Alet, together with Abbé Olier, were also present. We would propose a topic relating to a virtue or vice; each one would take pen and paper and write down the motive and reason for avoiding the vice or adopting the virtue, and then we’d try to find the definition and means. Lastly, we’d gather together everything that had been written down and we’d prepare a talk on it. All that was done without any books; each of us worked from his own knowledge. After M. Portail had collected from everyone all that had been said during that time, and what was said since then in other conferences given in the Company, he devised an easy method for giving helpful sermons and for the grand

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⁶The Institutes of Justinian I, the Byzantine Emperor (527-65). It was a general textbook of law.
⁷Charles Admirault (cf. XI, 177, n. 4).
catechism instructions, and added something of his own. He'll explain it; and because he has a speech impediment, and, moreover, M. Alméras isn't always able to speak because of his illness, which obliges him to have the special diet of which you are aware, they'll help one another.

"The time we can use for theology will be from eight to ten in the morning; the explanation of the method of preaching, catechizing, and administering the Sacraments will be after Vespers each evening. So, we'll do two things: (1) administration of the Sacraments; and (2) explanation of the method of preaching; or else we'll practice teaching the little catechism.

"So that's what we'll try to do, Messieurs; and even though we may perhaps know these things already, nevertheless it's good to refresh our memory on them. Then, too, perhaps we don't know everything we should. If the occasion presented itself where it would be necessary to enlighten a Huguenot on the difficulties he might put forward to us, we'd find this very hard—at least I would because I'm a poor, wretched, fourth level student. If I were to meet a minister who presented his difficulties and objections to me, I must confess that I'd really be at a loss. Let me tell you on this point that one time I was giving a mission with M. de la Salle, a great Missioner. The late Bishop of Beauvais used to say about him that he had

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8The "grand catechism" instruction was given from the pulpit in the afternoon, concluding the day the mission was given. It was directed to all the faithful and was the central moment of the mission. The "little catechism" was held at two o'clock in the afternoon and was geared toward the children, using a simple question and answer method. This method of catechesis was the one adopted by most of the Missioners of that time.

9In a 1712 circular letter, the Superior General Jean Bonnet wrote of Antoine Portail's work. "In 1652-53, he (Saint Vincent) had some lectures given at Saint-Lazare, at which he assisted as often as he could, and had someone put together everything he himself, M. Portail, his first companion, and the other older Missioners felt was most suitable to make our manner of preaching uniformly sound, intelligible, and fluent. The late M. Portail collected them into a rather large volume, which we have in this house. In 1666, however, the late M. Alméras. . ., thinking that this collection. . . was too wordy and that few people would have occasion to read it, prepared this abridged little method of preaching."

10A member of the Reformed Church in France (cf. XI, 15, n. 1).

11Jean de la Salle (cf. XI, 107, n. 4).

12Augustin Potier, Seigneur de Blancmesnil, was consecrated Bishop of Beauvais on September 17, 1617, in Rome, and renewed his diocese with the help of Saint Vincent and Adrien Bourdoise. He brought the Ursuline nuns to Beauvais and Clermont, had missions given in which
never met a man better at reasoning. When that good Father was in Villiers-le-Bel, he met a woman who asked him to hear her confession, but first she asked him to solve a problem she was having— I think it concerned the reality of the Blessed Sacrament or Communion under both species. Since he had studied only a little philosophy and something else, he found it very difficult. When this was brought to our attention, we gave some conferences on these topics, and God granted us the grace to provide an answer to all the problems that might be proposed to us. That good Father had received grace from God to convince people of anything he wished. If His Divine Goodness were pleased to grant us this grace, Messieurs, how happy we'd be! It's one thing to give conferences on preaching and catechizing, but what's most important is practice, which we'll be doing, with the help of God.

"I recall what M. Chrétien wrote me about the Huguenots who are holding their synod and, at the same time, about the blessing God is pleased to give to Catholics to refute them. He says some very consoling things about this, which I'm going to have read in the refectory. So then, the Huguenots meet every year to hold their Synod; there are about 80 of them—sometimes up to 120. Every day during their meeting one of them preaches on some point of controversy. The Bishop of Cahors, who couldn't take any action against them because he had no jurisdiction in that diocese, went there nevertheless, because it was the See of his Coadjutor and made use of the authority of the Vicar-General of his Coadjutor, whom he asked to accompany him. He brought there some priests

he himself took part, established a seminary in his episcopal palace, and multiplied the Confraternities of Charity. He became Grand Almoner of the Queen and was a member of the Council of Conscience. Named Prime Minister at the death of Louis XIII (1643), he was going to receive the Cardinal's hat when Mazarin's influence prevented this. He died on June 20, 1650.

13Jean Chrétien (cf. XI, 158, n. 14).
14Alain de Solminihac.
15Nicolas Sevin, Bishop of Sarlat and then Coadjutor Bishop with right of succession to Alain de Solminihac, who chose him.
to give the mission. They also had with them a good shoemaker, whom you’ve seen here, and who follows them. God has given him extraordinary graces for converting heretics. After the Missioners preach, he gives a conference on controversies and is going to challenge the ministers at the end of their Synod.

“Don’t you admire the zeal of all those good persons, Messieurs, who, in order to understand the controversies, are so assiduous and punctual in attending the weekly conferences given in Paris? This shoemaker is one of them. The Duchess d'Aiguillon sent him to her estates to help her subjects hold fast to their religion. He had a shop in Paris; the Duchess asked him how much he earned annually, and when he replied 400 livres, she offered him that much to go to work in Aiguillon, which he accepted, and had his brother take over his shop. God is pleased to give him so much grace that he challenges the ministers every day, and they don’t dare to confront him. That’s why people call him the ‘minister chaser.’ M. des Isles, who has studied philosophy and whom we’ve seen working very well with him here, goes with him. Together, they challenge the ministers, with the result that the ministers, who used to attack us in the past, are seeing themselves today attacked by us and even by persons who have studied nothing but Scripture. These are gratuitous graces, proper to priests, which God is giving to these laymen. Because of the progress that good shoemaker is making, they call him, as I said before, the ‘minister chaser’ in the entire region.

“We’ve gone way off the point, Messieurs. Where are we? Let’s get back to where we were, please. We had left off by saying we were going to discuss the method of preaching and catechizing, but we wouldn’t be doing much if we weren’t practicing it; and we certainly have a greater obligation to do this, since very important opportunities present themselves to the Company, obliging us to

16Perhaps Claude Leglay, “a simple artisan living by his trade,” so adept at debate “that it was felt he ought to abandon his workshop to dedicate himself entirely to disputation.” (Cf. Frédéric Monier, *Vie de Jean-Jacques Olier* [Paris: Poussielgue, 1914], vol. I, p. 399.)

use not only priests who are already formed, but even those who are
still not well-enough prepared for this ministry. So, we’re going to
strive to become competent to teach these things to those who will
be entrusted to us by the Bishops. But you’ll either make mistakes
or you won’t. You’ll make some, you tell me, because you’re not as
great a preacher as others who have a talent for preaching.

“The Blessed Bishop of Geneva asked that, after his death, his
body be given to a surgeon for anatomical studies to be done on it so
that, he said, as it was good for nothing during his lifetime, at least it
might be useful for something after his death. Eh bien! Your faults
will serve to correct others and prevent them from falling into them,
either to show preaching in its perfection—or at least so your embar­
rassment will be useful to you for something else. Believe me, only
pride alone can make you look for excuses.

“You know there’s nothing that brings out better the beauty of a
painting, its colors, and the various subjects treated in it—in short,
the beauty of the colors—than shading; and in music, discords are
blended in to make it harmonious! In the same way, faults will serve
to show preaching in its splendor. If there’s someone to whom God
has given a special talent, fine, we should strive to imitate him. All
of us—priests and students—will give ourselves to Our Lord to
preach. I’m speaking of the older priests because, for the rest of
you, my conferees who are philosophers, your time has not yet
come. We’ll give prepared sermons to those who can’t write them,
or who might not have time to do it, so they can memorize them.
We’re going to do this to look at each man’s special talent and to see
for what he’s suited. No one will be excused from this exercise; and,
take my word for it, only pride can prompt someone to try to be
dispensed from it. So then, we all have to do our part to see that this
exercise is carried out. I’m well aware that, because of M. Portail’s
difficulty in speaking, he won’t be able to do this; M. Alméras,
because of his infirmity; M. Bécu, because of his hands—but not
because of his head, for he has a very fine one—and M. Bourdet.18

18Etienne Bourdet (cf. XI. 106, n. 3).
because of his frail condition; but for everyone else, yes. And I, poor keeper of pigs that I am, will go first—not in the pulpit, for there’s no way I could get up there, but during a conference, when I’m dealing with some point of Rule or some other topic.

“But when shall we begin? Today? No, not today, but tomorrow. For that reason, the students and priests from the Seminary can take a break so they can get a better start; even the senior priests can do so, if they wish. So, tomorrow at eight-thirty. And for that purpose, I’m going to ask M. Alméras to give copies of the Entretiens to the students and priests in the seminary. We’ll meet for this in the Saint-Lazare hall. In the afternoon, after Vespers, we’ll begin practice for the administration of the Sacraments, etc. We’ll do the sermons during dinner and supper; for this reason, we’ll begin supper half an hour earlier because of the retreatants. We’ll see if it will be well for the Abbots19 to be present.

“That, my dear confreres, is what we’ll be doing between now and the ordination retreat. What remains but to humble ourselves profoundly before God? For it’s to the humble that He gives His grace. But what shall we do in order to succeed? Humble ourselves, Messieurs, humble ourselves, and then ask God for His grace, for everything depends on His goodness and mercy, without which we can do nothing. For that intention, I ask our Brothers to hear Mass, and the priests to offer the Holy Sacrifice. That’s what we’re going to do.”

19Louis de Chandenier (cf. XI, 157, n. 11) and his brother Claude were lodging at Saint-Lazare.
August 22, 1659

We should follow, as far as possible, all the Gospel teaching already mentioned, since it is so holy and very practical. But some of it, in fact, has more application to us, particularly when it emphasizes simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls. The Congregation should pay special attention to developing and living up to these five virtues so that they may be, as it were, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that everything each one of us does may always be inspired by them.

"This, my dear confreres, is the subject of our conference. Please put on your birettas; it will be better for me to leave my head uncovered.

"Continuing with our method, we'll divide the subject into three points, which are ordinarily those used in our sermons. In the first one, we'll look at the motives and reasons we have to give ourselves to God to renew in us our love for the practice of the Gospel teachings, in line with what was said to you about them when we spoke to you awhile ago. In the second point, we'll show which Rules and teachings are most helpful and best suited to our vocation. In the third, we'll talk about the means; all for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of our souls.

"The first motive or reason we have for giving ourselves to God to observe the Gospel teachings, my very dear confreres, is that their author is Our Lord Jesus Christ. Coming from heaven to announce the Will of God His Father and to teach people what they had to do to be the most pleasing to Him, He told them that this was the aim of the Gospel teachings. So, the Son of God, coming from heaven to lead us to His Father and to inform us what He was asking of us to be most pleasing to Him, announced this teaching to us. By that you see, brothers, that He is their author; and that's the first reason."
"The second is that He himself observed them; that He did so was apparent in the eyes of heaven and earth, and everyone who had the happiness of being with Him during His mortal life saw that He always observed the Gospel teachings. That was His goal, His glory, and His honor, and thus we infer that, since we should have no other intention than to follow Our Lord and to conform ourselves entirely to Him, that alone is capable of leading us to the practice of the Evangelical Counsels.

"The third reason is drawn from the fact that a creature... I made a mistake in what I just said; I should have said that the motives are drawn from the holiness and usefulness of the Rules and the Gospel teachings. That they’re very holy I infer, first of all, from the fact that the Saint of Saints practiced them himself, and, second, that this is drawn from the nature of holiness. That they’re also very useful speaks for itself.

"So then, the motives should be taken from the nature of holiness and the usefulness of the teachings. Let’s take a look at that, please. What is holiness? It’s the retrenchment from earthly things and distancing ourselves from them, and is, at the same time, an attachment to God and union with the Divine Will. I think holiness consists in that. And what can distance us from earth and attach us to heaven like the Gospel teachings? For all of them are intended to detach us from possessions, pleasures, honors, sensuality, and our own satisfactions; they all aim at that; that’s their purpose. So, to say that someone abides by the Gospel teachings is to say that he or she is holy because holiness, as we’ve just seen, consists in lessening our attachment for the things of earth, and in union with God, with the result that it’s inconceivable for a person to observe the Gospel teachings and not be detached from earth and united to heaven.

"The second motive, usefulness, is drawn from the practice of the Gospel teachings. What do persons who begin to practice them do? They detach themselves from three powerful enemies: the first is the passion to have possessions; the second is the passion to enjoy one’s pleasures; and the third is the passion to be free. That, my dear confreres, is the spirit of the world, which reigns today with such
absolute authority that we can say that *totus mundiis in hoc positus,1* the entire concern of worldly people is to have possessions and pleasure and to do their own will. That’s what they seek, that’s what they run after. They imagine that happiness in this world consists in accumulating wealth, enjoying pleasures, and living as they please. But, alas, who doesn’t realize the contrary and who doesn’t know that the person who allows himself to be ruled by his passions is a slave of them? Scripture says that whoever serves sin is the slave of that sin: *a quo quis superatus est hujus et servus est,2* and whoever is the slave of sin is a slave of the devil. A person in such a state—I mean someone who hasn’t mastered his passions—can and should consider himself a child of the devil. On the contrary, those detached from a love for worldly possessions, from the greedy desire for pleasures, and from their own will become the children of God and enjoy perfect freedom; for that’s to be found in the love of God alone. Those are the persons who are free, brothers, who have no laws, who fly, who go to the right and to the left; once again, who fly, who can’t be stopped, and who are never slaves of the devil or of their passions. Oh, blessed freedom of the children of God!

"*Mais quoi!* Is anything as useful as freedom? The teaching states that freedom should be bought at the price of gold and silver and that we should sacrifice everything to possess it. Now, my dear confreres, this is clearly seen in the practice of the Evangelical Counsels. These teachings are reduced to three points: love of poverty, mortification of one’s pleasures, and submission to God’s Will. They place a person in a state of Christian liberty. A while ago you were slaves of your passions; attachment to wealth, pleasures, and your own will had become your master; now these teachings have made you free. Neither the world with its charms, nor the flesh with its pleasures, nor the devil with his illusions can hold you captive because the love of poverty, mortification of your pleasures, and submission to the Will of God carry you through. That’s the strength and power of the Gospel teachings, among which—because

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1. *The entire world is in this power.* Cf. 1 Jn 5:19. (NAB)
2. Cf. 2 Pt 2:19. (NAB)
there are many of them—I’m choosing mainly those most fitting for Missioners. And what are they? I’ve always thought and believed that they were simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal.

“First, simplicity, which consists in doing everything for love of God and having no other aim in all our actions but His glory. That, strictly speaking, is simplicity. All the acts of this virtue consist in saying things simply, without duplicity or subtlety, being straightforward, with no evasion or subterfuge. So then, simplicity means doing everything for love of God, rejecting any admixture, because simplicity implies the absence of any composition. That’s why, since there’s no composition to be found in God, we say that He’s pure act and a very simple being. All admixture, then, must be banished so as to have in view only God alone. Now, my dear confreeres, if anyone in the world should have this virtue, it’s Missioners, for our whole life is spent in practicing acts of charity, either toward God or toward our neighbor. And for both one and the other, we must proceed simply, with the result that, if these are things we have to do which concern God and depend on us, we have to avoid all subtlety, for God is pleased with simple souls, and communicates His graces only to them. If the things concern our neighbor, since we have to assist our neighbor corporally and spiritually, bon Dieu, how careful we must be not to appear wily, clever, crafty, and, above all, never to say a word that has a double meaning! Ah, how far that should be from a Missioner!

“It seems that, at this time, God has willed that a Company should have this virtue because the world is awash in duplicity. Today we hardly see anyone who says what he thinks; the world is so corrupt that all we see everywhere is artifice and deceit, and that goes—shall I say it—even through the convent grille. Now, if there has ever been a Community that should profess simplicity, it’s ours; for note this well, brothers, duplicity is the plague of the Missioner. Duplicity robs him of his spirit; the venom and poison of the Mission is a lack of sincerity and simplicity in the eyes of God and others. So then, the virtue of simplicity, my dear confreeres, simplicity, my dear confreeres, ah, how beautiful it is!
“Sometimes at the Tuesday Conference, which is composed of secular priests, talks are given that discuss the spirit of that same group; most of them—almost all—used to say that the spirit of simplicity was easily perceived there. That’s true, and anyone who sees how they act would say that simplicity reigns there, for each man relates simply and before God his thoughts on the topic that has been proposed. And if propter quod unum tale, et illud magis tale, with what greater reason aren’t we, the creators of that group, obliged to have the virtue of simplicity? Shame on the Mission, farewell to its spirit, if it doesn’t have the spirit of simplicity! Shall I tell you what a gentleman told me? ‘You see, Monsieur,’ he said to me, ‘when I speak, I say things as they are; if some circumstance demands silence, I keep quiet.’ Now, what’s that, if not the practice of this virtue of simplicity? That gentleman is one of the finest men I know in his social class; he just returned from the Venetian Embassy. ‘If I have to speak,’ he told me, ‘I say something, if I know it; otherwise, I keep silent.’ And that’s how a Venetian Ambassador speaks, a man who had been responsible for negotiating with all the important persons. Simplicity! Ah, how admirable this virtue is! O my God, give it to us.

“The second teaching is humility; for, it doesn’t suffice to be simple in order to be pleasing to God, we must also be humble. So then, humility, which consists in emptying ourselves completely before God, overcoming ourselves in order to place God in our heart, not seeking the esteem and good opinion of others, and struggling constantly against any impulse of vanity. Ambition causes a person to establish himself, to seek to become well known so that people will say, ‘Look at him!’ Humility causes us to empty ourselves of self so that God alone may be manifest, to whom glory may be given. Humility bespeaks the love of being despised and not putting ourselves forward, with each of us considering himself a poor wretch. It always says ‘Honor and glory to God alone, who is the Being of Beings!’ It imprints in us these sentiments: ‘I renounce honor, I renounce glory, in a word, I renounce anything that can

3Whoever gives a thing its existence possesses this existence to its highest degree.
make me vain; for, alas, I'm nothing but dust and corruption! My God, only You alone should reign; and if there were in me something that might not be in You, my God, I would willingly divest myself of it to give it to you and to annihilate myself in my inmost being.' Those are the various affections of the humble man and ones Missioners should have; but the light makes us see clearly the contrary of not wishing to be esteemed and to be known.

"That's the second teaching absolutely necessary for Missioners; for, I ask you, how could a proud person adjust to poverty? Our purpose is to serve the poor, uncultured common people; now, if we don't adapt ourselves to them, in no way will we do any good for them. The means of doing it, however, is humility because, through humility, we annihilate ourselves and establish God as the Sovereign Being. Factus sum sicut jumentum apud te.\footnote{I was like a brute beast in your presence. Cf. Ps 73:22. (NAB)} The humble person considers himself a beast of burden before God. But durus est hic sermo.\footnote{This saying is hard. Cf. Jn 6:60. (NAB)} That's true, yet I'll say that this state is proper to the Mission; and, if that's not the case, we have reason to fear that we don't have the spirit of a true Missioner.

"The third teaching is gentleness, which concerns both the interior and the exterior, inside and outside the house; gentleness among ourselves and in bearing with our neighbor; for you see, my dear confreres—and I think someone said this in the sermon—a Missioner needs forbearance with regard to outsiders. The poor people whose confessions we hear are so coarse, so ignorant, so obtuse—not to say so stupid—that they don't know how many gods there are or how many persons in God. Make them say it fifty times and in the end you'll find them as ignorant as they were in the beginning. If someone isn't gentle enough to put up with their boorishness, what will he be able to do? Not a thing; on the contrary, he'll discourage those poor people who, on seeing that, will be put off and will never be willing to return to learn the things necessary for salvation. So then, forbearance.
"Speaking of this, I remember that, when I was hearing someone's confession (we can talk about what we've heard, even in confession, my dear confreres, especially when the persons concerned are dead and people don't, and can't, know about whom we're speaking), this person said to me, 'That's fine, Monsieur, go on.' She thought I didn't hear her; she tugged my surplice and said again, 'Go on, Monsieur, go ahead, what you're saying is fine.' I assure you she wasn't giving a thought to what I was saying but rather to her little game.

"What forbearance do we have to have in that? And if a Missioner has none, what will he do in such a circumstance? Someone has written me that our men are working very successfully in the mountains of the kingdom of Naples and that those persons are uncouth and surly; it's bandit country. Now, how can we do good among such people without this virtue? So then, gentleness and forbearance are necessary among ourselves and for our service to the neighbor. O Savior, isn't Your forbearance with Your Apostles, who murmured among themselves and fought over the first places, a beautiful example for us? Ah, brothers, what forbearance in Our Lord, who saw that they were going to abandon Him, that the first among them was going to deny Him, and that the unfortunate Judas was going to betray Him! After such an example, what Missioner wouldn't be willing to work to acquire this virtue?

"Those then, my dear confreres, are the three Gospel teachings most in conformity with our state. The first is simplicity, which concerns God. The second is humility, which concerns our submission; by it we become a holocaust to God, to whom we owe all honor, and in whose presence we must efface ourselves and act in such a way that He may take possession of us. The third is gentleness in order to put up with our neighbor's failings. The first concerns God; the second, ourselves; and the third, our neighbor.

"But, the means of having these virtues is mortification, which gets rid of anything that can prevent us from acquiring them. And, in fact, if the spirit of mortification doesn't animate us, how are we going to live together? Won't there always be something to criticize? Isn't there always something that offends us in the various
situations in which we encounter one another? If we aren’t morti­fied, we’ll be perpetually nitpicking. Having this virtue is so necessary that we can’t live—I repeat—we can’t live with one another if our interior and exterior senses aren’t mortified; and, not only is this necessary among ourselves, but also with regard to the people, where there’s so much to endure. When we go to give a mission, we don’t know where we’ll be staying or what we’ll be doing. Things may be very different from what we planned, since Providence often upsets our plans. Who, then, doesn’t see that mortification is indispensable for a Missioner in dealing not only with the poor common people, but also with retreatants, ordinands, galley convicts, and slaves? For, if we’re not mortified, how can we put up with what has to be endured in these various ministries? How can Missioners like poor M. Le Vacher,6 of whom we hear no news, who’s in the midst of poor slaves in danger from the plague, and most likely, his brother7 as well, how can they see the sufferings endured by the people entrusted to them by Providence without feeling them themselves? Let’s not deceive ourselves, my dear confreres, Missioners must be mortified.

“The fifth teaching is zeal, consisting in a pure desire to become pleasing to God and helpful to our neighbor: zeal to spread the kingdom of God and zeal to procure the salvation of our neighbor. Is there anything in the world more perfect? If love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is unconditional in the love of God. Now, brothers, how are we going to have this spirit of simplicity, humility, and gentleness, if we don’t have mortification, which makes us find the good in everything? And how will we have mortification without zeal, which prompts us to rise above all sorts of difficulties, not only by the power of reason, but also by that of grace, which helps us to find pleasure in suffering—yes, pleasure. Wretched man that I am, I know this and don’t do it. Oh, come now, brothers, does the Company have this spirit? Is the spirit of simplicity easily perceived in our dealings with outsiders? Can that be said? And do those who observe the Missioners see the spirit of simplicity in them?

6Philippe Le Vacher (cf. XI. 261, n. 5).
7Jean Le Vacher (cf. XI. 151, n. 1).
What can be said is that it’s apparent in some; but I don’t know whether it’s obvious that François, Jean, or Claude are all simple, humble, gentle, mortified, and zealous. Let’s examine our conscience; do we have these virtues? And has this love of appearing just as we are taken root in our hearts? Do we ask God often for His grace to efface ourselves, to bear with our neighbor, to mortify ourselves, etc.? When the opportunity to mortify our interior and exterior senses arises, do we do it? Do we experience that within ourselves? Oh, what a happiness if we do! If we don’t, let’s admit that we’re in the wrong and say that we’re not Missioners; for, true Missioners are simple, humble, mortified, and filled with ardor for their work. I have reason to believe that many do have this spirit, if not in everything, at least in part. If we examine ourselves, perhaps each individual will realize that he’s at the second level in this. Or sus, blessed be God! Enough for the past! Let’s take renewed resolutions to acquire this spirit, which is our spirit; for the spirit of the Mission is a spirit of simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal. Do we have it or don’t we?

"But, Monsieur, what can we do to acquire it?" These five virtues should be like the faculties of the soul of the entire Congregation. Just as the soul knows by the intellect, determines by the will, and remembers by the memory, so a Missioner should act only by means of these virtues. For example, there’s a question of doing one thing or the other; I have to preach; then I must do it, but simply and for God—no fanfare, no embellishments. Fine! We can speak whatever we like, provided our sermons are given in the spirit of simplicity. ‘But our sermons will embarrass us.’ Ah, a true Missioner immediately says, ‘I welcome this embarrassment; give me some in order to subdue my pride,’ for—understand this clearly—to want to do otherwise is to try to show off and to act like a braggart. Doing things simply is the nature of our spirit; the excellence of the Mission will be judged by its simplicity, humility, etc. It’s by that, my dear confrères, that we should judge ourselves, by that we should love one another; if I have to do something, that’s my standard of acting; and, to put it in a nutshell, everything God asks of us in the Gospel teachings is found in these five virtues.
“O Lord, how beautiful that is, and how pleasing the Mission will be to You if its spirit is such that it considers everything in the spirit of simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal! How, Lord, do You judge the blessed if not on that! Ah, simplicity, which has no other view than God’s view, which refuses any other motive than God and what is apparent! In line with that, the Rule states that we have to sprinkle our actions with these virtues, especially simplicity, now that we’re practicing preaching. That’s going well, by the grace of God, and I’ve been consoled by it and thank Him lovingly; nevertheless, I think it’s good to show gentleness, gentleness I say, with regard to ourselves and to our listeners. We’ve failed in that. So, let’s be gentle in our sermons. And mortification must be apparent in leaving aside the things that serve only to make people think highly of us. Let’s get rid of all that, let’s preach Jesus Christ and let all our actions tend toward God, who is a Spirit of simplicity.

“Let each and every one of us strive to enclose ourselves in these five virtues, like snails in their shells, and act in such a way that all our actions savor of these virtues. The man who acts in this way will be a true Missioner; the one who acts otherwise—such as myself, wretched man, who am nothing but dust and filth—won’t be like him.

“O Savior Lord my God, You brought this teaching from heaven to earth, recommended it to people, and taught it to Your Apostles. Among the counsels You gave them, You said that this teaching is like the edifice of Christianity and anything that isn’t part of it is built on sand. Fill us with that spirit, Lord my God, You who have indicated that spirit to this Little Company, a spirit that’s so necessary in order to correspond to its vocation. You are the only author of it, and, I dare say, Lord, that, whether or not we possess it depends only on You; for we are burning with the desire to have it. Dispose our hearts to receive this spirit. You, Lord, are the one who raised up this Company; You have given it its start. There’s some progress in the Company, my dear confreres; these five virtues seem to be in it, if not to the degree to which Our Lord, the Apostles, and the first Christians had them, at least it’s a beginning that will
continue, provided we strive to conform all our actions to those Gospel teachings. The purpose for which we’re Missioners, Messieurs, is to be very simple, humble, gentle, mortified, and zealous for the glory of God. That’s what we should ask of Him and should hope for from His Divine Goodness. And if we find it apropos to make meditation all together tomorrow morning on this subject, I hope we’ll receive great consolation from it. May God grant us this grace!”

212. - TEACHINGS CONTRARY TO THOSE OF THE GOSPEL
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 15)

August 29, 1659

“My very dear confreres, we’ve come to the fifteenth article of the second chapter of our Rule, which still concerns the Evangelical Counsels.

“This article speaks of the vices that contend against the five virtues summarizing the Gospel teachings which we discussed last Friday and which are the perfection of the Missioner’s spirit. Even though we should do our utmost to observe all these Gospel teachings, which are very holy and useful, some among them are, nevertheless, more proper to us than others, namely, the ones that recommend particularly simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal for souls. The Congregation, therefore, will strive in a very special way to see that these five virtues may be, so to speak, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and that the actions of each one of us may be always animated by them. Now, this brings us to the opposite of these virtues, what is contrary to them, that is, the vices that contend against these Gospel teachings.

Satan is always trying to divert us from living up to this teaching by suggesting his own, which is the exact opposite. Each one of us,
then, should be fully aware of this, and completely ready to oppose and overcome all those things. This applies especially to those values which conflict more obviously with our Congregation, such as: (1) mere human prudence; (2) the desire for publicity; (3) always wanting everyone to give in to us and see things our way; (4) the pursuit of self-gratification in everything; (5) attaching no great importance to either God’s honor or the salvation of others.

“In line with that, my dear confreres, we now have to speak about teachings contrary to Gospel teachings. We’ll summarize the vices connected with them and show how they battle against the perfection of the spirit of a Missioner. We’ve mentioned in what these virtues of the Gospel teachings consist and how they make up our spirit. We’ve said, I repeat, that these five virtues and these teachings are opposed to those false teachings of the world, against which we must wage war. So, we’ll divide our talk into three points: in the first, we’ll look at the reasons we have to give ourselves to God to combat the teachings opposed to those of the Gospel; in the second, we’ll explain the Rule and point out its enemies; in the third, we’ll look for the means and weapons to destroy them. I have good reason to hope that God will bless our efforts.

“The first reason we have to give ourselves to God to fight and hold our ground against these vices is that the devil is the author of them, says the Rule, and that these teachings are false, since it’s that evil spirit which has produced them and is the father of them. On the contrary, the teachings that make up our spirit are holy, since Our Lord is the author of them; this is also what the Rule states. And, in fact, since all good comes from God, so all evil comes from the devil and our corrupt nature, which puts his teachings in opposition to those of the Gospel. The Gospel teaching states, ‘Blessed are the poor because the kingdom of God belongs to them.’ ¹ The demon’s maxim preaches the contrary; the devil doesn’t teach that the poor are blessed; he says, ‘You must have possessions, since life is hard, and woe to the person who doesn’t strive to make his fortune!’ The Gospel says we should be gentle and kind, and the devil says we

¹Mt 5:3. (NAB)
shouldn’t yield to anyone, and anyone who damages our reputation should be considered our enemy. We have to avenge ourselves and hold firm; if we’re attacked by word or in writing, we’re bound to defend ourselves. Our honor and reputation are at stake if we keep silence on these occasions. Those are maxims, but where do they come from? We don’t find them in Scripture or in what the Son of God has commanded us; they must, however, come from somewhere; it’s neither from the Gospel nor from God; so the devil must be their author.

“The second reason we have to give ourselves to God to brace ourselves against those false teachings and to stand fast against them is that the devil uses us and takes up arms within us to make us embrace his teachings and abandon those of Our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that, although original sin is taken away by Baptism, this fomes peccati² stays with us; we have within ourselves our concupiscence that stirs up the love and desire to have possessions, to gratify ourselves, and to do our own will. All that is born with us and will never leave us, unless it’s through the virtues that make up the spirit of the Mission. Since the devil is the author of these false teachings of which our Rule speaks, and since he finds in us weapons to destroy us, we have to give ourselves to God in the right way to brace ourselves and stand fast against these vices that try to destroy the empire Jesus Christ has established within us. Those are the evils.

“Assuming this to be true, let’s see what these adversaries are, please. The first is human prudence; the second, our desire for publicity and to acquire a good reputation and the esteem of others; the third is our passion to have everyone submit to our judgment; the forth is to seek our own satisfaction in all things; and the fifth is a lack of sensitivity for the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbor.

“Human prudence is opposed to simplicity. Simplicity causes a person never to use duplicity, to speak as he thinks, always to consider God, and never himself, in divine things, and to be mindful of God in the acts of religion and charity he practices. Now, human

²Tinder from which sin is ignited, popularly called inclination to sin.
prudence is just the opposite. What is human prudence? A serious pursuit of illicit means for self-advancement and for attaining our expectations; a constant desire and effort to satisfy the inclinations of our corrupt nature; and, in fact, we see this in persons who live according to the prudence of the flesh. For example, what does someone who doesn’t think of God think about? He’s usually seeks his own satisfaction and follows his own inclinations. Where do your inclinations lead you? To get the best of others. What’s that person trying to achieve? To be filled with knowledge through fine collections and similar things in order to have people admire him. Alas! It’s not being simple when we seek our own satisfaction in everything, eager to see and hear new things, to find out everything that’s going on inside and outside the house, to gratify our taste in eating and drinking, to have exclusive friendships (I don’t think there seems to be too much of that in the Company, thank God!), and, lastly, to strive to ingratiate ourselves with this person and that. All that, my dear confreres, is a tragedy, a tragedy. What does human prudence mean? It means to make a human choice. Now, all that is directly opposed to the virtue of simplicity, which has God alone in view in all our actions, whether it’s saying or attending Mass, hearing confessions, or reconciling enemies. Simplicity always has God in view in those things, whereas prudence of the flesh, on the contrary, seeks itself always and everywhere, causing us to use indirect means to attain the goal we’ve proposed to ourselves. Oh, how dangerous is this human prudence! God grant that it may never be found in the Company!

“So that’s the first kind of human prudence. There’s another that’s not so exacting: when we try to resolve divine matters by human ones. Take someone who wants to enter a religious Community. What dangerous prudence it is when he tries to reach a decision about this by human means! That’s why we should have a very special devotion to resolving human matters by divine ones, even though nature is opposed to this and contradicts it. Ut quid perditio haec? Someone has just made retreat in order to choose a state in

\(^1\text{Why this waste? Cf. Mt 26:8. (NAB)}\)
life; you see one man going to the Jesuits, another to the Carthusians. Going to the Jesuits, *mais quoi!* Isn't the Mission a holy Company, where a man can work out his salvation as well as somewhere else? Human prudence! I remember that one of the finest men of the time, a lawyer in the Council, consulted me regarding his vocation. He had struggled with the desire to become either a Carthusian or a Missioner. I felt flattered; nevertheless, God gave me the grace never to talk to him about becoming a Missioner. He went to the Carthusians. *'Quoi!'* I would say to him, *'God is calling you to the Carthusians; then go where God calls you, Monsieur.'* That didn't prevent me from feeling flattered, but I still kept saying to him, *'Go where God is calling you, Monsieur.'* True, I do think he was right in remaining in the world for a time to tie up his business affairs and make his final decision. Let's act in such a way, Messieurs, that God may have advisers in this Company who consider the strength of a calling, and who judge according to His spirit and not according to the flesh.

"So then, it's against this human prudence that we have to struggle, using the weapons our Rule furnishes us, namely, simplicity, which resolves human matters by divine ones and not divine by human ones.

"The second vice and the second adversary we have to combat is the desire to distinguish ourselves in the eyes of others, a vice totally opposed to the virtue of humility, so necessary for Missioners. If, by some misfortune, some were to allow themselves to become involved in important matters, men like that would change the Company for the worst. So then, humility, love of our own abasement, wanting everyone to know us and to be aware of our faults—to love all that and to rejoice in it is to be a perfect Missioner. But to love the contrary is to lack the spirit of the Mission, which is to be unconcerned about ourselves and not worry about what people say. Let them tell whatever tales they like, let them say that we're ignorant men, low-class people, scoundrels, if you like; we have to accept all that, brothers, in the spirit of holy humility. Alas, what did people not say of the Apostles! What calumnies did not blacken their reputation! Did they return insult for insult on that account?"
On the contrary, they used those occasions as so many opportunities for merit. Ah, we’re not Apostles but sinners, ciphers of sin; let’s humble ourselves, and that’s it.

"But are we not to defend ourselves?" Fear not, God will defend us. "But, Monsieur, is it such a great wrong to say a few words in reply?" Ah, God forbid! It’s the spirit of envy that makes one want to appear as a good casuist, a good confessor, a fine preacher. Ah, brothers, let’s esteem others but humble ourselves and keep God alone in view in our actions, remembering what Our Lord said to His disciples, ‘Rejoice, not because of those brilliant deeds you’re doing in the sight of others, but because your names are written in the book of life.’ I ask you, what good will it do you to have the good opinion of others? What profit and advantage will you gain from that reputation? What is that human honor? It’s a certain mental image that vanishes almost as quickly as it appears. Certainly, my dear confreres, if we seek to be esteemed, we’re greatly deceived; those who run after honor usually find only shame; and experience shows clearly enough that, if people praise you, they do it either through spite or through flattery, saying just the opposite of what they think. After all, the world is made up of some good people and some bad. The good will put a good interpretation on your actions, but the bad ones, almost infinite in number, will scoff at them. Thus, in seeking honor, you’ll find contempt and shame.

"Ah, we’re so poor and wretched as to want honor! And what is it? A puff of smoke that’s in the mind, which dissipates in a flash. Most people don’t care about us, and yet we become worshipers of esteem. That’s being senseless, crazy, like those who think they’re Popes or Kings; it’s madness, sheer daydreaming. Let’s fight against that; let’s take up arms to destroy this enemy; let’s be united to the Son of God, who fought pride in a frightful way. It’s a little hard on nature, but let’s hold fast and ask God for His enlightenment in order to know ourselves, and we’ll root out this cursed passion. So then, let’s wage war against pride, my dear confreres; it’s

4Cf. Lk 10:20. (NAB)
an enemy we’ll find here, outside, in town and country; in a word, it follows us everywhere; but we’ll be victorious over it if we’re grounded in holy humility. That’s the second Gospel teaching and the second virtue that makes up the spirit of the Mission.

“The other adversary is the passion of wanting everyone to submit his judgment and will to ours. That’s contrary to gentleness, for we usually see that those who want everything to be done in accord with their judgment, and that everything they want should be done in the time and manner they wish, are rude, violent, angry, and imperious people, and that’s totally opposed to gentleness. On the contrary, gentle persons don’t hold to their own opinion, condescending to the will of others and never pushing to have their will done, like those other people we just mentioned.

“So then, wanting everyone to submit his judgment and will to ours is a vice opposed to gentleness. O Savior of my soul, what vice do I not have? Savior of my soul, forgive me for them, and especially for the faults I’ve committed against that teaching that recommends submission of judgment. Grant me the grace, Lord, that, during the Council meeting we have for house business, I may report things as they are, without passion, and with no desire to be followed but in the proper spirit. If I say something, let it be in order to give more enlightenment and so that the truth may be known by others rather than by me. This is the grace I ask of You, Lord.

“This passion, Messieurs, comes partly from pride and partly from the desire for self-satisfaction. We’re at a Council meeting; naturally, we’d like our opinion to be followed; we’re annoyed that others attain their goal; we want to carry the day; we think we have more convincing reasons than others do. If we act according to nature, that leads to contradicting everything and to holding to our own opinion, but if we act according to the virtue of a good Missioner, we submit our own opinion and yield to others, preferring their sentiments to our own. Ah, how happy we’d be if we behaved like that! We’d have the satisfaction that Our Lord was presiding over our affairs. Grant us also the grace, my God, that, in all things, we may not wish to be served or obeyed as if we were ruling with an iron hand, or that everything should be done accord-
ing to our own will on all occasions. I mean when what we want is not specifically a Commandment of God or of the Church or one of our Rules; for then it’s not so much our own will that we want but the Will of God himself, which is very reasonable to obey and to obey on all occasions.

“The fourth enemy is the pursuit of our own satisfaction in everything. Savior of my soul! What’s that? Isn’t it true, Messieurs, that we seek self, without even thinking about it? We flatter ourselves and don’t oppose nature, which has no other aim than its own satisfaction. In the name of God, my dear confreres, remember that we have to combat this vice by mortification, which doesn’t seek its pleasures from either the external or interior senses. Let’s love this; otherwise we’ll never be content in our vocation. There are some men here, you see, who have a passion for seeing, hearing, and knowing everything that goes on in the house and outside. Let’s mortify that; let’s not fail to do so. Alas! We’ve left everything for God; why, then, do we seek ourselves, as we do? There are few men in the Company who are tormented by this passion to see, hear, and know the news; there are few of them; and I ask the Company to thank God for that; but, since there are some, we should mortify that. We have to be generous in struggling against this enemy who’s trying to place an obstacle in the way of God’s graces.

“Fifth: the last enemy is insensitivity regarding the affairs of God and of our neighbor. This vice causes the insensitive man to feel no love or attraction for what concerns his salvation. That’s why Saint Bernard considers this passion a sign of reprobation. We certainly go to church to pray, sing, say Mass, and perform the other liturgical functions, but all these functions are performed without feeling, tastelessly, and without devotion. What’s the cause of this callousness? We haven’t been carrying out the ceremonies with a view to their purpose, which is to stir the people to devotion. We aren’t moved when we strike our breast at Mass. Insensitivity, brothers, insensitivity! Let’s be zealous in edifying the people, making them see how the Word of God should be treated, by treating it properly ourselves. For, take my word for it, they act respectfully in Church and take the Word of God into account if they see that we ourselves esteem it. Ah, my dear confreres! If we’re faithful to performing the
ceremonies and prayers, we’ll receive this sensitivity from God, which will help us to inspire one another to devotion, and we’ll take pleasure in these ceremonies. But if, on the contrary, we lack this sensitivity, we’ll fail to edify our neighbor. Why did Saint Francis pray with his arms extended? Why did he prostrate himself with his face to the ground before going into the pulpit? He prepares himself in this way, his body language moves the people, this action delights everyone, and God in His goodness gives such great efficacy to his preaching that everyone leaves there edified. Ah, my dear confreres, let’s enter into this spirit, for that’s what animates us, and, by this means, we’ll be preserved from being callous!

“Insensitivity also causes us to be unmoved by the physical and spiritual miseries of our neighbor; we lack charity and zeal and don’t sense offenses against God. Eh, let’s not be like those Missioners who aren’t zealous! If we send them to give a mission, they go; if they have to work with ordinands, they do it; it’s the same for retreatants; but how do they do it? Where’s their zeal? That zeal is assailed by callousness, so let’s strive to be animated by the spirit of fervor; let’s perform all the ministries of our Institute and be zealous in doing them courageously and fervently; let’s have compassion on the many souls that are perishing and not allow our laziness and insensitivity to be the cause of their loss.

“Those, my dear confreres, are the five enemies we have to combat, of which the first, as you’ve seen, is prudence of the flesh; the second is a wish to appear to be someone in the eyes of others; the third is the desire to have everyone always submit to our judgment and will; the fourth is to seek our own satisfaction in everything; and the fifth is insensitivity for the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbor. Brothers, let’s work courageously to destroy these enemies; let’s arm ourselves with simplicity and candor; let’s give ourselves to God to acquire gentleness, humility, mortification, and zeal for souls; let’s abide by them and envelop ourselves in these five virtues like snails in their shells. Ah, these virtues will preserve us from all disastrous happenings; we’ll go everywhere with them and manage to overcome everything! Without them, we’ll be Missioners in appearance only.
“So then, courage, brothers! Let’s wage war against these ene-
mies, but let’s look at the means to be victorious in this. The first one
is to get right to the heart of things and is common to all that we do. It
consists in asking Our Lord for the weapons we need to fight against
these five enemies and, to do it more effectively, to ask Him very ear-
nestly for them, for He’s the only one who can set us free and give us
the peace enjoyed by righteous souls. This grace depends on His
goodness and mercy; that’s why we have to ask Him for it.

“The Rule provides a means for us, namely, to keep watch over
ourselves and not to allow the evil spirit to catch us unawares. Is that
in the spirit of the Mission? Is it far removed from it? Don’t ever do
anything contrary to simplicity; what will also be a big help to us is
to examine ourselves in order to discern the illusions of the devil.

“So then, my dear confreres, be on the watch; be constantly on the
watch and with the appropriate prudence. Do nothing on your own ini-
tiative but always with the advice of the Superior or the Director, or, if
they’re not available, of one of the good senior confreres; always do
that; otherwise, the demon will deceive you. O Savior, we’re talking,
then, about combating the enemy of Your Cross. Please give us
strength to destroy him and to have You triumph in our hearts.

“You’ve seen, brothers, the reasons we have to give ourselves to
God to struggle against the enemies of the Company. The first is that
it’s the evil spirit who has stirred up these vices; the second is that
he’s even more powerful because he’s armed and takes advantage of
our weakness, so opposed to the Gospel teachings. You said it, Lord,
that our corrupt nature was the source of all our misfortunes.

“Since that’s true, my dear confreres, we’ll wage war against
those enemies and that prudence of the flesh, *inimica mors*,5 which
causes death. After that, against what else shall we do battle? That
spirit of desiring honor, which is the greatest of all follies. Chasing
butterflies! ‘Oh, but I do a good job hearing confessions.’ What’s
left of that? ‘Ah, he gave a good sermon.’ What’s left of that? ‘He’s
done well with catechizing; he’s a great casuist and a fine theolo-
gian.’ What’s left of that? Smoke. What else? Smoke, and that’s all.
Ah, let’s do battle against all that!

5Cf. 1 Cor 15:26. (NAB)
“On the other hand, we have to combat the passion of wanting our own judgment to prevail. If we go up against that, if we have it before our eyes, if we give that to God in order to taste those Gospel truths, what spiritual men we’ll become, and the Company will soon become like Jesus Christ, linked with the company of the Apostles! That being the case, I say, let’s give ourselves to God to overcome these vices. Down with pride! Down with human prudence! Shame on seeking our own satisfactions! Shame on any attachment to our own judgment! Shame on duplicity!

“So then, let’s be determined to fight generously and say boldly, ‘Long live simplicity in the Mission! Long live mortification and zeal for souls!’ Let’s be filled with that spirit of ardor and stir ourselves up to join battle. Even though the devil is the author of those false teachings, let’s not be afraid; for, as Saint Augustine says, latrare potest, mordere non potest. He may very well bark and make noise, but he can never bite and harm you, if you’re unwilling. We certainly see that people who are simple, humble, gentle, mortified, and zealous for souls scoff at all his efforts because mordere non potest nisi volentem. Eh, if we’re simple, humble, and mortified, we have nothing to fear, and victory will be ours. So let’s be very courageous.

“Savior of our souls, these are Your teachings we’re embracing, and the devil is trying to make us abandon them. My Savior, it’s to Your advantage for us to be the victors, since we’re fighting against Your enemy. Come to our aid. We protest that we’ll take up arms as long as we can. But what can we do without Your help? Lord, who, by the eternal decree You proclaimed to raise up a Company that is to make profession of imitating You, have associated us to Your mission, grant that this poor, insignificant Company of the Mission may be conformed to Your teachings, both as a body and in each of its members, that it may be filled with and grow in simplicity, humility, mortification, and zeal for the salvation of our neighbor, in order to be more and more pleasing in the eyes of Your Divine Majesty. This is the grace we humbly ask of You, Lord.”

6He can bark. he cannot bite.
7He cannot bite unless allowed.
213. - PRAYING THE DIVINE OFFICE

September 26, 1659

"My dear confreres, I had asked M. Alméras to see that the chanting of the psalms be the topic of this evening’s conference because of a certain disorder that’s apparent in praying the Divine Office. I’m not speaking of Sundays and feast days, when it’s our custom to chant High Mass and Vespers, but only about Matins, the Little Hours,¹ and Vespers, which we pray in choir on weekdays. We begin Prime one way and Terce another; a high tone predominates on one side, a low tone on the other. Seeing all that, I said to myself, ‘Mon Dieu, that’s disgraceful, especially in this house, which should be the standard for the others for praying the Office!’ Now, as I was thinking about that, M. Portail came to see me. ‘We’ll talk about this shortly,’ I said to him, ‘in the conference.’ And, after reading the Rule to see what it said about this, I thought it might be very useful matter for us in a conference today, and I hope God will give it His blessing.

“So then, we’re going to speak about the Rule that deals with the Divine Office. Here it is: We should take the greatest care to pray the Divine Office properly. We pray it in the Roman rite and in common, in a middle tone of voice, even when on missions. We do not sing it so as to leave more time for helping others. Exceptions to this would be houses where we are bound to Gregorian Chant because of obligations accepted, or students preparing to receive orders, or seminaries for diocesan students, and other suchlike commitments. No matter in what place or at what time we pray the canonical hours, we should remember the reverence, attention, and devotion with which we should do so, since we know for certain that we are at that moment praising God in our celebration, and therefore sharing in the role of angels.²

¹Prior to the reform of the Roman Breviary, what today are called Mid-morning, Mid-day, and Mid-afternoon prayer in the Divine Office of the Roman Rite were called Terce, Sext, and None. Vatican Council II, in its reform of the Liturgy of the Hours, dropped Prime from the Little Hours.
²Common Rules. Chap. X, Art. 5.
"That, my very dear confreres, is the Rule that concerns the Office. It's not the one that immediately follows what we started in the preceding conferences, but the Providence of God has allowed it this way to remedy the faults committed in it. That’s what made me think it would be opportune to speak to you according to the little method we observe and which applies to all the topics we discuss. We’ll divide this one into three points: in the first, we’ll look at the motives we have to give ourselves to God to pray and chant the Divine Office; in the second, how it should be done; and in the third, the means to remedy the failings we commit in this, and what should be done in the future to pray it well.

"The first motive we have, brothers, to give ourselves to God to pray the Divine Office well is what the Rule tells us: that it’s very important for us to carry out this duty properly and to chant God’s praises in a fitting manner. I’m afraid we don’t understand clearly what the praises of God are and the dignity of them. Now, the praises of God are not as small a matter as we may think. Do you know, my dear confreres, that the first act of religion is to praise God. Let’s go further; it even takes precedence over sacrifice. There’s a teaching that states, *prius est esse quam operari*: a thing must exist before it can operate, and it must exist before being sustained: *prius est esse quam sustentari*. We have to acknowledge the essence and existence of God and have some knowledge of His perfections before offering Him a sacrifice; that’s only natural; for, I ask you, to whom do you offer presents? To important persons, to Princes, to Kings; they’re the ones to whom you pay your respects. This is so true that God observed the same order in the Incarnation. When the angel went to greet the Blessed Virgin, he began by acknowledging that she was filled with graces from heaven: *Ave, gratia plena;*³ you are showered and filled with God’s favors, Madame; *Ave, gratia plena.* So then, he acknowledges her and praises her as being full of grace. And what does he offer her next? This beautiful gift of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy Spirit, taking the most pure blood of the Blessed Virgin, formed a body with it, then God created a soul in

³Cf. Lk 1:28. (NAB)
order to give life to this body; and immediately the Word is united to this soul and body by a marvelous union. In this way, the Holy Spirit brought about the ineffable Mystery of the Incarnation. Praise preceded sacrifice.

"This way of acting on the part of God shows us how we should conduct ourselves. First, the ambassador is sent; then, once the Virgin gives her consent, the effect immediately follows. Thus, the first act of religion is to acknowledge God in accordance with the attributes and perfections He possesses. Now, since it’s true that the first act of religion is to pray and chant the Divine Office well, you see, Messieurs, that we have to give ourselves to God to assure that the chant is what it should be. I make you yourselves the judges of that, and I call you to judge it in the inner recesses of your hearts. So then, that has to be our goal, namely, to perform this act with the greatest perfection possible. Alas! We prepare ourselves for the Sacrifice, and that’s how it should be, but we also need preparation for the praises of God, since they are a sacrifice; sacrificium laudis honorificabit me.4 This is the way by which we arrive at the salvation of His Son: et illic iter quo ostendam illi salutare Dei.5 And, in fact, is there anything more touching and pleasing than the holy desires and loving sentiments to be drawn from the seven Penitential Psalms? 6 Each verse—what am I saying—every word of each verse is like so many shafts of love of God which His Goodness shoots into a soul, piercing the heart so lovingly that it yearns unceasingly for God. Yes, brothers, one verse—no more is needed—is capable of sanctifying a soul, when it is tasted and savored with the devotion God asks.

"The second motive we have to give ourselves to God in order to pray and chant the Divine Office well is the offense against God, the sin we commit, when we don’t pray it in the manner our Rule prescribes. We might say that there’s something of the animal in the

4The sacrifice of praise will honor me. Cf. Ps 50:23. (NAB)
5And in that place is the journey by which I will reveal to him the salvation of God. Ibid.
6A group of seven psalms especially suitable for the use of penitents and considered, at least from the sixth century, as forming a class by themselves. In the New American Bible these are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.
attitude of a poor man who takes his place in choir, without reflecting on what he’s saying, and who, though he should be performing this action with respect, since he’s speaking to God, does it, nevertheless, like a dumb animal. Is there any greater sin than that of treating God this way in His presence? You know, my dear confreres, what casuists say about this, namely, that the Office must be prayed *digne, attente et devote.*7 So, what sin does the person who acts otherwise commit? You know in how many ways we offend God in praying the Office. And this must be true, since Saint Chrysostom says that God prefers the barking of dogs to the praises of a man who doesn’t pray them properly. God prefers the barking of a dog! Of a dog! Ah, brothers, it must really be a serious sin not to carry out this duty properly! Yes, the man who’s negligent in his efforts to pray the Office should consider himself a dog, since, being endowed with reason, he performs such a holy action in a way that’s worse than animal-like.

“The third motive for praying our Office well, Messieurs, is that this is to begin to do what we’ll be doing in heaven: *Eritis sicut angeli.*8 If we have that happiness of possessing this glory, we’ll be like the angels. ‘And will the saints be doing what the angels do?’ Yes, like them, they’ll be engaged in singing eternally the praises of God. Just look at those twenty-four elders in the Apocalypse, *Et viginti quatuor seniores ceciderunt coram Agno, habentes singuli cytharas, et cantabant canticum novum.*9 So, the saints praise God in heaven with the angels; and we’ll be eternally engaged in singing the praises of God, saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the God of hosts!’ So then, to pray the Divine Office properly is to imitate them here on earth. If this weren’t the case, how would so many Orders have been allowed to have no other mission in the Church than to sing the praises of God? The Carthusians, the Benedictines, and several others have as their main purpose to pray and chant the Office in order to draw down on earth the blessings of heaven and to establish a

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7 Worthy, attentively, and devoutly.
8 You will be like the angels.
9 And the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb with their harps, and they sang a new hymn. Cf. Rv 5:8-9. (NAB)
connection between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. And, in fact, how could so many foundations be made and so many Chapters established, which have no other duty but to chant the praises of God? Why would so many Kings, Princes, Lords, and other high-ranking persons have founded so many monasteries and Communities, except with a view to establish in the Church men who would praise God unceasingly? So then, that's the third and final motive I'm advancing.

"But, according to our Rule, what do we have to observe? You know that intention, diligence, and devotion are required. That's quite a few things, and there are a number of others, which would take a lot of time to explain.

"But, Monsieur, tell us what should be done." First of all, each individual should realize that the Office we pray should be the Roman Office because of the different places where we live; in Paris, the Roman is used, and the same in the other houses because of the seminaries and the ordinands from various dioceses who come to us, apart from the fact that we're obliged to go, now to one area, now to another, and it would be difficult to change the breviary each time. That's why we use the Roman one.

"The Rule states furthermore that we should pray it together. And, in fact, the Company has done this from its infancy, and those who have been here since that time know that it was customary to pray Matins, the Little Hours, and Vespers together. Each individual knows also that this is the practice in the other houses. When I hear the praises of God chanted in the spirit Our Lord asks of us, I'm more touched, you see, than I am by any other act of piety. So then, it's customary to pray it together in all our houses. In Richelieu there's an order for that, and it's the same in Saint-Méen and Cahors. In a word, the same thing is done everywhere. The Rule goes on to state that even when we're giving missions we should pray the Office in common. Why is that? Experience has shown that, when it wasn't recited in common, many men got behind, and some were still saying Prime in the evening; they even had to leave meals and absent themselves from community exercises to go to pray their office, which they had omitted at its proper time. Add to
that the haste with which it was prayed, and the lack of devotion they brought to it, along with a number of other drawbacks that would take too long for me to explain to you. And because, just as one candle doesn't give off as much light as several of them together, so we don't have as much fervor and devotion when we say our Office alone as when several of us come together to pray. I must confess that there's a sort of special blessing when we pray it like that. Now, the diligence we should have consists in pondering the words and the meaning of each word, reciting it calmly, and not running ahead. Anyone who tries to go fast would put himself in danger of not satisfying his obligations in any way and would scandalize those who might hear him.

"The way to pray it well is to observe the pauses and pronounce the words devoutly and distinctly. We're certainly touched when it's prayed in common. That's why you see the priests who come here on Tuesdays, and are waiting for the conference to begin, getting together in twos to pray the Office and, from what they've told me, they realize that there's a very special blessing in this. That's also why we've set down this practice, even during missions.

"Now, my dear confreres, we're guilty of what I've just mentioned. What did I say, that everyone was guilty! There's some excuse for everyone; I, wretched man, am the only one who has sinned for not having seen that this Rule was in vigor among us. I'm the only one answerable before God for all the sins and failings committed in the divine service because, in my wretchedness, I wasn't steadfast in seeing that things were observed according to what the Rule prescribed. Pray to Our Lord for me, Messieurs, that He may forgive me. But how has this happened? I repeat, it's because of my negligence, and I'm very well aware that, if God didn't have pity on me, and if He treated me according to my sins, I'd have to suffer torments in hell on that account. Let's tell the truth: at Saint-Lazare we don't keep that Rule at all; it seems as if it isn't made for us; off we go, some in this direction, some in the other, to say our Office in private—as if we weren't obliged to say it in common. Who's guilty of that, Messieurs? It's this miserable man, who would get down on his knees if he could—you'll excuse my infirmi-
ties. So then, we've fallen. Or sus, may the Divine Majesty be pleased to put us back on our feet again!

"The second thing to be observed is to pray the Office *media voce sine cantu*;\(^{10}\) that's what the Rule states, so as not to oblige Missioners to have a perpetual choir, as is done at Notre-Dame, in the other Chapters, and in many religious Orders. Our manner of praying the Office isn't a new invention; you have the Capuchins, the Minims, and a few other Communities that recite it *media voce*, and that's what we should do. That's what the Rule states, to recite it *media voce sine cantu*, in a low voice, so as to have time to devote to the ministries of the Mission. We have to make an exception for those houses founded with the obligation to pray it in choir and who are even obliged to chant it. Saint-Lazare used to be bound to this; the monks who came before us used to chant the Divine Office every day; but, when we replaced them, we had the Archbishop’s permission to pray it *media voce sine cantu*, on condition, however, that we would sing the High Mass and Vespers on Sundays and feast days. So, with the obligation to pray it in this manner, we accepted the Saint-Lazare house. A few others, which I don’t recall right now, have the same obligations.

"There are some other houses obliged to chant the Office, such as Richelieu, where we have the parish, and Cahors, and in Agde, where they’re obliged to chant it because of the office of Pastor that they hold. Add to that a few others houses, like Saint-Méen, where they’re obliged to pray the Office together and to chant High Mass, not only on Sundays and feast days but on several other days, because of foundations.\(^{11}\) I almost forgot to tell you that in some other houses, because of seminaries and the ordinands received there, we’re obliged to chant the Office sometimes in order to teach them. Well, in the other places where we’re obligated to pray the Office in choir and to sing High Masses and Vespers, we still go to a room to pray the Office all together. Those, Messieurs, are our obligations. So, in this house we chant it on certain days; apart from that, we

\(^{10}\)In a moderate voice, without singing.

\(^{11}\)A reference to the contract of foundation, which obliged the community to chant the Office on certain days for the intention of the benefactor who provided the funds.
should pray it together, and even when we’re giving missions. Now, if, according to our Rule, we’re obliged to pray it all together in a room or oratory, as is done in Richelieu and in other houses where there’s no foundation to chant it in choir, why shouldn’t we, who are obliged to pray it all together, and especially in this house or in church, why, I ask, shouldn’t we pray it in those places rather than privately in our own rooms? We certainly aren’t keeping that Rule at all, brothers.

“The means to remedy this disorder (because it has reached that point) is to consider the sin we’re committing. It’s not a small one, because we give those in other houses cause for not keeping this Rule, when they see that it’s not being observed in this house, which should be the standard and model for the others. That’s what has always made me stand firm and which should oblige us, as far as in us lies, in seeing that this practice is observed among us; otherwise, farewell to the Rule! Would you believe that there are persons who have complained of being made to go to the Office and have asked to be dispensed from it? That didn’t come from any senior priest but from a seminarian, who said to his director, because he had been at it for an entire week, ‘Monsieur, you’re making me spend too much time for the Office; please give me an exemption from it.’ Consider, please, where that leads. Consider also that, if we don’t rectify this disorder, the Office will no longer be prayed in common during missions; and the consequence of that will be that, because it wasn’t prayed at the proper times, we won’t be ready to go to the confessionals, excusing ourselves on the grounds that we haven’t prayed our Office. Lastly, consider the source of all that. I don’t think there’s anyone, Messieurs, who doesn’t see that this must come from a dissipated person who doesn’t love his vocation. That’s true, and I think that, if not all of us, at least most of the Company are of the same opinion about that as I am.

“But let’s see what human nature and the devil have to say: ‘Well, Monsieur, things have been that way for twenty years; don’t you know that the time limit has passed and this has become a custom? Oui-da, Monsieur, the custom has now been introduced into Saint-Lazare of no longer going to choir, except for those in the
seminary.' To that, Messieurs, in part I bow my head and am ashamed before God for the little attention I’ve given to maintaining that ancient practice, but I will say that we never place a time limit on anything contrary to divine things, though indeed we can set a statute of limitations for human things. Furthermore, there’s no time limit on this, since from time to time we’ve recommended attendance at Divine Office; that does away with the prescription you mention. What also hinders the prescription is that there are some in the Company who have always been present for the Office. God bless those men! God bless them, since they have prevented this prescription until Providence provided the opportunity to rectify the failings that have slipped into the Company and has permitted that be devout persons who have been there! That’s why, as long as there are some who uphold the law or a custom, it can’t be said that it’s been abrogated. Now, there have been persons in the Company who have upheld it, consequently, it’s a weak argument to say that this custom is no longer in vigor. Furthermore, when the Superior gives an order against those who are in violation of this practice, and when the Rules are renewed from time to time, no custom can prevail against that. I add the following: theologians think there will be no excuse before God and men for the person who, entering a Community and knowing its Rules and practices, doesn’t observe them because there’s a custom to the contrary. Having vowed them, he’s bound to observe them, and he’s inexcusable if he doesn’t.

"'Oh, what will be said of me if I go to the Office from now on? Oh, but, Monsieur. I’d have a hard time doing this. I say my Office all by myself. Monsieur. I’m well aware that we should be in Church, but there are enough men who go.' My dear confreres, there’s not much difference in praying it privately or in public, and I assure you that it’s just as hard praying it either way; for, please tell me, aren’t we supposed to pray it attentively and devoutly and observe the pauses when we say it privately? I assure you that I’ve never seen nor read a single theologian who doesn’t set down these conditions for praying it well. All respectable persons observe the pauses in order to nourish the spirit; to do the contrary is a sin. Do
you know what certain persons do? They mumble the first word; articulate poorly the second; then rush along any way you like. Do you call that singing God’s praises, Messieurs?

‘But, Monsieur, it takes time to get from my room to the choir.’ Eh, mon Dieu! Where does that lead? Eh, Savior of my soul! We see Chapters that don’t have their houses as close to the church, and they go to Matins, then return home, then go next to the Little Hours, to High Mass and Vespers, going and returning continually; and we, we would complain! I’ll say to our shame that there are eleven or twelve Canons of Notre-Dame who always go to Matins at midnight and never miss, unless they’re sick. Canons of Notre-Dame, leaders of a Chapter composed of very high-ranking persons, get up at midnight! M. de Ventadour, the Duc de Ventadour, has always risen to go to Matins at midnight. An English Prince, named . . . I don’t remember his name, it’s . . . leads this kind of life. M. de Parfait does the same. In a word, there are twelve of them who never fail to be there, except when they’re not well. O Sauveur! We see men of the world, who are very well off, so zealous as to rise at midnight in order to sing the praises of God, and we complain about going during the day from our room to the church! Brothers, see how far that leads, see how far our wretchedness is taking us!

‘But, Monsieur, I’m not well.’ The sick should be treated as sick persons; the yoke of Our Lord is easy and should be adjusted to the possibilities of each individual.

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Henri de Levis, duc de Ventadour, Peer of France, Prince de Maubisson and Comte de la Voulté. After having fought successfully against the Huguenots of Languedoc, he sought to extend the kingdom of God by means other than arms. In 1630 he established the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, together with Bro. Philippe d’Angoumois, Capuchin; Jean Suttren, S. J.; Charles de Condren of the Oratory; Henri de Pichery, the day-to-day steward of the King; and other important persons. Ventadour received subdiaconate on September 22, 1641, and, having ceded his titles of Duke and Peer to his brother Charles, accepted a canonry at Notre-Dame, Paris, in 1650. The proposed Congregation of Missionaries for the Indies never materialized. As Saint Vincent states in this conference, the very devout and mortified Duke rose regularly at midnight to recite Matins. He died on October 14, 1680, at the age of eighty-four. All that remains of his writings is a letter against the Jansenists. (Cf. Le due et la duchesse de Ventadour: un grand amour chrétien au dix-septième siècle [Paris, 1889]; Raoul Alher, La Compagnie du Très-Saint-Sacrement de l’autel à Marseille [Paris: Champion, 1909], pp. 10ff.)
"'But, Monsieur, I'm an Officer of the house.' It's only right that those men should be excused from it; sometimes they have to leave God for God; that's all right for them.

'To absent themselves from the divine service, others will say, 'Monsieur, I'm writing a sermon.' Do you know that the best means for preparing this sermon is to be present for the Office? That's where you'll come up with some holy thoughts.

"'I'm a student.' We'll see about these. Apart from the Jesuits, I don't think there's any religious Order or Community where those who are studying and are in Holy Orders and, consequently, are bound to pray the Office, are dispensed from going to choir. I know that the students with the Capuchins go to it; I don't know if the same is done everywhere else. The best means to study well, say the Capuchins, is to take part in the Office.

"'Ah, but, Monsieur, I have this problem.' It's up to each one of us to acknowledge before God if he can or cannot do it, and, after examining himself, to present the matter to the Superior, saying to him, 'Monsieur, please excuse me from Matins for ten days, two weeks, or a month.' Then it will be up to the Superior to examine conscientiously the excuse being given him. The person must then explain what is hindering him; and it's up to the Superior to consider before God if he should dispense the person; and the one who's planning to ask for this dispensation should first place himself before God and say to himself, 'If I were at the hour of death, would I be asking for this dispensation? Or, am I indifferent as to what the Superior will tell me? Does whatever thing I have to do equal what I ought to do?' But remember that nothing should be proposed without examining it previously before God and recognizing that it's just; for you know that the weakness of Superiors who grant dispensations without good reason doesn't excuse us before God. Saint Bernard calls that 'freedom to sin.' Notice that at times the Rule obliges us to do something under pain of mortal sin, when it has its basis in Scripture, or when something is ordered by virtue of holy obedience, or when, by a man's bad example, he leads others to do likewise. For example, as a senior priest in the house, I might want to be dispensed, with no good reason, from
several of my Rules, but I reflect that others, following my exam­
ple, will ask for the same thing. I’m guilty before God, by my bad
example, of not observing the Rules. In a word, we’re bound to
keep the Rule, and anyone who fails in this, and has recourse to the
Superior to be dispensed without good reason, always sins when
there is scandal and deliberate contempt, according to the theolo­
gians, either of the Rules or of the Superior’s observance of the
Rule. So let’s not mollify ourselves that our Rules don’t bind under
pain of sin.

“So, Messieurs, the time has come when God, who does all things
with weight, number, and measure, has made the truth known to us. I
was asleep but God, in His mercy, has awakened me and opened my
eyes to see how important it is to be steadfast in seeing that the Rule is
observed. The time has come, then, for us to acknowledge that we’re
bound to pray our Office in the way we’ve mentioned. Isn’t this
right? I make you the judges of that and call you to it in the inner re­
cesses of your hearts. So then, let’s pray our Office together, but let’s
do it in the choir. How happy will those be who begin tomorrow, and
how miserable will those be who criticize such a holy practice! Let’s
get on with it, but with no regrets, no delay. I think that each and
every one of us want to save ourselves and have a great desire to prac­
tice the Rule recommending the Office to us.

“Since this is one of the most important means for our sanctifica­
tion, we’ll give ourselves to God to use it. Hodie si vocem ejus
audieritis. Since you hear the voice of God knocking at your hearts,
saying that it’s the custom of the entire Company to pray the Office in
common, let’s give ourselves to Him from now on to witness to Him
our desire to render Him this honor. Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis.
Let’s delay no longer. Let’s remember to have that in capite, in
spiritu, that the priest is bound to pray the praises of God.

“Do you know, my dear confreres, that most priests—including
ourselves—don’t know how to chant because we haven’t made it our
priority to sing the praises of God, while others have preserved that

13 If today you hear his voice. Cf. Ps 95:7. (NAB)
14 In head and in spirit.
blessing of following the teachings of their fathers? That’s obvious in villages where they took the trouble to get good schoolmasters. Almost all the children know chant; and that has passed from father to son. The lay people and the peasants have preserved this blessing since God has restored order to His Office, willing that it be chanted in a devout manner. To my shame I have to say that, when I was a parish priest, I didn’t know how I should go about it; I’d hear those peasants intoning the psalms without missing a single note and I admired them. Then I’d say to myself, ‘You, who are their spiritual father, don’t know how to do that,’ and it distressed me. How shameful for priests, my dear confreres, that God has allowed the poor common people to retain the chant—God, who has such joy and pleasure, if I dare speak in this way, when people sing His praises!

“I entreat you, by the pleasure God takes in the Office we pray, to be present at it and to be punctual; I also entreat you to do this because of the inconveniences you know may arise, and they’re very great ones. Eh, how do we know what might happen if only the seminary knew how to chant and it became necessary to put it elsewhere and form it apart, as the Jesuits and Capuchins do? Who would keep the Rule, Messieurs? To avoid religious houses having more subjects than they could feed, the Pope has ordered in Italy that no novice may enter an Order or monastery without his permission. Even the Jesuits go to His Holiness and say, ‘This man is presenting himself; does Your Holiness approve of our accepting him?’ If a similar measure were imposed in France, Messieurs, either by order of the Pope or by some other order (Wasn’t it the Emperor Maurice15 who forbade accepting soldiers into religious Orders?), who, I repeat, would pray the Office?

“I have nothing else to say to you, except that—just let me say this once more—tomorrow at meditation let’s enter into the inner recesses of our hearts in order to place ourselves in the presence of God, and, in His sight, examine if it’s not right for us to observe this practice. I beg the whole Company to ask this earnestly of God, with the perfect confidence we should have that He will grant us

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15 An outstanding General and emperor (582-602), one of the most important rulers who shaped the early Byzantine Empire.
this favor. No one, then, should dispense himself from the Office
without permission from the Superior, who is bound to examine the
matter very closely. Ah! I don't think there's anyone here who
won't sacrifice himself most willingly to chant and pray the praises
that are, so to speak, part of glory. God listens with joy and pleasure
to the praises we give Him. Well then! Let's all be animated with
the spirit we need to begin tomorrow to sing the praises of God.
This will be our prayer to Him.”

214. - ILLUSIONS AND GENUINE INSPIRATIONS
(Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 16)

October 17, 1659

“My dear confreres, this is the sixteenth article concerning
Gospel teachings, which we have to discuss, and here's the text:
The evil spirit often disguises himself as an angel of light, and now
and then tricks us with his illusions. All of us must be ever alert for
these tricks and should pay particular attention to learning how to
recognize and overcome them. Experience has shown that the most
effective and surest remedy in such cases is to discuss them as soon
as possible with those appointed by God for this. So, if anyone feels
himself troubled by ideas which seem to be in some way misleading,
or upset by acute anxiety or temptation, he should tell his Superior,
or a Director appointed for this, as soon as possible so that the
matter can be competently dealt with. And he should accept with
approval, as coming from God's hand, whatever solution is
suggested, and put it into practice with confidence and respect.
Above all, he should take care not to discuss it in any way with any-
one else, whether a member of the Congregation or not. Experience
has shown that this worsens the problem, causes similar trouble for
others, and can, in the long run, even do serious damage in the
whole Congregation.
“So then, my very dear confreres, this is the topic we have to consider. We’ll try to explain this article the way we did in previous conferences. First, we’ll look at the reasons we have for giving ourselves to God to discern the spirit of light from that of darkness, the good angel from the evil one, and genuine inspirations from false illusions. That’s the first point. In the second, we’ll speak about illusions, their nature and causes, and the principal ones found in the Company. Lastly, we’ll give the signs for distinguishing genuine inspirations from false ones; and, if we have time, we’ll look at how we should act in order to contend against the illusions of the evil spirit.

“The first reason, brothers, is that everything is at stake—I mean, our eternal happiness or unhappiness, our salvation or damnation. aiming at distinguishing genuine inspirations from deceptive ones, embracing the good and shunning the evil ones. To put it in a nutshell, our main concern is to realize the importance of discerning the teachings of Jesus Christ from those of the devil. All the misfortune that has come into the world through our first father, stripped of holiness and deprived of the innocent state in which he had been created, causing human nature to be subject today to all God’s justice and to the ills that must be suffered—all this comes from deceptive inspirations, yes, my dear confreres, deceptive inspirations. And to help you realize the truth of this, please listen to the language the spirit of darkness used with our first parents:¹ ‘Why, why don’t you eat the fruit of life?’ said the malicious spirit. ‘We’ve been forbidden to do so.’ ‘Ah! no, it’s not that at all, you’re mistaken; the real reason is that, if you eat it, eritis sicut dii,² you’ll become like gods, and, in addition, you’ll have knowledge of good and evil.’

“All the miseries we have to endure proceed from these deceptive inspirations, deceptive inspirations, which are supposed to help us understand all of the world’s insights. Don’t think this is as minor a matter as you imagine, my dear confreres, because it’s no small sin to have reduced everyone to suffering such violent, continual evils, of

¹Cf. Gn 3:1-24. (NAB)
²Cf. Gn 3:5. (NAB)
which the very thought is horrifying and makes one prefer death to such a miserable life. O Messieurs! O my dear confreres! Who will give us the grace to discern clearly between good and evil, the snares and tricks of the evil spirit and, finally, the adversities into which poor human nature has fallen through illusions?

“The second motive is that deceptive insights usually assail people who have withdrawn from the world more than they do others. The devil makes little effort to attract people of the world to his side; he has only to suggest to them what he wants, and he’s obeyed immediately; he has himself worshiped by them because of the hope he gives them that they’ll enjoy the pleasures they seek; he has a hold on them, manipulates them, lets them run where they please, and allows them to give themselves to this to their heart’s content, certain that they’ll always be subject to him and will respect his orders. Those, however, who have left the world in order to live with Jesus Christ are more subject to illusions. In fact, we should keep in mind that, while Our Lord conversed with people and was in recollection with His Father, He wasn’t tempted; but, when He withdrew into the desert and began to practice greater penance than before, it was then that the evil spirit tempted Him and was brazen enough to test Him three different times. In accordance with that, as God has given us the grace of withdrawing us from worldly concerns, we have reason to believe that we’re more exposed to illusions than people of the world. That, my dear confreres, is the second motive.

“The third is, strictly speaking, that it’s devout persons, who live in the spirit and in a spiritual way, who should know how to discern deceptive inspirations from authentic ones, as much for their own good, as for the consolation of our neighbor. They have received the insights the Holy Spirit communicates to those who give themselves to Him and are aware of having the intelligence and even the experience to help souls who are prone to do things that lead to their downfall. Alas! How many persons do we see, and how many have past centuries seen, who have enlightened an infinite number of souls, even though they weren’t called to the priesthood, whose very role is to be the light of the world! If that’s the case, Messieurs—which we should in no way doubt—how much more are
we priests obliged to inform ourselves of these things and to learn which ones are genuine insights, so we can free from deception those who walk in darkness, and console souls plagued by false illusions! And if we don’t do it, we’re guilty before God of as many souls who perish by our fault, because our priestly character obliges us to that; and if the laws of God were lost, we would have to reestablish them. People have the right to ask this of us because we’re their legislators and their teachers. That’s why we must know how to discern genuine inspirations. This gives you three reasons. Assuming all this to be true, let’s see what illusion is.

“Illusion can actually be understood in various ways. Lawyers are accustomed to use this word in their pleas; that’s why it’s said that they’re illusory and deceptive. Now, it’s not in this sense that our Rule understands it; it understands it as a false light, a misleading inspiration that the devil plants in the imagination, whose images go to the understanding, and the influences and reflections pass to the will. That’s the way and the sense in which we should understand our Rule on this.

“‘But what are you saying, Monsieur? ‘A false light,” you say. Quoi! They make things look different from what they are! You’re saying that what’s as white as a swan is as black as a crow, and what’s black as a crow is as white as a swan!’ Yes, I’m saying that a false light that the devil produces in the imagination represents to it elements different from the reality of the things they’re supposed to show. So, these images enter into the imagination, rise to the understanding, and are finally reflected on the will; the result is that this angel of darkness makes what is black appear white, and what is only a lie to be truth.

“‘But what are you saying, Monsieur? That’s very strange! Is it found elsewhere?’ Yes indeed, nature itself has its illusions. Persons who have been to Montmirail have seen a tree trunk changed into stone. But how does that happen? I don’t know by what power the wood bonds with the stone, but there’s a transformation of one into the other, so that what used to be wood appears to be stone. The wood is still there, it’s wood; but what’s happening? Your eyes say that it’s wood, and the moss that surrounds it, the distinguishing
features, and the veins that appear tell you that it’s wood, but touching it tells you that it’s stone. That’s an illusion, my dear confreres. What does nature do? A tree is cut, a slip is grafted on to it, and, when it has taken, a wild stock is transformed into a tree, so that what was previously an apple tree is today a pear tree. What’s that? It’s an illusion. I met a man who had a certain pointed awl, which, as he pressed it down, would retract; that man would stick it down his throat, and everyone, seeing him put it in his mouth, would cry out, ‘Pull it out, pull it out.’ Even though the point seemed to go down into his throat, it really didn’t; and in this way that man fooled everyone. Strictly speaking, what is eloquence? An illusion, which makes good appear bad, and bad good, causing people to take truth for falsehood and falsehood for truth, and, by some intricacy and order of words, flatters and charms the listener at the same time as it tricks him.

“Now, my dear confreres, if there are so many illusions in the world, judge whether the author of lies, the devil, who transforms himself into an angel of light, as Saint Paul says,\(^3\) can’t do them. If human beings, whose knowledge is very slight and limited, can easily fool one another, what, I ask you, might not the evil spirit do, who knows everything and is skillful enough to make objects appear in as many different ways as he pleases? Do you want to know what the evil spirit is in our regard? He’s nothing but illusion and deception. Crafty as he is, he persuades us that we’ll be happy if we achieve this or that; he deludes us into believing that to be applauded for our success in preaching is even for the glory of God and that we should make a name for ourselves in a province. Ah, Savior! How many snares, how many deceptions, how many tricks our enemy uses to bring to ruin the creatures You have redeemed by Your Precious Blood!

“‘But, Monsieur,’ you’ll say to me, ‘the devil is well aware of this; and haven’t people been able to identify the elements and tricks of the illusions the evil spirit uses?’ Eh, who could do that? Remember, however, that, when we fall into sin, illusions are there

\(^3\)Cf. 2 Cor 11:14. (NAB)
because, in committing sin, we’re abandoning the Sovereign Good to run after an imaginary one.

"Ah, mon Sauveur! How many pitfalls there are for us! How many inspirations we need to evade the deceits of the demons! Oh, if the first man, whom God had admitted into His holiness, fell into the trap with the first step he took; if the angels, who were created as so many lights, were overshadowed and fell into the trap, and, after being defeated in battle by Saint Michael for being unwilling to obey God’s orders, were thrown into hell, who, my dear conferees, should not be afraid after falls like those? And who will be exempt from them?

"But, Monsieur, how does he do it?" He knows the tendencies that contribute to arousing this or that passion; he knows how to stir them up; and so, by the false inspirations he plants in our mind, he causes us to fall. He knows all our moods; he knows our personal and private actions; he sees the ones that can give a bad light; he knows how to put those tendencies together and from them to create an impression, which passes from the imagination to the understanding and from there presents itself to the will, prompting it to give its consent. But how does he do that? Or is that all he does? He tempts us, from another angle, using creatures as so many traps to make us slip up. You know the story of Saint Anthony and how he was tempted by the image of indecent creatures the devil would form in his imagination, pictures of certain very beautiful women, who appeared completely nude. The devil also has the trick of forming certain bodies in the air, so that when the creature sees these objects, he very often lets himself be carried away. Let’s add to this bad dreams, which, often enough, are the work of the devil.

"On this point, I’m going to tell you again a story I’ve often told you; it’s about Pope Clement VIII, whom I had the honor of seeing. You know the problems that arose in France regarding Henry IV."

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4Saint Anthony of Egypt, hermit (251-356).

5Although baptized a Catholic at birth, Henry of Navarre was brought up as a Calvinist (Huguenot) by his mother, Jeanne d’Albret, but made profession of the Catholic faith in 1572 on the evening of the Saint Bartholomew Day Massacre to marry Marguerite de Valois and to avoid the rigorous treatment of her brother, King Charles IX, whose prisoner he was. However, he reverted to his original religion as soon as he was free. He inherited the throne of France in 1589, but the religious right prevented his ascension to it. On July 25, 1593, at Saint-Denis, he abjured Calvinism once again, realizing that this was necessary to gain acceptance from the Pope and
This Prince had been a heretic and relapsed into heresy, obliging his subjects to renounce the obedience they would have rendered him if he hadn’t declared himself, for the second time, an enemy of the Catholic religion. Feeling bound by conscience to retract his errors, and seeing that the people were refusing to submit to his laws, this King immediately contacted Rome in order to seek reconciliation. The Pope said that he had relapsed into heresy and, consequently, it was unlikely that he had changed, and that it was the desire to reign, rather than the desire to be converted, that was urging him to seek reconciliation. On hearing that, the King sent his ambassadors back; the Pope refused, as previously; however, fearing that the King would send his ambassadors back a third time, he fasted and prayed in order to know whether he should dispense the people whom he had forbidden to submit to the King as long as the latter remained obstinate. Finally, after doing a great deal of penance and mortification, and having prayers offered for this intention, he decided to accept him for penance and to oblige his subjects to render him obedience. Some days later, this holy man was called during the night before the tribunal of God, where he was reproached for having exposed God’s people to a repulsive man and ordering Catholics to submit to a murderer. This vision tormented him, and it was said that he experienced the same sufferings Saint Jerome was supposed to have felt when he was flogged. This holy Pope, finding himself in this state and fearing he had given in too easily to the King, sent for some holy persons to get their advice. None of them satisfied him, however, until his confessor, Cardinal Tolet, told him that what was tormenting him was an illusion, and that once he had acted with all the prudence required by the affair in question, and had done everything with advice and many prayers, he should

from his people. Received in Paris in 1594, he was crowned King of France at Chartres on February 27. After two years of hesitation, Clement VIII (1592-1605) consented to absolve him, and Henry IV never wavered again. (Cf. Abbé Antoine Degert, Le Cardinal d’Ossat, évêque de Rennes et de Bayeux (1537-1604) [Paris: Lecoffre, 1894]).

Francisco Cardinal de Toledo, S.J., his confessor. Born in Córdoba on October 4, 1532, Toledo died in Rome on September 14, 1596. He was a brilliant philosophy professor at the Roman College and carried out successfully various diplomatic missions. He wrote several treatises on philosophy and theology and was especially renowned for a work on casuistry, often republished: Instructio sacerdotum ac de septem peccatis (Rome, 1601). It was reissued in 1604, 1608, 1633, and several times later, under the title Summa casuum conscientiae absolutissima.
remain at peace and believe that everything that happened was according to God’s Will. That relieved him of his anxiety.

“So then, what had happened? The Pope was under an illusion; the devil tried to upset him, not only during the day, by making creatures appear in a succession of images, but even during sleep. Illusion, then, doesn’t occur only in the first or second way, but also in the third, that is, during sleep. That’s why we’re going to examine these illusions, even the ones that occur when we’re asleep.

“There’s another illusion, of extraordinary things, a false light. Someone will come to you saying he has an urge and hears something like an interior voice crying out to him incessantly that he should leave his wife. What would you call that, brothers? It’s sheer folly. When we hear such bizarre ideas, that’s when we need insights from heaven, so we can give helpful advice to people like that when they come to us. We also need these insights to advise those who have lofty ideas about living a life out of the ordinary and would like to change their state or rank. So then, we have to be informed, theoretically and practically, about the nature and diversity of illusions so as never to fail in this and to avoid the traps and pitfalls of the devil, with the help of God.

“But what signs will we have for recognizing these false insights? To save time, I’ll mention only three or four. The first is to discern whether it’s a genuine inspiration or whether it’s an illusion, by considering the substance of the thing and all the circumstances surrounding it. For example, a man wants to leave his wife; if it’s with her consent and for some good purpose, that’s fine! The Church allows this in certain cases. Someone wants to enter a Community; we have to see whether it’s against the Commandments of God and the Church or contrary to the laws of the State.

“Another sign for discerning an illusion is if there’s something superstitious in it. You’ll know that there’s superstition involved in this or that thing if it has to be done so many times, at such and such a time, saying certain words, mixing certain herbs together, and doing it in the presence of certain persons of a particular rank and age. If so, we can conclude: all that’s an illusion.

“The third sign is when these illusions nag and upset us and make us uneasy. The reason for this is that the Spirit of God never
upsets us: *Non in commotione Dominus.* So, when someone comes complaining to us, telling us his pains, sufferings, and inspirations, and we see that he reacts to them with anxiety, bitterness, and impatience, we can conclude that it's an illusion, for God's Spirit is a spirit of peace, a gentle inspiration that slips in without any commotion. *Non in commotione Dominus.* Everything He does is always followed by calmness and gentleness; and, because He's the God of peace and union, He can't tolerate any disturbance or division. If, by the ministry of angels, He sometimes communicates a favor to us, it will be easy to recognize that this insight comes from Him if it slips sweetly into our soul, prompting us to seek the greater glory of God. That, my dear confreres, is a common standard, but one that makes it easy to discern genuine inspirations from false ones.

"Fourth and lastly, if we sense this within ourselves, or if our Superior or our confessor notices it, it would be an illusion, a false light, to be unwilling to submit this insight to them, or to accept what they tell us regarding it, for the Spirit of God leads into submission those He inspires; the spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of obedience; to refuse to obey is to resist the Will of God. *Or sus,* take, for example, a matter of importance that arises and that concerns us; what should be done? We have to seek advice. If the person receives the advice given him gently, calmly, and serenely, and accepts it, that's a sign that there's no illusion in what he's doing and adopting.

"These four signs are very common; but, after thinking about whether there are any others—in the past I've heard other people talk about this—I felt these sufficed, or that any other ones were similar to them.

"'Eh quoi, Monsieur! You're saying that the devil sets traps to do harm, that he tries to prevent us from following our Rules, that he's always lying in wait; what do you think of that?" Those, my dear confreres, are false insights. Why is it that we don't show up to pray the Office? What's the source of that individualism of some members of the Company, causing them to place so little value on

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7The Lord was not in the earthquake. Cf. 1 Kgs 19:11. (NAB)
the practices and advice they’re given? Whose work is this? Who’s the author of it? Isn’t it the evil spirit, who puts into our minds the false insights and imaginary reasons with which we flatter ourselves in order to dispense ourselves from our obligations? Ah! mon Sauveur! Ah! mon Sauveur! Ah! mon Sauveur! How many snares the demon lays out for us, and who will give us the grace of avoiding them?

“But what can we do to protect ourselves from illusions and to help those who are assailed by them? The first means, you see, is that a supernatural enlightenment from God is necessary in order to discern true insights from false ones. We must ask this of God. ‘But I’m a Brother, I don’t understand what an illusion is. You’ve made me a priest; I don’t realize the dignity of this; I don’t recognize the insights concerning this; I don’t know how to help my neighbor, who’s being tried by illusions, if You, my God, don’t give me genuine insights to discern the false ones. That’s the grace we ask of You, Lord.’

“Second, we mustn’t be too curious in trying to discern those false lights because curiosity makes us mull over our actions and examine them in various ways. When the devil sees this desperate effort to understand, he takes the occasion to disturb a poor soul and to twist it until it falls into the trap. God usually punishes with illusions those who want to know about miracles and to probe into things that should be kept hidden from them. Ah, Messieurs! Ah, Brothers! Let’s flee all curiosity and think only about humbling ourselves, have no esteem for ourselves, believe ourselves unworthy of seeing the light of day, convince ourselves that we merit being abandoned by everyone, and see in ourselves only reasons for the exercise of God’s justice. A person like that is not subject to illusions. We must, then, humble ourselves before God, see only poverty and wretchedness in ourselves, reject all thoughts opposed to that, and rid ourselves of all individualism and every desire to be successful in all our actions. Then we’ll have discernment of deceptive insights. But, what is it if we seek the contrary? It’s subtle pride, my dear confreres. If we examine ourselves closely and think of ourselves as children of Adam, children of anger and malediction,
how fortunate we are! Humility, then, and not only with regard to ourselves, but let’s propose it to the persons with whom we have the honor of coming in contact. Humility, wanting to know *ad sobrietatem*, wanting to do what God wants us to do and, after all the sins we’ve committed, being astounded that His Goodness puts up with us. Alas, brothers, if we don’t know ourselves, it’s because we don’t examine ourselves!

“Are you really aware that we’re worse than the demons? Yes, worse than the demons! For, if God had given them one-tenth of the graces He’s given us, *mon Dieu*, what use would they not have made of them? Ah! What wretched men you are! You’ve been redeemed by the Precious Blood of an incarnate God, you have actual graces to live the life of Jesus Christ, and yet you’ve scorned them! What punishment do you not deserve?

“*Sus donc!* Let's look very carefully into ourselves; and when we’ve done all we should, let’s conclude that we’re useless servants, yes, useless servants; let’s remember that, after our actions have been carefully examined with regard to their essence, their qualities, and their circumstances, we’ll see that we’ve done nothing worthwhile in our entire life. If we want to see this truth more deeply, let’s look at how we made our meditation this morning, how we prayed the Little Hours, how we spent the morning, and so on for the rest of the day. Let’s go back to other days, please, and examine all our actions before God and how we carried them out.

“I don’t know how it is with others, but for myself I know that I deserve to be punished; I know you’re good, that you love God, that you’re sincere, and that you walk rightly before His Divine Majesty; but in myself, alas, I see nothing but what merits punishment. All my actions are nothing but sins, and that’s what makes me fear God’s judgments. I could say much more about this, but, frankly, I’d get too involved. Be that as it may, let’s say that, after we’ve carried out our Rules exactly, we’re useless servants; let’s have no doubt about that, for it’s the Son of God himself who said it.

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8Reasonably.
"Or sus, what are we going to do about all this, except to give ourselves to God that He may be pleased to put in our hands the weapons to combat the evil spirit. If we've fallen, if we have any illusion, let's run to God and remain at peace. But let's never reveal these things to anyone except to those who have the grace for that, namely, the Superior or the spiritual father of the house. Our Rules say that, if we knew the evil we do by telling a third or a fourth party, we'd certainly never reveal anything to anyone other than to those God has appointed for that. Would you believe, Messieurs, that those evils affect the entire Company! Just as our good actions are a credit to the whole body of the Community because of the union that exists between the members and their head, it's the same for all the harm those bad communications do to the entire Company. Oh! Isn't it a great pity to see in a Community persons who complain and find fault with everything! 'Ah! What's this? What's that? What good is that? Eh! Has anyone ever done that?' What good can come from it? A man shares these bad feelings with others: that one tells someone else; that makes two of them; then it goes from that second man to a third; and in this way the entire Community becomes infected with this poison. Someone says, 'There's a Brother who does such and such; there's a priest, there's an Officer,' etc. Where will that end, my dear confères, except with the ruination of a Company? Ah! If it pleases God to rectify this disorder, and if today we take the resolution to give ourselves to His Divine Goodness and never to reveal our troubles to anyone but those whom He places over us, O Brothers, O Messieurs, how happy we'll be! Not that there aren't any virtuous senior confères here, but, for the man who submits himself to his Superior there's no likelihood of error, since he's doing God's Will. 'It's not you,' He says, 'who decided to do that, it's I who have commanded it of you through your Superior.' And I assure you that, if you have recourse to him, you'll never go wrong. Let's act like that, asking God to instruct the Company about the things we just mentioned and to give us the weapons appropriate for fighting illusions. That's the grace we'll ask of Him."