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

CORRESPONDENCE

CONFERENCES, DOCUMENTS

II

CONFERENCES

VOLUME XI

NEWLY TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND ANNOTATED

FROM THE 1923 EDITION

OF

PIERRE COSTE, C.M.
To

THE ORGANIZERS
OF
THE INTERNATIONAL FORMATION CENTER (CIF)

In recognition of their efforts to facilitate a return to the sources by offering programs and experiences that encourage confreres to keep alive the fire of knowledge, love, and appreciation of Saint Vincent de Paul in living the spirit and charism today.
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INTRODUCTION TO THE FRENCH EDITION

If care had been taken to collect and preserve all the conferences of Saint Vincent to his confreres at the Collège des Bons-Enfants⁴ or at Saint-Lazare,² ten thick volumes could not contain them. He spoke to them often: every Friday, at Chapter in the morning and at the conference in the evening; on Sundays, Wednesdays, and feast days; and at Repetition of Prayer.³ The practice of virtue, the duties

⁴On March 1, 1624, Jean-François de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, turned over to Saint Vincent the direction of the Collège des Bons-Enfants so that he might have a place to lodge priests wishing to join him in giving missions in the country. Situated near the Porte Saint-Victor, on the site of the building now standing on the corner of rue des Écoles and rue Cardinal-Lemoine, this collège, nearly three hundred years old, was one of the oldest of the University of Paris. It was not a teaching center, but simply a hostel in which students were provided with shelter and sleeping quarters.

²Saint-Lazare was outside the city limits of Paris. At its greatest extent, the buildings and enclosure covered a vast quadrangle which today is encompassed by rue du Paradis, rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis, boulevard de la Chapelle, and rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière. (Cf. Jean Parrang, “Saint-Lazare” in *Petites Annales de S. Vincent de Paul*, 1903, pp. 13-30.) In his petition to Pope Urban VIII (cf. I, 248-57), Saint Vincent gives a detailed description of the situation of Saint-Lazare in 1634.

³Adrien Le Bon, Canon Regular of Saint Augustine and Prior of Saint-Lazare, offered the priory to Saint Vincent. The generous offer alarmed the saint who refused it—several times—until a trusted advisor, André Duval, convinced him of the wisdom of this agreement. The contract was signed on January 7, 1632 (cf. VIII, 263). The following day Saint Vincent and his men went to live at Saint-Lazare. Le Bon also donated a number of farms for the support of the Congregation.

When references to other volumes of this series are given, the number of the volume will be given in bold Roman numerals, the page in italics, and, if applicable, the number of the footnote preceded by “n.”, e.g., (cf. V, 243, n. 4). Where there is reference to another conference in vols. XI-XII, the reference will be given in the form used in the following example: (cf. XI, Conf. 11).

⁵Repetition of Prayer was a practice dear to Saint Vincent. Two or three times a week, before the end of the meditation made in church, he asked three or four confreres to give an account of their meditation: judgments, inspirations, resolutions, or a reflection that resulted from pondering the topic assigned for meditation. In instituting this exercise, which lasted ten to fifteen minutes, Saint Vincent envisaged three results: to verify the existence of a prayer life and keep an eye on its development; to stimulate and nourish meditation; and to direct the Community at a moment where it was particularly open to supernatural influences. The collection mentioned here contains a certain number of Repetitions whose dates were established by means of a particular day of the week. François Lefort, who entered the Congregation of the Mission on July 14, 1657, testified at the Process of Beatification for Saint Vincent that the saint himself made Repetition every Sunday and Wednesday and gave a conference every Friday. In thirty-five years Saint Vincent probably presided over some two thousand Repetitions of Prayer. We have the text for only fifty-two of these, dated for the most part from the years 1655-57.
of their state, the explanation of the Rules, and the lessons to be
drawn from the feast days of the year were the usual subjects of his
talks. To these he added recommendations he judged useful and
news that was of interest to the Company, especially news of distant
missions such as Scotland, the Hebrides, Poland, Barbary, and
Madagascar. The words issuing from his mouth came from the
abundance of his heart, and he did not notice that time was passing.
When the clock indicated that it was time to conclude, a surprised
Vincent de Paul still had a great deal to say. He apologized for being
so loquacious, adding that he was about to conclude, and he did, in
fact, come to a close, even if he sometimes allowed himself to get
carried away by what he was saying and went far beyond the ap­
pointed time (cf. XI, Conf. 134 and 161).

He didn’t try to find the right thoughts or words; everything
flowed from his heart. His recommendations to the confrères to be
simple in their preaching were much more easily accepted when he
put his own advice into practice. He wasn’t one of those who speak
“in a declamatory tone that goes way over people’s heads.”

In these familiar talks, he sometimes interrupted himself to ques­
tion his confrères or to get some information or detail from them. In
one conference he was saying, “We’ve seen ancient philosophers,
who disdained wealth to a very high degree, even though they were
pagans; look at one of them—I forget his name... . Don’t you remem­
ber it, M. de la Fosse?”4 No one in the group knew pagan antiquity as

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4Jacques de la Fosse, born in Paris on November 25, 1621, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 8, 1640, took his vows on April 7, 1643, and was ordained a priest in September 1648. Immediately after his ordination, Saint Vincent entrusted to him the humanities at Saint-Charles Seminary. He “often reenacted there Christian tragedies,” wrote Pierre Collet (La vie de St. Vincent de Paul [2 vols., Nancy: A. Leseure, 1748], vol. I, p. 326), “whose spirit and sublimity drew the applause of connoisseurs in Paris.” In 1656 he went to Marseilles, where he served in turn as missioner and seminary professor. Two years later he was sent to Troyes. He died in Sedan on April 30, 1674. De la Fosse was as generous as he was capricious, easily becoming enthusiastic and just as easily becoming discouraged. Several times he almost left the Company; only Saint Vincent’s paternal encouragement kept him from doing so. His writings, all in Latin, made a name for him among the Latinists of the seventeenth century. Collet says he was “an orator, philosopher, and theologian all in one, and such a great poet that Santeuil considered him his rival and sometimes his master” (ibid., vol. I, p. 277). Dom Calmet added: “In general, there is great passion and many noble, generous thoughts in de la Fosse’s poetry, but his penchant for mythology, even in his sacred verses, sometimes renders them obscure because of his unusual expressions and frequent allusions to fable.” (Cf. Augustin Calmet, Bibliothèque
well as Jacques de la Fosse. Immediately the latter answered, “It was Diogenes,” but Saint Vincent wasn’t convinced and continued, “All right then, Diogenes, if he’s the one.” (Cf. Conf. 110)

Another time, the saint gave the gist of a scriptural reference but forgot the exact wording. “How does that go?” he asked. “Does anyone remember?” It was Antoine Portail who stood up and gave the answer.

Vincent de Paul loved to display his “ignorance”; he took as much joy in it as others do in displaying their knowledge. One day, giving an interpretation of these words of the Psalmist, Ut jumentum factus sum apud te, he fumbled on the translation, unsure whether jumentum was masculine or feminine. Anyone else would have let it go; that was easily done; but not he; he was happy to have a fresh opportunity to humble himself. “I’ve acted with God and men like a


5Antoine Portail, born in Beaucaire (Gard) on November 22, 1590, came to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. He met Saint Vincent there around 1612 and became devoted to him. From the time of his ordination (1622) until his death in 1660, he was the auxiliary of the saint. The latter assigned him to the service of the galley convicts, received him as the first member of his new Congregation, initiated him into the ministry of the missions and the work of the ordinands, chose him as First Assistant in 1642, and entrusted to him the direction of the Daughters of Charity. In 1646 Portail left Paris to make visitations of the houses of the Congregation. He began in the west of France, then went south, crossed into Italy, and did not return to Saint-Lazare until September 1649. Except for a fairly long absence in 1655, he hardly ever left the Motherhouse again and died on February 14, 1660, after an illness of nine days. (Cf. Notices sur les prêtres, clercs et frères défunts de la Congrégation de la Mission [10 vols. in two series, Paris: Dumoulin, 1881-1911], vol. I, pp. 1-94. This text is henceforth cited as Notices.)

6If was like a brute beast in your presence. Cf. Ps 73:22-23. (NAB)

Translations of scripture quotations are usually taken from the New American Bible (NAB), unless a passage cannot be found in that edition or a more suitable rendering of the quote is found in the Douay-Rheims Bible (D-R B). Where there are variations in the numbering of the psalms in these two editions, both versions may be cited. Saint Vincent referred to Scripture innumerable times; occasionally he gives an incorrect rendition or attributes the passage to the wrong person. This edition does not give references for all the allusions, many of which are already familiar to the reader. For further study of Saint Vincent’s use of Scripture, see the following studies: Warren Dicharry, C.M., “Saint Vincent and Sacred Scripture,” Vincentian Heritage, VII, no. 2, 1989, 137-49; Maurice Vansteenkiste, C.M., “Les Règles Communes et la Bible, Citations explicites, implicites, et réminiscences,” CD-ROM Documents vincentiens, Ecrits et Images, Claude Lautissier, C.M., Paris 2002; and François Garner, “Enchiridion Spirituale Sancte Vincenti a Paulo IV: Textes Bibliques Cités par Saint Vincent,” Vincentiana, 23 (1979): 214-19, among others.
mule—male or female," he said. "I’m so stupid that I don’t know whether to make ‘mule’ masculine or feminine." It would be difficult to find such amiable simplicity joined to such great humility.

To simplicity was added warmth, a contagious warmth that moved hearts deeply because it flowed from a heart totally permeated with the truths he was proclaiming—from the heart of a saint. Nothing serves the interest of an orator better than profound conviction. Two words coming from his mouth often produced a greater effect than a long discourse. Just by using the interjections so familiar to him, such as "O Jésus! mon Dieu! O Sauveur!" Saint Vincent found the way to affect his listeners, so animated were the tone of his voice and his facial expressions.

As one of the best examples of his eloquence—and rightly so—the following passage, taken from one of his conferences, has been noted: "I leave you to ponder, my dear confreres, the great danger our unfortunate confrere the Consul of Algiers and so many poor French Christian slaves are in.... O Sauveur! O mon Sauveur! What will become of those poor men? What will they do? But what will our poor confrere do, this man who left his country, his region, his relatives, and his birthplace, where he could be leading an easy life? Yet, he abandoned all that for God, to serve God and to assist his neighbor, that is, those poor slaves!

I’m talking about M. Bourdaise, my dear confreres, M. Bourdaise, who is so far away and all alone, and who, as you’ve heard, has brought forth in Jesus Christ with such trouble and care so many of those poor natives of the country in which he now is. Let’s also pray for him. M. Bourdaise, are you still alive or not? If you are, may it please God to will to preserve your life! If you’re in heaven, pray for us.”

“Shouldn’t a passage like this,” writes Abbé Brémont, “be familiar to all of us from our secondary school days? Isn’t it worthy of

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7Toussaint Bourdaise, born in Blois (Loir-et-Cher) in 1618, entered the Internal Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris on October 6, 1645, and took his vows there on October 7, 1647. He was ordained a priest in 1651, even though his talent and knowledge had been questioned a number of times (cf. XI, no. 177). In 1654 he was sent to Madagascar, where he died on June 25, 1657. Cf. Notices, vol. III, pp. 180-214).

being compared to the three wonders of the genre: David weeping for Jonathan, *Montes Gelboe* ...; 9 Virgil; 10 and Saint Bernard’s funeral oration for his brother?"

No one escaped the seduction of his words. The Ladies of Charity and the Priests of the Tuesday Conferences 11 were as captivated as the Daughters of Charity and the Missioners. People like to cite as a model of eloquence what he said one day regarding the foundlings in one of his talks to the Ladies, who were looking after them (cf. XIIIb, Doc. 196, pp. 423-24). We know all the things he obtained from them for his good works. We are familiar with these words from the letter Bossuet 12 wrote to Pope Clement XI, “When

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9 Cf. 2 Sm 1. (NAB)

10 Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro), *Aeneid*, bk. VI, “Funeral Panegyric of Young Marcellus”: *Heu, miserande puer, si qua fata aspera rumpas, tu Marcellus eris.* (Alas, pitiable boy—if only you might break your miserable fate, you are to be Marcellus.)

11 The meetings known as the Tuesday Conferences began on June 13, 1633, as an outgrowth of the retreats for ordinands. They were to serve the clerical and spiritual development of priests selected for their proven holiness and learning. By the rules devised at the initial organizational meetings (cf. XIIIa, 140), the members committed themselves to meet every Tuesday at Saint-Lazare or at the Bons-Enfants “to honor the life of Christ, the Eternal Priest”; to celebrate daily Mass and confess once a week to a regular confessor; to make a spiritual retreat annually; to spend some time each day in mental prayer and the Divine Office; to read the New Testament; to make an examination of conscience; to attend the funerals of members; and to offer three Masses for the souls of the deceased.

They met at three o’clock in the afternoon from All Saints’ Day to Easter, and at three-thirty from Easter to All Saints’, beginning with the *Veni, Creator*, followed by discussion on the topic proposed at the previous meeting. In his letters and conferences, Saint Vincent mentions some of these topics suitable for priests, such as the Beatitudes, the sanctification of Lent, modesty, humility, the spirit of poverty in the use of ecclesiastical goods, and censures. Members also gave reports on the works undertaken: confession for the sick at the Hôtel-Dieu, exhortations for prisoners, missions, etc.

The Superior of the Congregation of the Mission or his delegate directed the Conferences at Saint-Lazare, which were attended by more than 250 priests during Saint Vincent’s lifetime. Of these priests, twenty-two became Bishops. Similar conferences, modeled on those of Saint-Lazare, were organized in dioceses throughout France and Italy.

12 Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. Bishop, preacher, and author, was born in Dijon on September 27, 1627, into a family whose ancestors on both sides had occupied judicial posts in France for over half a century. He pursued a classical education at the Collège de Navarre, where he came under the influence of Vincent de Paul, whose guidance prepared him for the priesthood, which he received on March 18, 1652. He was a Canon of the Cathedral Chapter of Metz and for seven years was engaged in preaching, discussions with the Protestants, and study of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. In 1659 he went to Paris on Chapter business and was persuaded by Saint Vincent and the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria, to remain there as a preacher. In 1670 he was consecrated Bishop of Condom, but had to resign later that year, when he was named tutor and guardian for the Dauphin. He wrote a number of works for the latter, of which he considered the most important his “philosophy of history”: *Discours sur l’histoire universelle*. After the
we listened attentively to him speaking at a certain conference (cf. XI, Conf. 93), we felt these words of the Apostle fulfilled in him, ‘If anyone speaks, let his words be like the words of God.’ "13

What edified people more than anything in the saintly priest’s conferences was his humility in speaking of himself. No matter what the topic, he always found the means of demeaning himself before his Community. To hear him talk, no one had merited the wrath of God more than he did because no one had made poorer use of His graces.

At Repetition of Prayer on June 26, 1642, a coadjutor Brother was so naive as to say that he was ashamed for profiting so little by the good examples of M. Vincent and the many wonderful things he saw in him. The good saint let him go on, then, speaking in his turn, said, “Brother, it’s a practice among us never to praise anyone in his presence,” and added that he was indeed a wonder, but a wonder of malice worse than the devil, that he had merited hell a hundred times over, and that there was no exaggeration in what he was saying.

To find matter for humbling himself, Saint Vincent went back to the distant past and his last family visit, and even to the years when, as a child, he tended his parents’ flocks and accompanied his father, who was “poorly dressed and had a slight limp,” to Dax. How many times did he not call himself a poor pig-keeper or a fourth level student! How often did he not mention the lowly social condition of his parents and their extreme poverty! Even his infirmities and the needs stemming from them gave him occasion to speak ill of himself. “O mon Sauveur!” he said one day in a conference on poverty, “How can I talk about that, I who am so wretched and who used to have a horse and a carriage, and now have a bedroom with a fireplace, a nicely curtained bed, and a Brother to stay with me, and am so well cared for that I lack nothing! What scandal I give to the Company by

Dauphin’s marriage in 1681, Bossuet was named Bishop of Meaux, but continued to have great influence at Court, especially on Louis XIV’s religio-political policy with regard to the Protestants (revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685). It was he who inspired the promulgation of the Gallican Principles in 1682, which he also wrote by order of the Assembly of the Clergy of France. He was involved in the disputes both with the Jansenists and the Quietists of Fenelon. Bossuet died on April 12, 1704.

13Cf. 1 Pt 4:11. (NAB)
the abuse I’ve made of the vow of poverty in all these and other similar things! For this I ask pardon of God and of the Company, which I entreat to bear with me in my old age. May God grant me the grace to correct myself, now that I have reached this age, and, as far as possible, to rid me of all those things!” The humble old man had gone on his knees to say these words and, as was the custom, the Community did the same. Is there a more beautiful and more touching sight, a stronger and more persuasive eloquence?

The naturalness of his gestures gave the saint’s words a greater hold on his audience, as his contemporaries had remarked. In his conference of December 6, 1658, he warns his men against those lazy persons who, after his death, will try to divert the Company from its original works. He asks himself what sort of men these will be, and he replies, “They’ll be pampered men,” and Bro. Ducournau notes that, as he said this, “he folded his arms, mimicking the lazy ones.” He then continues, accompanying those words with hand gestures, movements of his head, and a disdainful inflection of his voice, which spoke louder than the words themselves, “They’ll be men who have a limited perspective, who confine their outlook and their plans to a certain circle, in which they enclose themselves as on one spot; they don’t want to leave it; and if anyone shows them something outside of it, and they draw nearer to consider it, they immediately go back into their center like snails in their shells.” This couldn’t be better stated.

Like many of his fellow countrymen from the Midi, didn’t the saint sometimes go beyond the limits allowed by treatises on eloquence? It’s possible. One day he apologized to the Community for

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14Bertrand Ducournau, born in Amou (Landes) in 1614, entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother on July 28, 1644, and took his vows on October 9, 1646. He had fine penmanship and common sense and, from the various positions he had occupied in the world, including that of a professional secretary, had learned to be shrewd, frank, and reliable in business affairs. Saint Vincent, therefore, made him his secretary in 1645. By his devotion, tact, and love of work, this good Brother rendered inestimable services to Saint Vincent and his Congregation. It can be said that, through his preparation of materials and his personal notes, he contributed more than Abelly himself to the first biography of Saint Vincent. Bro. Ducournau remained as secretary to the Superiors General René Alméras and Edme Jolly, and was Archivist of Saint-Lazare. He died in Paris on January 3, 1677. Bro. Pierre Chollier, his assistant in the secretariat, wrote his biography, which is found in Notices, vol. 1, pp. 377ff.

15The South of France.
being too animated. "Last Friday, I gave reason for scandal to the Company by shouting so loudly and clapping my hands; it seemed like I was annoyed with someone; that's why I ask pardon of the Company for it." (Cf. XI, Conf. 133.)

Even though the Friday conference was scheduled at a late hour, after evening meditation, the saint was not always free to be there from the beginning. Sometimes he had one of his men write down what he thought was noteworthy in what those who were questioned had to say.

Repetition of Prayer took place in the church. It began most likely before the conclusion of the usual time for meditation. Saint Vincent would have the Company gather around him and would question three or four members of the Community, regardless of their category, after which he would speak. He thanked God for the good thoughts given to those who had just spoken, pointing out charitably—sometimes forcefully—anything erroneous in their thinking, inaccurate in what they said, or faulty in their manner of making their meditation, helping them to realize the seriousness of the failings they had acknowledged. Sometimes, going even further, he reminded them of more weighty faults about which they had kept a discreet silence.

Unless there was a serious reason, very rarely did anyone excuse himself from Repetition. The saint sternly humbled those who were guilty of this negligence so that they would not give this bad example to the Community again. At the end of Repetition, the saint would ask for prayers for those who had requested this grace; then a few Missioners—this was not obligatory—would accuse themselves of a recent fault.

It was during Repetition of Prayer that the saint preferred to give his recommendations. When he felt it his duty to give a reprimand, and deemed that the rebuke would be more successful if this was done before the Community, nothing stopped him, neither the position of the person being reproved, nor the nature of the reproach, nor

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For example, the penance imposed on Lambert aux Couteaux, his Assistant, in the presence of the whole Community. (Cf. Louis Abelly, *La vie du Vénérable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul* [Paris: F. Lambert, 1664], bk. III, chap. XIV, p. 236.)
the thought of the shame the guilty man was going to experience. More than once, he humbled priests in front of the coadjutor Brothers and young clerics, or publicly admonished those who had so far forgotten themselves as to commit the fault of drinking to excess or of having no scruples about going into the rooms of others, even of retreatants.

So that the recommendation might be more effective, he sometimes gave a penance: depriving the man of wine, making him abstain from Holy Communion, forbidding him to offer Mass, or even extending his time in the seminary. The seminarian who gave himself permission to go to a conference despite his Director’s prohibition must have had a very unpleasant surprise when he heard Saint Vincent, in front of all the members of the Community, add six months to his time of probation; for, on that particular day, contrary to his usual way of acting, the holy Founder kept in the church until the end of Repetition those men who had some reason to leave sooner. The man to whom the reprimand was being given knelt down and stayed in that position until the end of the admonition. If the person remained standing, the saint would remind him of the customary practice.

To make his admonitions more acceptable, Saint Vincent would begin by accusing himself. “O Brother, shall I say this?” he exclaimed at Repetition of Prayer on August 24, 1655. “O Sauveur!

Lambert aux Couteaux, born in Fossemanant (Somme), in 1606, had been a member of the Congregation of the Mission since August 1629. In the early 1630s he preached in the South of France with Robert de Sergis. He founded the house in Toul in 1635 and remained there as Superior until 1637. In January 1638 he began the establishment in Richelieu (Indre-et-Loire), where he was Pastor and Superior for four years. The General Assembly of 1642 named him Assistant to the Superior General. For a brief period he was Superior at the Bons-Enfants (1646-49), then at Saint-Charles Seminary. In 1650-51 he was again in Richelieu. The saint had such confidence in him that he had him make the visitation of Saint-Lazare. He sent him to render the same service to the Missioners in La Rose and Toul, as well as to the Sisters in Angers and Nantes.

Urged by Propaganda Fide in 1647 to designate someone as Coadjutor Bishop of Babylon, Saint Vincent could think of no one more worthy than Lambert aux Couteaux. In his response to Bishop Ingoli (cf. III, 168), he expressed himself as follows: “I must confess, Excellency, that losing this person is like plucking out one of my own eyes or cutting off my arm.” The plan, however, did not materialize.

In 1651 the saint chose Lambert to establish the Congregation in Poland, where the Queen was asking for the Missioners. Everything had to be organized in that war-torn and plague-stricken country. Lambert’s efforts were blessed by God but were short-lived because he died on January 31, 1653, a victim of his dedication to the plague-stricken. (Cf. Notices, vol. II, pp. 1-28.)
Can I really say it without blushing? Ah, Brother, I’m as guilty as you are because I failed to instruct you well. Can I really mention this? I have to swallow my shame as much as you do because I’m guilty of it…. I, a miserable sinner, am the cause of this disorder! And it wouldn’t have happened except for the sins of this wretched man! O Brother, both of us should be ashamed of this”! On another day he said, “Alas, my dear confreres! What should distress us the most is not to see God draw His servants the saints to himself in this way, but rather to see that among our own priests there’s someone along with me—yes, someone along with me—who gives scandal to the Company.” And then he would begin to give the reprimands.

It would be interesting to have the detailed account of each of these conferences; we would see in them, together with a thousand edifying features, precious elements of the life of Saint Vincent and the history of his Congregation. Alas, almost nothing has been preserved! What we do have from conferences prior to 1655 covers only about sixty pages, most often simply synopses or short excerpts.

Perhaps no one understood Saint Vincent better than his devoted secretary Bro. Ducournau. He often bemoaned this indifference and did his best to try to fill in the gaps on his own, but he was very busy. In the end, on August 15, 1657, unable to stand it any longer, he sent a memo on the subject to René Alméras, Assistant of

17René Alméras the younger, nephew of Madame Goussault, was born in Paris on February 5, 1613, and was baptized the same day in Saint-Germain Church. By coincidence Saint Louise was married in this church that very day. A Councillor in the Great Council at the age of twenty-four, Alméras left everything—family, position, and hopes—despite the opposition of his father (who was to follow him later) to enter the Congregation of the Mission, into which he was received on December 24, 1637. He was ordained a priest at Easter in 1639. Saint Vincent entrusted to him important positions, such as Assistant of the Motherhouse and Seminary Director. He appointed him to his council and often relied on his prudence to deal with lay persons in delicate matters; he also gave him charge of the retreatants. So much work ruined Alméras’ health. The saint, convinced by personal experience that a change of air could improve one’s health, sent him in 1646 to make the visitation of several houses in France and Italy. When he reached Rome, Alméras was notified that he had been appointed Superior of the house, where he remained until 1651. On his return to France he took over the direction of Saint-Charles Seminary. In 1654 he was involved in distributing relief to the poor people of Picardy and Champagne. He made visitations of some houses of the Congregation and was again named Assistant of the Motherhouse, in which position he remained until the death of Saint Vincent. He was also Visitor of the Province of Poitou. Alméras was in Richelieu when the saint, realizing that his own death was near, asked him to return to Paris immediately. Alméras was ill and was brought back on a stretcher but had the consolation of receiving a last blessing from the saint. Appointed
the Motherhouse. (The memo follows this introduction.) In it he pointed out the reasons for being faithful to collecting the discourses of Saint Vincent, refuted the objections that might be made, and suggested various means for achieving the desired goal. It was a delicate question. How could they manage to record the saint’s words without arousing his attention? If someone—and with even greater reason, if some ones—of his listeners had begun to write things down while he was speaking, he certainly would have noticed. Even supposing that the reporters were well hidden behind the columns, the noise made by scratching on a piece of paper or turning a page would sooner or later have betrayed them. On the other hand, to reconstruct a conference from memory after the meeting also had its disadvantages. A long presentation cannot be remembered verbatim. There would, of necessity, be gaps and mistakes in the written text. To have recourse to the collective memory of all the priests in the house by meeting with them after the conference would hardly be feasible. The more practical thing was to give one or two of the listeners best suited for this work the job of recalling and transcribing the conference, giving them enough free time to do it. However, it was also necessary to find at Saint-Lazare willing persons with good memories, who would be able to interrupt their habitual work rather often, for the conferences occurred frequently. Bro. Ducournau volunteered for this, on condition that he be relieved of the duty of secretary. Since René Almèras really couldn’t ask Saint Vincent to change his secretary without telling him why he was making that request, he asked Bro. Ducournau if he would collect the conferences of the holy priest, as far as time allowed him to do so.

The zealous secretary set to work; his biographer states that he collected enough material for two or three thick volumes. Ex-

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Vicar-General by Saint Vincent, then elected Superior General by the Assembly of 1661, he governed wisely the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity until his death on September 2, 1672.

18Bro. Pierre Chollier, collaborator and later successor of Bro. Bertrand Ducournau. Besides his biography of Bro. Ducournau, he also wrote the life of Bro. Alexandre Véronne, the infirmarian at Saint-Lazare. He was the principal witness to appear before the ecclesiastical
cept those for the conference of May 30, 1659, on charity, Bro. Ducournau’s manuscripts have all been lost. As far as we can judge, they were full of erasures and corrections, which seems only natural because it is hard work to reconstruct a text from memory, and those efforts do not produce good results at the first attempt.

Fortunately, the contents of Bro. Ducournau’s manuscripts did not get lost with the papers. They have been preserved—although only in part—in two seventeenth- or eighteenth-century manuscripts, now in the Archives of the Congregation of the Mission. One of them contains a number of summaries or excerpts of conferences and Repetitions of Prayer; the other, a full-length copy of thirty-one conferences and the outline for a thirty-second. These two manuscripts complete one another, none of the talks that are in the second are in the first, and vice-versa.

The conferences of which we have the complete text were copied and recopied many times before the Revolution; for some of them we have two, three, or even four early copies, and they are all consistent with one another, except for a few rare insignificant differences of pure form.

Abelly had access to a more complete collection than ours. His _Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul_ contains ex-

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19 Conference on the Observance of the Rules.

20 The manuscript volume of conferences which we are following for this publication has only an artificial unity owing to the binding. It is composed of as many distinct parts as there are conferences; the transcription is the work of six or seven copyists. To it are added two lists, written by Jean Gicquel and René Alméras, of conferences given at Saint-Lazare, and the diary of Saint Vincent’s last days, written by Jean Gicquel.

21 Louis Abelly was born in Paris in 1604. From the earliest years of his priesthood he took part in Saint Vincent’s apostolic works. The saint spoke so highly of him to François Fouquet, Bishop-elect of Bayonne, that the latter appointed him his Vicar-General. Abelly’s stay in Bayonne was short-lived; he accepted a simple village parish near Paris, and shortly afterward (1644) was given charge of Saint-Josse parish in the capital, where he formed an ecclesiastical Community. He later became Director of the Sisters of the Cross (1650), chaplain of the General Hospital (1657), and Bishop of Rodez (1664). In 1666 he resigned his diocese for reasons of health and retired to Saint-Lazare, where he spent the last twenty-five years of his life in recollection and study. We have almost thirty of his books on devotion, history, and theology. Abelly is not merely the sponsor of _La vie du Vénérable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul_, as has been asserted, but is truly its author. His task was greatly facilitated by Bro. Ducournau, one of the saint’s secretaries, who collected and classified the documents. Abelly made a donation to the Saint-Lazare house of some property he owned in Pantin, which became the country house of
cerpts of conferences that are not found in our two manuscript copies. It also contains many of the ones in the manuscripts, but the editing is often so different that it makes us wonder if they did not come from different sources, since several persons would have written down the saint's discourse at the same time. So then, it seems that there are grounds for asking this question: which text reproduces the saint's words most faithfully—the one from the manuscripts or Abelly's? The accord of the ancient manuscript copies, the comparison of the two different texts with that of Bro. Ducournau in the conference on charity, and, lastly, the liberty Abelly usually takes in the material he quotes lead us to conclude that the differences come, not from the plurality of sources, but from the changes made by the biographer and, consequently, that the text from the manuscripts must be preferred.

Fr. Étienne, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission [1843-74], understood that reading the holy Founder's conferences to the first Missioners would be very helpful to their successors. He had facsimiles of the complete conferences of Saint Vincent made in 1844 for the exclusive use of the members of the Congregation of the Mission and, shortly after, of the contents of the other manuscript, to which he added various recommendations given at Chapter on Fridays and some instructions whose source we have been unable to find. The title of the first work is *Collection des Conférences de S. Vincent, de plusieurs de ses lettres et de quelques conférences de M. Alméras, son premier successeur*; the second is *Recueil de diverses exhortations et lettres de S. Vincent aux missionnaires, pour faire suite au premier volume de ses Conférences touchant l'explication des Règles communes*.

Fr. Fiat, the second successor [1878-1914] of Fr. Étienne, had all these conferences printed in one volume entitled *Avis et Conférences de saint Vincent de Paul aux membres de la Congrégation*, published by Pillet and Dumoulin in 1881. This edition has been out of print for years. Together with the *Conferences to the Daughters of the students. He died on October 4, 1691, and, according to his wish, was buried in the church of Saint-Lazare, under the Holy Angels chapel. (Cf. Collet, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 5ff.)*
Charity and the Correspondence, no work can help us to be more deeply imbued with the spirit of this great saint and to give us a better knowledge of the governing principles of such a supernatural and fruitful life as his. The good this book has done for its readers, especially those whose vocation calls them to continue the work of the Missioners to whom Saint Vincent was speaking, is sufficient proof of the good it has been destined to do—reason enough for considering a new edition.

A few documents have been omitted because they would be out of place here; others—a much larger number—most of which are taken from the saint’s first biographer, have been added. As its title indicates, only the recommendations or talks addressed by Saint Vincent to his Missioners will be found in the present collection, and we think we can assure the reader that all the ones known to be extant are included.

This edition differs from the 1881 edition by its closer conformity with the text of the early manuscripts. We would have liked the conformity to be absolute, but we had to be satisfied with slightly modifying the style of the last conferences whose reading, especially in public, would otherwise be too difficult, not to say impossible. Sometimes we have only an incoherent series of obscure sentences that are incorrect or unfinished; Saint Vincent certainly would not have spoken like that. To have these talks printed without editing them would be to give the public an imperfect text of no use to the reader. As is only proper, corrections are limited to the bare minimum and vary as little as possible from the text of the manuscript. We have been very careful not to alter the actual discourses of Saint Vincent, if we have them in his own handwriting or dictated by him, even should they contain many linguistic imperfections. A reporter’s faulty editing does not demand the same re-

22Documents 32, 33, and 90 in the 1881 edition.
23André Dodin, C.M., (1917-93), in Saint Vincent de Paul, Entretiens Spirituels aux Missionnaires (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1960), provides the modern reader with most of Abelly’s materials. The editors have inserted them as a, b, c, etc. after the appropriate number from the Coste edition.
24The conferences that follow those of August 29, 1659.
It seems important for the Company, in the future, to make and preserve an accurate collection of the holy discourses of M. Vincent, for the following reasons:

(1) The best legacy of fathers is the good instruction they leave to their children.

(2) In the world, people are very careful to draw up an inventory and be given possession of the holdings of a perishable inheritance, even though it may often be a stumbling block and a subject of division for the heirs.

(3) If those who squander a beautiful, patrimonial estate do irreparable wrong to their successors, especially when it is intended for their subsistence, the first Missioners will be committing the same acts of injustice toward those who are to come after them if they do not pass on to them the words of life of M. Vincent because, since he is their common father, everything he leaves to them must also be in common.

(4) If the works he has done are works of God, as they seem to be, God must have given him His Spirit to do and maintain them; consequently, the advice and teachings used for that purpose must be considered divine and be gathered up like manna from heaven, whose various tastes have attracted so many different persons of both sexes and of every rank, associated in various ways for so many different

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1This text was originally added to vol. XII as Appendix I. The editors felt that it would be better placed at the beginning of vol. XI, the first volume of Conferences to the Congregation of the Mission.
good works undertaken and sustained by His guidance. My God, do not allow our distaste, coming perhaps from the abundance of these talks, to cause us to neglect preserving them for the consolation of our absent and future confreres, who will someday have an ardent desire for this food of the soul and will regard as fortunate those who eat it at the table of the master.

(5) Just as he wants Missioners to refrain from writing books, so as not to be distracted in any way from their duties, so he never puts in writing any of the lights he imparts to us or the reprimands he gives. Yet, we know that many saints have shown their virtues more by their writings than by any other actions, in such a way that people would not know them if their books had not revealed their piety. Now, even though the piety of M. Vincent has no need of this help to manifest itself on earth, since it has already diffused its fragrance throughout the Church by his works of charity and through the workers he has given it, his words, nevertheless, are so redolent with his devotion that, if it is true that from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, we will never be able to fathom the extent of his love of God and neighbor and his devotion for the virtues, if we are not familiar with the terms and the care with which he recommended their practice. Who would ever have thought that Our Lord would carry Christian perfection to the point of obliging us to love our enemies, to do good to those who offend us, etc., if the Evangelists had not collected the very words He spoke? So, is it not reasonable that, since the humility of M. Vincent prevents him from leaving us in writing a few indications of the grace that accompanies him, at least those who hear him speak should preserve some written accounts of them? Surely the ages to come, which will have good reason to admire what he did, would be quite right at being surprised not to see anything of what he said, and even to complain about those who heard him, if they failed to share with them the words of wisdom that came from his mouth.

It is said in Solomon2 that, if the fool could keep silent, no one would be aware of his folly, and we can say of that King and of all

2Cf. Prv 17:28. (NAB)
other wise men that their wisdom would be unknown if it had not been revealed by their judicious remarks. Now, it is important that the talks of M. Vincent be preserved in the Company so that, if God is pleased to maintain it, they may reveal in all ages and to every nation the spirit of this apostolic man, which will be even more esteemed when it is seen how similar it is to the spirit of the Gospel; and this esteem, necessary for Founders of Communities, will contribute notably to the growth and sanctification of our own.

_Objections and replies._

Someone may say that M. Vincent usually says only ordinary things.

To this we may reply that:

1. Even if this were the case, we should still put them in writing because, if they are ordinary for learned and spiritual persons, they are not so for the Brothers and beginners, who even need to be guided and spurred on by these things rather than by other extraordinary ones of which they are not capable.

2. A piece of advice which seems insignificant in itself should be considered important when it comes from the mouth of a wise person, who gives weight to it. That’s why the Spartans, if I’m not mistaken, unwilling to accept good advice from a wicked man, had it given by an upright person.

3. Even if M. Vincent speaks on something ordinary, everyone still knows that he does it with extraordinary force: for his eloquence and the grace animating him cause him to treat the most insignificant topics with such devotion that he always imparts this to his listeners, imprinting on their souls respect and reverence for all that concerns God and love for the Rules and practices of the house. That is why each individual is very attentive when he speaks, many are delighted to listen to him, and those who are absent often ask what he said, expressing their regret at not having been present for it.

4. When he speaks in depth of how to make our meditation, of self-knowledge, of renouncing our own will, of abandonment to and confidence in God (as he did today when telling us how stead-
fast M. Desdames is in his present sufferings in Warsaw) of gratitude for the blessings of God, of the good use of His inspirations, of calumnies and afflictions, of compassion for those in distress, of assistance to poor persons, of zeal for the salvation of souls, of the ordinands and of other such things that pertain to the perfection of a Missioner, he carries them to the heights both in regard to practice and to expression. And to show that there is nothing ordinary in either one, I ask what persons speak of these things as he does with such discernment, efficacity, and love, spontaneously and unstintingly.

Everyone knows that, in the Company, he has no equal in speaking so worthily of God and holy things, and so helpfully for those who listen to him. Thus, he is the leader chosen by God to breathe spirit and life into the members of the Company.

Someone else may say that M. Vincent says nothing that cannot be found in books.

I reply that this may be so; but we know that the best food for babies is their own mother’s milk, and that the loving instructions of their fathers make a greater impression on their minds than those of teachers because of the natural respect and affection God has given to all sorts of persons for those who have begotten them. In addition, it is very difficult to find in books the beautiful inspirations and good impulses we receive from the talks of this kind father because he gives them according to our needs and obligations, which differ in many things from those of other Companies that have written about what concerns them. Furthermore, it is a question of a tree being known by its leaves— I mean M. Vincent by his words as well as by his good results, as I’ve already mentioned, for the edification of posterity, which, seeing him come alive again only through his actions, might say to him what a philosopher once said to someone, “Speak, if you want me to get to know you.”

To say that M. Vincent cannot tell us now anything he has not already said and repeated several times should not stop people from taking notes on it. Ah, would to God that, during the thirty years since

\(^3\text{Cf. Conf. 171 in this volume.}\)
the Company began, we had carefully noted what he did and said for our interior progress! We would need no other instructions. We would see in these notes the frequent lifting of his heart to God, his self-annihilation and the outpouring of his paternal heart toward all sorts of persons; we would find in them lessons for everything we do, an attraction for all the virtues, remedies for all our infirmities, weapons against temptations, encouragement in our weaknesses, the right thing to say in conversation, a thousand touches of prudence in correcting a wrong without hurting anyone, and suggesting what is good without being pretentious, with countless reasons for blessing God for having called us to His service under the leadership of this servant of His.

I'm writing this while he is still fully alive, and I'm speaking to those who know the truth of what I say; but, since people have failed to take these notes in the past, it's better to begin them late than not at all. Even if some have been taken in the past and the same things noted a hundred times, all of them written together will show more clearly that the more he spoke of certain virtues or practices, the more he had them at heart and tried to inculcate them in his children.

For all these reasons, it seems that God is asking the Company to write down exactly the advice, remonstrances; corrections, stories, and recommendations that M. Vincent gave in public, even down to the smallest details, as long as God is pleased to preserve him for us. I admit that this will be difficult to do without his noticing it; but the importance of the matter certainly merits our making this effort.

Following are three means from which one may be chosen.

(1) Recommend to the priests, once and for all and under obedience, to retain what M. Vincent says from now on at the Repetitions and conferences, and then always gather them together in a certain place that very day or the day after he has spoken, where one of them, taking up his pen, will ask, "How did M. Vincent begin his talk? How did he continue it, and how did he end it?" Then, with one recalling one thing and someone else another, it will all be put together. It is said that the discourses of blessed Francis de Sales have been collected in this way by the Visitation nuns.
(2) Assign only two men having common sense and a good memory, capable of grasping clearly the gist of his talks and of recalling the references and expressions in them, who will be dispensed from any other duties on those days so that they can write them down and put them in good order while they’re still fresh in their mind. I suggest two men because it’s difficult for one person to be able to retain everything and then put it in order without the help of someone else.

(3) Lastly, the best thing would be if someone could be found whose mind and hand were quick enough to write down verbatim the very words and exclamations of M. Vincent at the time he spoke them. May God be pleased to inspire the Assistants with what they have to do! If they feel that I can be of help in this, all they have to do is to order me to do so, after having convinced M. Vincent to find someone else to be his secretary; for I’m not intelligent enough to be able to do it all, and he might be happy to relieve me of this duty because of the mistakes I make in it, if they consent to point out to him that such a duty would be more fitting for a priest, whom he could entrust with many replies and other business, and that several may find it difficult that a coadjutor Brother should know what they write and what goes on in their houses.

Saint-Lazare, the glorious feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, 1657.

Note: *This* English edition of the conferences uses an informal, conversational style in order to preserve the spontaneity and simplicity of the exchanges between Saint Vincent and the confreres and to provide a translation that appeals to the modern reader.

—Ed.
SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

CONFERENCES
TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

1. - THE VOCATION OF A MISSIONER

"The state of the Missioners is one in conformity with the evangelical maxims, which consists in leaving and abandoning everything, as the Apostles did, to follow Jesus Christ and, in imitation of Him, to do what is proper. Since that is so, as someone said to me on one occasion, only the devil can find fault with that state; for, is there anything more Christian than to go from village to village to help poor persons to be saved, as you see being done with great fatigue and inconvenience! We have certain confreres working at present in a village of the Évreux diocese, where they even have to sleep on straw. Why? To help souls get to paradise through instruction and suffering. Doesn’t that come close to what Our Lord came to do? Not only did He not have a stone on which to lay His head, but He came and went from one place to another to win souls for God and, in the end, He died for them. He certainly could not have made us understand more clearly how dear they are to Him, nor convince us more effectively to spare nothing to instruct them with His teachings and bathe them in the fountains of His Precious Blood. But, if we want Him to grant us this grace, let’s strive for humility, especially since the more humble we are, the more charitable we’ll be toward our neighbor. Charity is the paradise of Communities and the soul of the virtues, and it’s humility that attracts and preserves them. Humble Companies are like valleys that draw down on themselves sap from
the mountains. As soon as we empty ourselves of self, God will fill us with himself; for He can’t stand a vacuum.

“So, my dear confreres, let’s humble ourselves to know that God has looked to this Little Company to serve His Church—if we can call a Company a fistful of men of lowly birth, learning, and virtue, the dregs, the sweepings, and the rejects of the world. Two or three times every day I ask God to destroy us if we’re not useful for His glory. Quoi, Messieurs! Would we want to be in this world without pleasing God and procuring for Him His greater glory?”

2. - THE MISSION PREACHED IN FOLLEVILLE IN 1617

After relating the conversion of the peasant of Gannes, M. Vincent added, “Shame prevents many of those good country people from confessing all their sins to their Pastors, keeping them in a state of damnation. On this point, one of the greatest men of our day was asked a while ago if those people could be saved with that shame, which deprives them of the courage to confess certain sins. His answer was that there was no doubt that, if they died in that state, they would be damned. Alas, mon Dieu! (I said to myself), then how many of them are being lost! And how important is the practice of general confession, which remedies this misfortune, when it’s accompanied by true contrition, as it usually is! Because he was truly touched by the spirit of penance, that man said aloud that he would have been damned; for, when a soul is filled with this spirit, it conceives such a horror of sin that not only does it confess it to the priest but would be ready to accuse itself publicly, if that were necessary for its salvation. I’ve seen people who, after their general confession, wanted to declare their sins publicly before everyone, and I had a hard time restraining them. Even though I forbade them to do it, they said to me, ‘No, Monsieur, I’ll tell them to everyone; I’m a wretched


1 A place about ten miles from the Château de Folleville (Somme), on the estates of Mme de Gondi.
man and I deserve to die.' Please note in that the impression made by grace and the power of sorrow. I've seen several people with this great desire, and we often see it. Yes, when God enters a heart in this way, He causes it to conceive such a horror of the offenses committed that the person wants to reveal them to the whole world. In fact, there are some who, touched by this spirit of compunction, have no problem saying aloud, 'I'm a wicked man because, on such and such an occasion, I did this and that; I ask forgiveness of God, of the Pastor, and of the whole parish for it.' We also see that the greatest saints practiced this. In Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, he made public his sins to everyone, in imitation of Saint Paul, who declared aloud and wrote in his Epistles that he had been a blasphemer and a persecutor of the Church, in order to show even more how merciful God was to Him. That's the effect of grace that fills a heart; it casts out whatever is contrary to it."

This grace prompted the peasant of Gannes to acknowledge publicly, even in the presence of Mme de Gondi, whose vassal he was, the serious sins of his past life. "Ah, Monsieur! What's this?" that virtuous lady then said to the saint. "What have we just heard? No doubt it's the same for most of these poor people. If this man, who is considered an upright man, was in a state of damnation, what will it be like for others who live more badly? Ah, M. Vincent! How many souls are being lost! How can this be remedied?"

Then M. Vincent continued, "That took place in the month of January 1617, and, on the twenty-fifth, the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, that lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church of Folleville to urge the people to make a general confession, which I

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2Françoise-Marguerite de Silly, wife of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, was born in 1580 of Antoine de Silly, Comte de Rochepot, Baron de Montmirail, Ambassador to Spain, and of Marie de Lannoy. Shortly after Saint Vincent entered her house as her children's tutor, she entrusted to him the direction of her soul. The saint's influence was not long in making itself felt. The devout woman formed the habit of visiting and serving the sick, and of distributing abundant alms to the poor. She had missions given on her estates and joined the Confraternity of Charity in Montmirail. She died on June 23, 1625, after having her saintly director named head of the Collège des Bons-Enfants, and having provided him with the means of establishing the Congregation of the Mission by a gift of forty-five thousand livres. (Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, vol. I, chaps. VII-XVII; Hilarion de Coste, *Les éloges et vies des reynes, princesses, dames et demoiselles illustres en piété, courage et doctrine* [Paris: S. Cramoisy, 1630], vol. II, pp. 389 ff.; Régis de Chantelauze, *Saint Vincent de Paul et les Gondi* [Paris: F. Plon, 1882].)
did, pointing out to them its importance and usefulness. Then I taught them how to make it properly; and God had such regard for the confidence and good faith of that lady—tor the large number and enormity of my sins would have hindered the success of this act—that He blessed what I said; and those good people were so moved by God that they all came to make their general confession. I continued to instruct them and to prepare them for the sacraments, and I began to hear their confessions. But there was such a large crowd that, even with the help of another priest, I couldn’t hear them all. Madame sent someone to ask the Jesuits of Amiens to come to assist us, writing to the Rector, who came himself. Since he couldn’t stay very long, he sent Fr. Fourché of the same Company to take his place. The latter helped us hear confessions, preach, and teach the catechism and, by the mercy of God, found plenty to keep him busy. Next, we went to the other villages belonging to Madame in that area, and did the same as in the first one. There was a huge crowd, and God gave His blessing everywhere. That was the first sermon of the Mission and the success God gave it on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, and He certainly had a plan in mind on that day.

3. - THE SUCCESS OF TWO MISSIONS

“I ask the Company to thank God for His blessings on the missions we’ve just given, especially the great ones during the mission in... There was a scandalous division in that parish: the inhabitants had a strong aversion to their Pastor. On his part, the Pastor had good reason to resent being treated badly by his parishioners, and he took them to court over it. He even had three or four of the instigators imprisoned because they had gone so far as to manhandle him in the church, or some of his people. Most of them were unwilling even to hear Mass, and would leave the church when they saw him go to the altar. In a word, it was a very bad situation, and I’ve yet to see any-

thing like it. They swore they’d never go to confession to him and that they’d rather let Easter go by without receiving Communion.

"Seeing themselves reduced to this state, some of them came here to this house a while ago to ask us to go to preach a mission to them. We did, and, by the mercy of God, they all made their [Easter] duty. But, what should induce us even more to bless and thank God is that they have been totally reconciled with their Pastor and are now enjoying great peace and union, for which both sides are very pleased and equally grateful, for ten or twelve of them are here to thank us on behalf of the whole parish. They’ve told me so many good things about that mission that it was difficult to hear them all.

"Who did all that, Messieurs, if not God alone? Was it in the power of men to reunite them? Indeed, even if an entire Parlement had been involved in such a difficult compromise between persons so strongly alienated, it would scarcely have managed to settle what concerned only external discipline. So then, it’s God who is the Author of this good work and whom we must thank for it.

"I ask you, Messieurs, to do so with all possible devotion and, in addition, to ask His Divine Goodness to give the Company the spirit of union and of bringing about union, which is none other than the Holy Spirit himself, so that, being always closely united in itself, it may be able to unite those outside the Company; for we’ve been established to reconcile souls with God and people with one another."

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1 Parlement refers to the French judicial system. At the time of Saint Vincent, France had eight Parlements, each with its own legal jurisdiction, chief of which was the Parlement of Paris. They registered or gave sanction to the King's edicts, ordinances, and declarations, and supervised their implementation.
4. - FORMATION OF THE CLERGY

“The distinguishing mark of priests is a participation in the priesthood of the Son of God, who has given them the power to sacrifice His own Body and to give it as food, so that those who eat it will have eternal life. That’s a totally divine and incomparable characteristic, a power over the Body of Jesus Christ that angels admire, and a power to forgive the sins of the people, which is a great source of amazement and gratitude to them. Is there anything greater and more admirable? Oh, Messieurs! What a great thing a good priest is! What is there that a good priest can’t do and what conversions can he not obtain? Just look at that excellent priest M. Bourdoise; what is he not doing and what can he not do! The success of Christianity depends on priests; for, when good parishioners see a good member of the clergy, a charitable Pastor, they honor him, do what he says, and try to imitate him. We have to strive to make all of them good, since that’s our ministry, and the priesthood is something so lofty.

“But, mon Sauveur! If a good priest can do so much good, what harm can a bad one do when he’s given over to that! O Dieu! How hard it is to restore him to a good state. How fervently the poor Missioners must give themselves to You, my Savior, to contribute to the formation of good priests, since it’s the most difficult, the most lofty, and the most important ministry there is for the salvation of souls and the advancement of Christianity!

“If Saint Vincent Ferrer stirred himself up to holiness so that God would one day raise up good priests and apostolic workers in

Conference 4. - Abelly, op. cit., bk. II, chap. V, p. 298, excerpt. This conference was given before July 19, 1655, the day Adrien Bourdoise died.

1 Adrien Bourdoise, born July 1, 1584, in Brou (Eure-et-Loire) and died in Paris July 19, 1655, was one of the most zealous reformers of the clergy in the seventeenth century. He founded a Community called the priests of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, or Nicolaïtes, from the name of the parish in Paris in which they were located. He made one of his retreats at Saint-Ulare. This fact and his advising the Duc de Liancourt, patron of several benefices, to rely on the judgment of Vincent de Paul for the choice of beneficed clergymen, show the great esteem he had for the saint. As this conference indicates, Saint Vincent in turn had great respect for M. Bourdoise.

2 Vincent Ferrer, a Spanish Dominican, was born in Valencia on January 23, 1350. He worked to terminate the Great Western Schism, a period when there were two lines of claimants for the papal throne (1378-1417). Traveling throughout Europe, he preached the need for repentance and reform; miracles in the order of nature and grace accompanied his preaching. By his personal influence and constant direction, he prevented enthusiasm from degenerating into fanaticism. He
order to elevate the priestly state and prepare men for the Last Judgment, for what greater reason must we, who see the priestly state being restored in our day, stir ourselves up to ever greater holiness in order to cooperate in such a desirable renewal."

5. - FORMATION OF THE CLERGY

“To devote oneself to the formation of good priests and to carry out this ministry as a secondary instrumental efficient cause is to do what Jesus Christ did, who, during His mortal life, seems to have made it His duty to form twelve good priests, His Apostles. For this purpose He remained several years with them to instruct and form them for this divine ministry.”

6. - MINISTRY WITH THE ORDINANDS

“Or sus, my dear confreres, we’re now on the eve of that great ministry God has entrusted to us; tomorrow, my God, is the day we’re to welcome those whom Your Providence has determined to send us so that we can do our part in working with You to make them better. Ah, Messieurs! What an important phrase ‘to make better priests’! Who could understand the loftiness of this ministry? It’s the most elevated one there is. Is anything in this world as great as the priestly state? Principalities and kingdoms can’t compare to it. You know that, unlike priests, Kings can’t change bread into the Body of Our Lord or forgive sins; you know all the other advantages priests have beyond temporal greatness; and yet, nevertheless, these are the people God is sending us to sanctify them. Is there anything like it? O poor, insignificant workers! What little resem-

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blance there is between you and the dignity of this ministry! But, since God is bestowing on this Little Company, the least and poor­est of all, the honor of devoting itself to that, we must, on our part, put all our effort into making a success of this apostolic plan which aims at preparing future priests for Major Orders and to carry out their ministry properly; for some will become Pastors, others Can­ons, others Provosts, Abbots, and Bishops—yes, Bishops. These are the persons we’ll be welcoming tomorrow.

“Last week, the Bishops had a meeting to find some way to rem­edy the excessive drinking of priests in a certain province—a very dif­ficult task. The holy Doctors say that the first step for a person who wants to acquire virtue is to become the master of his mouth. Now, the mouth has the mastery over persons who give it what it asks for. What a disorder! They’re its servants, its slaves; they’re only what it wills. There’s nothing worse or more deplorable than to see priests—and most of them from one province—addicted to this vice to the point that the Bishops have to meet, and all of them have to go to a lot of trouble to try to find some remedy for this unfortunate situation. And what will the people do after that? But what must we not do, Messieurs, to give ourselves to God to help to withdraw His min­isters and His spouse from this infamy and from so many other mis­fortunes in which we see them only too often? Not that all priests are leading a disorderly life; Sauveur, no! There are holy priests. Many of them come to us here for retreat: Pastors and others who come from a great distance to put their interior life in good order! And how many good, holy priests there are in Paris! There’s a great number of them; and there’s not a single one of the members of the Conference1 who meet here who isn’t an exemplary man. They’re all working with unparalleled success.

“There are also bad priests in the world, and I am the worst, the most unworthy, and the greatest sinner of all of them. But, on the other hand, there are also those who give high praise to God by the holiness of their lives. What a happiness that God not only wants to make use of poor people like us, unlearned and without virtue, to

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1Tuesday Conferences.
help straighten out fallen, dissolute priests, but also to help the good ones to grow in holiness, as we see being done, by the grace of God! How fortunate you are, Messieurs, to spread the Spirit of God in those souls by your own devotion, gentleness, friendliness, modesty, and humility, and to serve God in the person of His greatest servants! How fortunate you are, you who give them good example at the conferences and ceremonies, in choir, in the refectory, and everywhere else! How happy all of us will be if, by our silence, discretion, and charity, we correspond to the intentions for which God sends them to us by making use of a special vigilance to see, look for, and bring them without delay whatever can make them happy, and by being ingenuous in providing for their needs and serving them. If we do that, we’ll edify them. We really have to beg Our Lord earnestly for this grace; I ask the priests to say Holy Mass and our Brothers to hear Mass for this intention."

7. - MINISTRY WITH THE ORDINANDS

“It’s almost ordination time; we’re going to ask God to give His Spirit to those who will speak to those men both in the instructions and in the conferences. Above all, each of us will strive to edify them by humility and modesty, for it’s not by knowledge that they’ll be won over, or by the beautiful things they’ll be told—they’re more learned than we are. Several of them have their Bachelor’s and some have a Licentiate in Theology; others are Doctors of Canon Law, and there are very few of them who don’t know philosophy and some theology; they discuss them every day. There’s almost nothing new that we can tell them that they haven’t already read or heard; they themselves say that it isn’t this that moves them but the virtues they see being practiced here. Let’s humble ourselves, Messieurs, in the face of such an honorable ministry as that of helping to form good priests; for what is more excellent? Let’s humble ourselves in the face of our insignificance, we who are poor in knowledge, in spirit, and in our so-

cial status. Alas! How is it that God has chosen us for something so great? It's because He ordinarily uses the most inferior materials for the extraordinary workings of His grace, as in the sacraments, where He makes use of water and words to confer His greatest graces.

"Let's pray for these men; but let's pray also for ourselves, that God will remove anything that might be the cause of their not receiving the effects of the Spirit of God, which He seems to want to share with the Company for this purpose. Have you ever gone on pilgrimage to some place of devotion? On entering it, we usually feel as if we're outside of ourselves, some finding themselves suddenly lifted up in God, others moved to devotion, others filled with respect and reverence for that holy place, and others have various good sentiments. What accounts for this? It's because the Spirit of God is there and makes itself felt in those ways. Now, we have to think that it will be the same here with regard to those men, if the Spirit of God resides in this house.

"We have to familiarize them with Moral Theology and always go into detail so that they hear and understand it well. This must always be the goal, acting in such a way that those who are listening take away with them everything said to them in the instruction. Let's be very careful that this cursed spirit of vanity doesn't worm its way in among us, making us want to speak of things that are lofty and exalted, for that only ruins things instead of giving edification. Now, they'll take away everything that will be said to them in the instruction if we instill it in them simply afterward and speak to them only of that and not of other things, which is advisable for several reasons."

8. - CONFERENCES FOR THE CLERGY

"If there are any persons alive who are obliged to make use of and benefit from conferences, I think they're the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission because God has turned to them to introduce into the world of the clergy this manner of discussing particular virtues in

this way. When I came to Paris, I had never seen anything like these conferences, at least on the virtues proper to their particular state and how to live their vocation well; yes, academia, where they would converse on certain points of doctrine and, in some places, cases of conscience. About fifty years ago, Cardinal de Sourdis\(^1\) introduced this method into his diocese of Bordeaux to treat certain points of Moral Theology. He brought together successfully the Pastors and the other priests to give them the means of becoming better instructed; but, until we began it, nothing was done on the virtues proper to one’s state among members of the clergy like us—or at least I never saw or heard of it. It’s very true that many good male religious have this holy practice like the ancient monks formerly had; but, be that as it may, it’s to this insignificant Congregation that God has been pleased to turn in this age in order to establish it outside the Community. not only as a fitting antidote for good priests, who, in the service of souls, remain exposed to the corrupt air of the world, but also to help them to become more perfect in their vocation. So, God has inspired the Congregation of the Mission to stir itself up and to become devoted to the practice of virtue through the conferences. Motives for acquiring virtues, their nature, their specific acts, the means of putting them into practice and, lastly, the obligations of our state both with regard to God and with the neighbor are treated in them. That’s the aim of the conferences. Now, what would become of us if we were the first to neglect them? What account would we have to render to God if we were to disdain such helpful and efficacious means, undertaken so avidly by those ancient Fathers and Anchorites, as Cassian\(^2\) reports in a book he wrote about this? I must confess that, in my own experience, nothing touches me more or moves me so deeply; and nothing of what I hear, read, or see makes a greater impression on me than these conferences.”

\(^1\)François Escombleaux, Cardinal de Sourdis.
\(^2\)John Cassian (c. 360-433), monk and ascetical writer.
9. - RETREAT MINISTRY

"O Messieurs, how highly we must esteem the grace God grants us of bringing to us so many persons in order to help them work out their salvation! There are even many soldiers who come here, and one of them said to me a short time ago, 'Monsieur, I'll soon have to go into certain situations, and I want to put myself in a good state beforehand; I have remorse of conscience, and, not knowing what might happen to me, I'm here to prepare myself for whatever God will want to ordain for me.' By the grace of God, we now have in this house a good number of persons on retreat. O Messieurs, what great benefits can that not produce, if we work at it faithfully! What a misfortune, however, if this house one day becomes lax in this practice! Let me tell you, my dear confreres, that I fear that the time may come when it will no longer have the zeal which, until now, has caused it to welcome so many persons for retreat. And then what would happen? There would be reason to fear that God might not only withdraw from the Company the grace of this ministry but even deprive it of all the others. The day before yesterday someone told me that the Parlement had degraded a member of the Council that day, and when they summoned him, dressed in his red robe, to the Great Chamber, where all the others were assembled, the President called his bailiffs and ordered them to remove that robe and his cap, since he was unworthy of those marks of honor and unfit for the office he held. The same would happen to us, Messieurs, if we made poor use of God's graces by neglecting our primary duties. God would take them from us, since we would be unworthy of the state in which He has placed us and of the ministries He has entrusted to us. Mon Dieu! What a cause for grief!

"Now, to be thoroughly convinced of the serious harm that would befall us if God were to deprive us of the honor of rendering Him this service, we must reflect that many people come here to make their retreat in order to know God's Will, having been inspired to leave the world; and I commend one of them to your prayers. He has finished

his retreat and, when he leaves here, will be going to the Capuchins to take the habit. Some Communities send us many men who want to enter them, and they send them to make their retreat here in order to test their vocation better before they accept them. Others come from ten, twenty, or fifty leagues away for this purpose, not only to recollect themselves here and to make a general confession but to decide on a choice of life in the world and to take the means of saving themselves in it. We also see a number of Pastors and other clergy who come here from everywhere to set themselves aright in their vocation and to advance in the spiritual life. All of them come without having to worry about bringing any money with them, knowing that they’ll be well received without it. Speaking of that, someone was telling me lately that, for those who don’t have any, it was a great consolation to know that there was a place in Paris that was always ready to take them in through charity, whenever they presented themselves with a genuine intention to put themselves on better terms with God.

"This house, Messieurs, was formerly a refuge for lepers: they were welcomed in it, and not one of them was cured. Now it’s used to welcome sinners, sick persons covered with spiritual leprosy, but who are cured by the grace of God. Or rather, let’s say that they’re dead persons who have come back to life. What happiness that the Saint-Lazare house should be a place of resurrection! After remaining in the tomb for three days, that saint left it fully alive; and Our Lord, who raised him from the dead, has done the same favor for many others who, after being here for a few days as in the tomb of Lazarus, leave it with a new life. Who will not rejoice over such a blessing and have sentiments of love and gratitude for God’s goodness and for such a great benefit?

"But what a source of shame if we make ourselves unworthy of such a grace! How embarrassed we’ll be, Messieurs, and what regret will we not experience some day if, through our own fault, we’re disgraced before God and men! What a cause of suffering and distress will a poor Brother of the Company not have when he now sees so many people of the world coming from everywhere to make a little retreat with us to change their lives, and who will then see this great benefit neglected! He’ll see that no one is received any longer; in a
word, he’ll no longer see what he has seen; for we could reach that stage, Messieurs, perhaps not right away but in the course of time. What will be the cause of that? If you say to a poor lax Missioner, ‘Monsieur, would you please guide this man during his retreat?’ that request will be a torture for him; and, if he doesn’t beg off, he’ll simply drag his feet, as they say; he’ll be so anxious to satisfy himself, and will find it so hard to give up a half hour or so of his recreation after dinner and as long after supper, that this time will be intolerable for him, even though it’s given for the salvation of a soul and will be the best spent hour of his entire day. Others will grumble about this ministry, under the pretext that it’s very burdensome and demands a lot of energy. So, the Priests of the Mission, who formerly would have given life to the dead, will no longer have anything but the name and appearance of what they once were. They’ll be only corpses and not true Missioners; they’ll be the carcasses of Saint Lazarus, not the resurrected Lazarus, and, even less, men who bring others back to life. This Mission, which is now like a beneficial pool, where so many come to bathe, will be nothing but a cistern contaminated by the laxity and idleness of the men who live in it. Let’s pray to God that this misfortune may not occur, my dear confreres; let’s ask the Blessed Virgin to divert it through her intercession and her desire for the conversion of sinners; let’s ask the great Saint Lazarus to be pleased to be always the protector of this house and to obtain for it the grace of persevering in the good already begun.”

10. - RETREAT MINISTRY

“Let’s thank God a million times, my dear confreres, for having been pleased to choose the Saint-Lazare house to be a theater of His mercies, where the Holy Spirit continually descends upon souls. If someone could see with bodily eyes this outpouring, how delighted he would be! But what a happiness for us Missioners that Saint-Lazare should be a throne of the justifications of God and that

the Saint-Lazare house should be a setting in which the resting place of the King of Kings is prepared in the well-disposed souls of those who come here to make their retreat! Let’s serve them, Messieurs, not simply as men but as men sent by God. Let there be no discrimination; let the poor one be as dear to us as the rich one, and even more so, since he’s in greater conformity with the life Jesus Christ led on earth. I commend to your prayers one of these men who has a very special need. There’s no doubt that he’s capable of doing much good, if he’s totally converted to God; but, on the contrary, if he isn’t properly converted, there’s reason to fear that he may do a great deal of harm.”

11. - RETREAT MINISTRY

“We have in this house a captain who wants to be a Carthusian, and who has been sent to us by those good Fathers to test his vocation, as is their custom. I urge you to commend him to Our Lord, and, at the same time, to reflect on the greatness of His goodness in taking a man, when he was firmly committed to a state so contrary to the one to which he now aspires. Let us adore this merciful Providence and acknowledge that God is no respecter of persons but, in His infinite goodness, takes them from all sorts of life situations as He sees fit.

“We have another military man with us, who is likewise a captain; we’ll praise God for this and pray for him along with the other one. Remember another one in your prayers as well, a new convert—a very good one—from the so-called reformed religion; right now he’s working and writing for the defense of the truth he has embraced, and by this means will be able to win over others. We thank God for this and entreat Him to increase His graces in him more and more.”


1 The Huguenot religion: the Reformed Church in France, a Protestant group that espoused the spiritual and political tenets of John Calvin.
12. - RETREAT MINISTRY

"In the past few days we had a priest who had come from a great distance to make his retreat, and the first thing he said to me was, ‘Monsieur, I’m coming to you, and if you don’t accept me I’m lost.’ And when he left, he seemed so touched by the Spirit of God that I was exceptionally surprised by this. Three others traveled from far-off Champagne, having encouraged one another to come to make their retreat at Saint-Lazare. O Dieu! How many men are coming here from far and near on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit! But what a powerful grace is needed to lead men from all over to such a crucifixion, for a spiritual retreat aims to crucify the flesh, so we can say with the holy Apostle, ‘I am crucified to the world, and the world to me.’"

13. - THE MENTALLY ILL OR DEPRAVED BOARDERS CONFINED AT SAINT-LAZARE

"I recommend to the prayers of the Company our boarders here, both those who are mentally ill and the others who are not, including a priest who, having been mentally ill for a time, recovered and was doing better but, unfortunately, has had a setback. This illness came upon him in a fit of depression which addled his brain and weakened him so much that he relapsed into that sad state. The poor man can feel this illness coming on, which—as he himself says—always starts with a black melancholy, impossible to shake off. Those who are reduced to this state certainly deserve great compassion. It’s very true that, in a certain sense, they’re in a state of sinlessness, since they’re not masters of their own wills and have neither judgment nor freedom. In that, they must be considered blessed, if, when they fell into it, they were in the grace of God, just as they are greatly to be pitied if this illness surprised them in the state of mortal sin.


1Cf. Gal 6:14. (NAB)

"The others we have here in this house, and who are in their right
mind but make bad use of it, give me reason to say that in today's
world we see among these young people a great deal of rebellion and
debauchery, which seem to be increasing daily. A while ago, a man
of the upper class, one of the leading officials of a sovereign Court,
was complaining about a nephew of his, a very depraved young man,
who had gone so far as to threaten several times to kill him if he
didn't give him some money. When one of the town Magistrates ad­
vised him to put him in Saint-Lazare, where there was a good pro­
gram to bring him back to his duty, he told him that he didn't know
that people like that were accepted there; and, thanking him for this
advice, told him that he wished there were four houses in Paris like
Saint-Lazare to prevent such disorders.

"Let's thank God, Messieurs, for having given this Community
the care of the mentally ill and the incorrigible. We didn't seek out
this ministry; it was given to us by His Providence, along with all the
others in the Company. In this regard, let me tell you that, when we
entered this house, the Prior had taken in two or three poor, mentally
ill persons; and, since we were replacing him, we took over their care
and guidance. At that time, we were involved in a lawsuit, in which
there was question of our being evicted or staying in the Saint-Lazare
house. I recall asking myself then, 'If you had to leave this house
right now, what and who would touch you the most? What would
give you the greatest displeasure and sadness?' And I thought at that
time that it would be that I'd be unable to see those poor persons any
longer and would be obliged to abandon their care and service.

"Don't think, my dear confreres, that it's a small thing to be de­
voted to the relief of those in distress, for we're giving pleasure to
God. Yes, we are; taking care of these mentally ill persons is one of
the ministries that pleases Him the most; it's all the more meritorious
because nature finds no satisfaction in it, and it's a good work that's
done in secret and for persons who don't realize that they should be

1 Adrien Le Bon, Canon Regular of Saint Augustine, was born in Neufchâtel (Seine-Maritime)
and died at Saint-Lazare on April 9, 1651, in his seventy-fourth year. As Prior of Saint-Lazare, he
supervised the transfer of the priory to Saint Vincent and the Congregation of the Mission. He
also donated a number of farms for the support of the Congregation.
grateful to us. Let’s ask God to give the priests of the Company the spirit of leadership for these types of ministry when they’re working in them, to strengthen our poor Brothers, animating them with His grace in order to banish the trials and put up with the work they have every day with these boarders, some of whom are physically ill and others mentally ill, some ignorant, others flighty, some insane, and others addicted to vice; in a word, all of them ill in mind but some because of weakness and others because of malice. The former are here to recover their health, and the latter to be cured of their evil ways.

“So then, courage, my dear confreres; are you aware that in the past there were Popes engaged in the care of animals? Yes, in the times of the Emperors who were persecuting the Church in its head and in its members, they used to arrest the Popes and make them look after the lions, leopards, and other similar beasts that would serve as entertainment for those infidel Princes and were like images of their cruelty; and the Popes were the ones who took care of these animals.2 Now, the men for whose external needs you’re responsible aren’t wild beasts, but they are, in a certain sense, worse than animals by their conduct and debauchery. Yet, God willed to have those holy persons, the fathers of all Christians, undergo those humiliations and extraordinary sufferings in order to learn through personal experience to commiserate with the humiliations and adversities of their spiritual children; for, when a person has personally experienced his own weaknesses and trials, he’s more sensitive to those of others. Those who have suffered the loss of property, health, and honor are much more likely to console persons who have these trials and tribulations than others who don’t know what that is. I recall that one day someone was telling me about a great, holy person, who was firm and constant by nature, strong-minded, afraid of nothing, and hardly ever subject to temptations. Because of that, he was all the less suited to tolerate the weak, console the afflicted, and assist the sick since he himself had never gone through those situations.

2Pope Saint Marcellus (May 308-January 309). A fifth century Passio Marcelli and the Liber Pontificalis contain the legend that the Emperor Maxentius turned Marcellus’ titular church into a stable and that the Pope died there as a result of his labors as a stable hand.
“You know that Our Lord willed to be tried by all kinds of misery. ‘We have a High Priest,’ says Saint Paul, ‘who knows how to sympathize with our weaknesses because He has experienced them himself.’ Yes, O Eternal Wisdom, You willed to experience and take upon Your innocent person all our poverty! You know, Messieurs, that He did that to sanctify all the sufferings to which we’re subject and to be the original and prototype of all the states and conditions of human persons. O my Savior, You who are uncreated Wisdom, You took on and embraced our miseries, our confusion, and our humiliations and infamy, with the exception of ignorance and sin; You willed to be the scandal of the Jews and the folly of the Gentiles; You even willed to seem like You were out of Your mind. Yes, Our Lord was really willing to pass for an insane person, as is recounted in the Holy Gospel, and for people to believe that He had become a madman. *Exierunt tenere eum; et dicebant quoniam in furorem versus est.* The Apostles themselves sometimes considered Him as a man who had become mad, and He appeared like that to them so that they might not only be witnesses to the fact that He had sympathized with all our weaknesses and sanctified our states of suffering and frailty, but also to teach them, and us as well, to have compassion on those who fall into these weaknesses.

“Let’s bless and thank God, my dear confreres, for entrusting to us the care of these poor men, deprived of their intelligence and reason; for, in serving them, we see and touch the extent and diversity of human misery. Through this knowledge we’ll be better suited to work effectively for the neighbor and to carry out our functions with even greater fidelity because we’ll know better from experience what it is to suffer. Nevertheless, I ask those who are ministering to these boarders to take very good care of them, and I ask the Company to commend them often to God and to appreciate this opportunity to practice charity and patience with these poor people.”

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3Cf. Heb 4:14-15. (NAB)
4 They set out to seize him because they said that He was out of His mind. Cf. Mk 3:21. (NAB)
5According to Coste. Abelly added lines from the conference of December 6, 1658 (XII, Conf. 195).
14. - MINISTRY OF CHAPLAIN IN THE SERVICE OF A NOBLEMAN

Motives:
(1) Because so little has been said on this very important topic.
(2) Because God can be greatly glorified by it.
(3) Because the Company directs many priests.

Qualities of a Chaplain:
(1) It is to be hoped that he might be a holy man—not of perfect sanctity, which is only for perfect saints, but that he have solid virtue—not just any kind, nor like that of a neophyte, but that he be a deeply interior man.
(2) He should have a very orderly appearance, otherwise, he’d be the laughing-stock of all the servants in the house.
(3) He should be very chaste.
(4) He should have great contempt for honors and wealth, and make little account of what is prized by the great ones of this world, who usually think only of honors and wealth. For that reason, he should not render service in the hope of obtaining a benefice. It has been reported that someone said this was mental simony.
(5) He should be very prudent and not discuss matters with others.

I’m not going to report the means. This is what M. Vincent had to say: “Messieurs, I think we were right to discuss this matter because someone in the Company may be chosen by God to serve Him in this capacity. I bless God for the inspirations He gave to those who have spoken.

“As for duties, the first concerns the man himself: to watch carefully over all his actions, and, for that reason, to be very exact to the little Rule of the Company, especially to meditation. Messieurs, someone did me the honor of asking for a man to serve in this capacity. When I proposed one, I was asked, ‘Is he a man of prayer?’ I assured him that he was, and I was immediately told that there was reason to hope for all sorts of blessings, that great piety was preferred to great knowledge, and that there would be enough time for

that during his leisure hours. He must give himself to God to show great respect for his master and the master’s wife, and to adore God in his master and the Blessed Virgin in his wife. The second duty is to do what the Pastor does in the parish because he’s actually the Pastor. The late M. Duval believed that in the rural area the chaplain was the Pastor of the Seigneur of whom he was the chaplain.”

M. Vincent said that this is what was done at the Court, that the head chaplain was the Pastor of all those at the Court; that’s the intention of the Church. So, he has to do what the Pastor does with regard to his parishioners:

“(1) Offer the Holy Sacrifice reverently. In order to do that, it should be neither too short nor too long, *circum circa.* After Mass, make the customary bows and do it in the proper spirit. After our late good Father of Geneva had celebrated Mass in the presence of an important Seigneur, he would make a deep bow. What do you think our blessed man was thinking about, Messieurs? Far from thinking about courteous gestures and worldly compliments, he was adoring the lordship of God in those persons.

“(2) Instruct. It would be a good thing to give the instruction publicly, but that usually doesn’t work, especially since most people go off to take care of their own affairs; rather, win over the servants and

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1 André Duval, renowned Doctor of the Sorbonne, author of several learned works, friend and adviser of Saint Vincent, was born in Pontoise on January 15, 1564, and died in Paris on September 9, 1638. The saint never made an important decision without having recourse to his wisdom. He asked his advice before accepting Saint-Lazare (cf. Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. 1, chap. XXII, p. 97) and before establishing vows in the Congregation. The humble Doctor got upset one day when he saw his portrait in one of the rooms at Saint-Lazare. He insisted so much that Saint Vincent had to remove it. (Cf. Robert Duval, *Vie d'André Duval, docteur de Sorbonne*, manuscript copy [Robert Duval was the nephew of André Duval]; J. Calvet, “Un confesseur de Saint Vincent,” in *Petites Annales de Saint Vincent*, May 1903, p. 135.) Duval was also the uncle of two Priests of the Mission, Jean and Philippe Le Vacher.

2 All round about.

3 Saint Francis de Sales, who honored Saint Vincent with his friendship, was born in Thorens, near Annecy on August 21, 1567, and died in Lyons on December 28, 1622. “Many times I have had the honor of enjoying the close friendship of Francis de Sales,” declared the saint at the beatification process of his illustrious friend on April 17, 1628. He always spoke of the Bishop of Geneva with great admiration, considering him worthy of the honors reserved to the saints. According to Coqueret, a Doctor of the Sorbonne, Saint Francis de Sales, on his part, used to say that “he did not know a more worthy or more saintly priest than M. Vincent.” (Postulational letter from the Bishop of Tulle, March 21, 1706.) When it came to appointing a Superior for the Visitation convent in Paris, he chose Vincent de Paul.
kitchen boys, and take them privately to instruct them. He should say grace at table, unless some high-ranking priest is there and does it. If the master thinks he should participate in the conversation during dinner, he must do it. Some of them don’t find that appropriate; others do, when there’s question of some topic regarding the priestly state or if his opinion is asked about something.

“Next, he must eat with the butler; he sits down after him; custom has prevailed for this disorder. He must be a great example of virtue and reserve there, not correcting anyone too much for minor matters, sometimes even turning a deaf ear; not raising his eyes to heaven too often; but if he should happen to hear, for example, that God is unjust, on those occasions he must speak up. Apart from that, however, he should wait to correct those persons in private, for these people are usually quite skilled, the devil interferes, and very little is gained by doing it on the spot. What should be done, however, is to win over the butler ahead of time and get him to acknowledge the obligation his position entails of preventing evil. The Queen has chosen a man expressly for that.

“He must also foster great union and love between the master and his wife. Sometimes he has to give an admonition, if he senses that the master has confidence in him; otherwise, get the Pastor to admonish him; if some disorder slips in, the confessor, the director, or he himself sometimes has to do it.

“There was a chaplain, Messieurs, who knew from a good source that his master was planning to go off to fight a duel. After this chaplain had celebrated Holy Mass and everyone had left, he went and threw himself at the feet of his master, who was kneeling down, and said to him there, ‘Monsieur, allow me in all humility to say something to you: I know you’re planning to go off to fight a duel; I say to you on behalf of my God, whom I have just shown you and whom you have just adored, that, if you don’t give up this bad plan. He’ll exercise His justice on you and on all your posterity.’ Having said that, the chaplain left him.”

4According to Abelly (bk. I, chap. VII. p. 31), Saint Vincent is supposed to have added here: “Please note the opportune moment he chose and the terms he used, which are two circumstances particularly necessary to observe on such occasions.” Coste completes the scene: “The chaplain
14a. - THE SPIRIT OF FAITH OF A CHAPLAIN

To consider Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in the Lord and his Lady.

He said that he knew someone who had received great benefits for himself and for others in the house of a Lord in this social class because he always saw and honored Jesus Christ in the person of this Lord, and the Blessed Virgin in the person of the Lady. This consideration kept him simple and prudent in all his words and actions and won for him the love of this Lord, the Lady, and all the servants, and gave him the means of being very successful with this family.

15. - ADVICE TO STUDENTS LEAVING THE INTERNAL SEMINARY

"The transition from the seminary to pursuing studies is a very dangerous passage during which many are shipwrecked; and if there's any time when we should be careful, it's the period of studies, for it's very perilous to go from one extreme to another, just as a glass that passes from the heat of the furnace to a cold place runs the risk of breaking. It's very important for us, therefore, to maintain ourselves in our first fervor in order to preserve the grace we've received and to prevent nature from getting the upper hand. If, every time we enlighten our understanding, we also try to enkindle our will, we can be sure that studying will serve us as a means to go to God; and let's hold as an unquestionable maxim that we'll become more capable of success in helping our neighbor in proportion as we work at our own in-

is none other than Saint Vincent himself, who was part of the Gondi household at the time. The General of the Galleys, Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, wanted to avenge one of his close relatives, killed in a duel by a nobleman of the Court. He thought it would enhance his honor, and, in misplaced devotion, had come to his chaplain's Mass to implore God's help. Shaken by the words of the saint, he generously renounced his plan. It was a difficult sacrifice. A tour of his estates and the removal of the murderer, who was sent into exile, succeeded in calming him.

Conference 14a. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk I, chap VII, p. 29

¹In the Congregation of the Mission, those in formation went through the Internal Seminary, which corresponded to the novitiate in religious Orders. All new candidates were formed there in the practice of the virtues of their state and prepared for the lifestyle and ministries of Missioners. From there they advanced to the Major Seminary.
terior holiness. That’s why, in studying in order to be of service to souls, we must be careful to fill our own souls with piety as well as knowledge and, for this purpose, to read good, helpful books and avoid reading those that serve only to satisfy our curiosity; for curiosity is the plague of the spiritual life. It was because of the curiosity of our first parents that death, plague, war, famine, and other miseries entered the world; consequently, we must beware of it as a root of all sorts of evil.”

16. - RECOMMENDATIONS GIVEN AT CHAPTER1

M. Vincent said that young people would do well to strive for holiness during their youth, for it is almost impossible for someone who has grown old in bad habits and whose soul is permeated by them to be able to rid himself of them.

He strongly urged us to be simple, especially since, where simplicity existed, God, who was simplicity personified and totally one and who did not tolerate being of two minds, was found there; *cum simplicibus sermoncinatio ejus,* besides which, the person who walks in simplicity can go forward with assurance: *qui ambulat simpliciter ambulat confidenter.* Consequently, those who are wily or double-dealing are always afraid that their cunning ways will be discovered and that, if they’re caught by surprise, people will no longer trust them. He added that simplicity was a virtue that makes us go straight to God and to truth, without beating around the bush or being deceitful.

He also told us that it was a great means of encouragement to induce Christians to brace themselves against temptation, since, as Origen states, by acts contrary to temptation we could hurl the devil into the depths of hell instead of hurling ourselves there. Should we

Conference 16. - *Recueil de diverses exhortations,* p. 214

1Subheading: Striving for holiness while we are young; in praise of simplicity; overcoming temptations by contrary acts.

2His communication is with the simple. Cf. Prv 3:32. (D RB)


4Origen was the principal theologian of the early Greek Church. He was born in Alexandria c. 184-89 and died in Tyre c. 253-54. He is best known for his scriptural exegesis.
be tempted by pride, we must repulse the enemy, either by acts of interior humiliation or by raising our minds to God, asking Him for humility or offering Him what we are doing, so that it may please Him to give us the humility to honor His humility.

17. - RECOMMENDATIONS GIVEN AT CHAPTER

M. Vincent said that the most common faults of Communities, as he had perceived from a few visitations he had made in religious houses, was the waste of Community goods; and he added that we would have to give a very exact account of them before God, that they were the property of God and of the poor, and that we were only distributors, and not masters, of them. He said that we had to be attentive and even to make it a matter of conscience to put five logs on the fire when four were enough; and that we had to use only what was necessary and never go beyond that. He also said that we were to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to a fire.

18. - FAITH

"Only eternal truths are capable of filling our hearts and of guiding us with assurance. Take my word for it, all we have to do is to rely strongly and solidly on one of the perfections of God, e.g., His goodness, His Providence, His truth, His immensity, etc. As I said, we have only to be firmly established on these divine foundations in order to become perfect in a short time. It’s not that it isn’t also good to be convinced by strong, significant reasons, which can always help us, but they must be subordinate to the truths of faith. Experience teaches us that preachers who preach in conformity with the light of faith do more good in souls than those who fill their discourse with

Conference 17. - Recueil de diverses exhortations, p. 215.

Subheading: Taking care not to waste Community goods; zeal for the spiritual needs of the neighbor.

human and philosophical reasoning because the light of faith is always accompanied by a certain heavenly unction that diffuses itself secretly in the hearts of the listeners. From that we can judge how necessary it is, both for our own perfection and to procure the salvation of souls, to accustom ourselves to follow the light of faith always and in all things.”

19. - THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

“I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or their apparent intelligence, especially since very often they scarcely have the expression or the mind of rational persons, so crude and vulgar they are. But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people; that He scarcely had a human face in His Passion, and passed for a madman in the mind of the Gentiles and a stumbling block in the mind of the Jews. With all that, He describes himself as the Evangelizer of the poor: Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.1 O Dieu! How beautiful it is to see poor people if we consider them in God and with the esteem in which Jesus Christ held them! If, however, we look on them according to the sentiments of the flesh and a worldly spirit, they will seem contemptible.”

20. - A TEMPTATION AGAINST FAITH

“I knew a famous theologian, who had long defended the Catholic faith against heretics in his capacity of Canon Theologian of a diocese. When the late Queen Marguerite sent for him to be with her because of his learning and piety, he had to leave his ministry; since he was no longer preaching or teaching catechism, he was assailed in

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1He sent me to bring the good news to the poor. Cf. Lk 4:18. (NAB)
his idleness by a violent temptation against faith. This teaches us, in passing, how dangerous it is to remain idle, either in body or in mind, for just as the land, no matter how fertile it may be, if allowed to lie fallow, it immediately produces thistles and thorns, so our soul cannot remain idle very long without experiencing certain passions or temptations that lead it to do evil.

"So, when this theologian found himself in this distressing state, he came to me saying that he was troubled by very violent temptations against faith and was having horrible, blasphemous thoughts against Jesus Christ—and even of despair—to the point of feeling himself driven to jump out a window. He was reduced to such an extremity that, in the end, he had to stop praying his Breviary and celebrating Holy Mass—and even saying any prayers. So much so that, when he simply began to say the Pater, he seemed to see a thousand phantoms, who greatly disturbed him. His imagination was so dry, and his mind so exhausted from struggling to make acts disclaiming his temptations, that he couldn’t formulate a single prayer. Being in this pitiful state, then, it was suggested that he do the following: each and every time he turned his hand or one of his fingers toward the city of Rome or even toward some church, this gesture and act would mean that he believed everything the Roman Church believed. And what happened after all that? God finally had mercy on that poor theologian: when he fell sick, he was instantly delivered from all his temptations. The blindfold of obscurity was suddenly removed from his eyes and his mind; he began to see all the truths of faith, but with such clarity that he seemed to feel and touch them with his finger.¹ He finally died, lovingly thanking God for allowing him to fall into those temptations, for raising him up so successfully from them, and for giving him such great, admirable dispositions regarding the Mysteries of our religion."

¹Abelly attributes this happy outcome to the prayers of Saint Vincent and to his act of charity in offering himself to God to be tempted in place of the theologian. The saint did, in fact, suffer a severe assault against his faith, from this interior struggle, lasting three or four years, he emerged greatly strengthened.
21. - CONVERSION OF A HERETIC

One day Saint Vincent told his Community the story of the conversion of a heretic, whom he himself had brought to the true faith. Before giving in, the Huguenot asked the saint to clear up an objection: “You told me, Monsieur, that the Church of Rome is led by the Holy Spirit, but I find that hard to believe because, on the one hand, we see the rural Catholics abandoned to Pastors who are ignorant and given over to vice, with so little instruction in their duties that most of them hardly know what the Christian religion is. On the other, we see towns filled with priests and monks who are doing nothing; there are perhaps ten thousand of them in Paris, yet they leave the poor country people in this appalling state of ignorance in which they are lost. And you want to convince me that all this is being guided by the Holy Spirit! I’ll never believe it.”

Deeply impressed by this objection, the saint replied to the heretic that “he was ill-informed regarding the matter they were discussing; that there were many parishes there with good Pastors and priests; that among the numerous clergy and monks in the cities, several were going to the country to catechize and preach; that others were devoted to meditation and to chanting the praises of God day and night; that still others were very helpful in serving the people by the books they write, the doctrine they teach, and the sacraments they administer; and if there were a few useless ones who did not carry out their obligations as they should, these were individual men subject to human frailty, and they are not the Church. When we say that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, that means generally speaking, when it meets in the Councils, and also privately, when the faithful follow the inspirations of faith and the rules of Christian justice. As for those who stray from that, however, they are resisting the Holy Spirit, and, even though they may be members of the Church, they are, nevertheless, among those who live according to the flesh, as Saint Paul says, and they will die.”

The heretic wasn’t convinced. The following year, Vincent de Paul returned to Montmirail with M. Féron, at that time a Bachelor of Theology, and later a Doctor of the Sorbonne and Archdeacon of Chartres; M. Duchesne, a Doctor at the same faculty and Archdeacon of Beauvais; and some priests and religious among his friends. He was coming to give the mission in that place and in the neighboring villages. The heretic was curious enough to attend the sermons and catechism lessons; he saw the care that was taken to instruct those who did not know the truths necessary for their salvation, the charity with which the priests adapted themselves to the weakness and slowness of mind of the most unrefined, and the marvelous effects the zeal of the Missioners brought about in the heart of the greatest sinners. Moved to tears, he went to find the saint and said to him, “Now I see that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Roman Church, since such care is taken in the instruction and salvation of poor village people; I’m ready to enter it whenever it will please you to receive me.” “Don’t you have any more difficulties?” asked the saint. “No,” replied the heretic, freed from his erroneous beliefs. “I believe everything you told me and am ready to renounce all my errors publicly.”

The saint questioned him, and, after assuring himself that the new convert knew well the essential points of Catholic doctrine, he informed him that he would accept his abjuration, and the following Sunday would absolve him from heresy in the church of Marchais, near Montmirail, where the mission was then taking place. That day, at the conclusion of the morning sermon, Vincent de Paul called the convert aloud by name and asked him publicly if he was still prepared to abjure his errors. After replying affirmatively, the former Calvinist added, pointing to a roughly carved statue of the Blessed

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1Blaise Le Feron, born in Chartres (Eure-et-Loir), was named Abbot of Saint-Lomer in Blois; accused of Jansenism, he was not accepted for the office. He became Vicar-General of Chartres in 1652, died in 1659, and was buried in Sainte-Foy (cf. Abbé Joseph Beauharié, Diocèse de Chartres: Chronologie . . . 1892, p. 9).

2Jérôme Duchesne became a member of the Community of Saint-Nicolas in 1612. In 1621 he gave the mission with Saint Vincent in Montmirail. (Cf. Abelly, op. cit., bk. I, chap. XIII, p. 55.)
Virgin in the church,3 “I can’t believe that there’s any power in that stone.” “The Church doesn’t teach that there’s any power in these material images,” replied the saint, “except when God is pleased to impart it to them, as He can and did do in the past to the rod of Moses that brought about so many miracles, which the children themselves could explain to him.” Thereupon, addressing one of the brightest, he asked him what the Church taught about sacred images. The child replied “that it was good to have them and to give them the honor due them, not because of the material of which they are made, but because they represent to us Our Lord Jesus Christ, His glorious Mother, and the other saints of paradise, who, having triumphed over the world, invite us, through these silent figures, to follow them in their faith and good works.”

That was an excellent answer. The saint repeated the child’s words and had his listener admit that they cleared up completely the difficulty he had raised. He postponed to another day the ceremony of abjuration to give the faith of the new convert time to be affirmed. It was, in fact, affirmed and so well affirmed that, after the public profession of Catholicism nothing could shake him. “Oh! What a happiness for our Missioners,” added Saint Vincent after this story, “to verify the guidance of the Holy Spirit on His Church by working, as we do, at the instruction and sanctification of poor persons!”

22. - MONSIEUR VINCENT’S FEAR FOR HIS FAITH

“All my life I’ve been afraid of finding myself at the start of some heresy. I saw the great havoc wrought by that of Luther and Calvin and how many persons of all kinds and conditions had sucked in its pernicious venom by wanting to taste the false sweetness of their so-called Reformation. I’ve always been afraid of finding myself en-

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3The relic room in the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission (95 rue de Sevres, Paris), houses a fourteenth-century bust of the Blessed Virgin. It is believed that this is the head of the statue mentioned here. (Cf. A. Loth, Saint Vincent de Paul et sa mission sociale [Paris: Dumoulin, 1880], p. 213.)

veloped in the errors of some new doctrine before realizing it. Yes, I’ve feared that all my life.”

23. - TRUST IN GOD

“Let’s trust in God, my dear confreres, but let our trust be total and perfect, and let’s rest assured that, having begun His work in us, He will complete it; for, I ask you, who has established the Company? Who has set us to work in the missions, or with those preparing for ordination, or the conferences, or retreats, etc.? Is it I? No way! Is it M. Portail, whom God associated with me from the beginning? Not at all, for we weren’t thinking of all that and had made no plan for it. So then, who is the author of all that? It’s God, it’s His paternal Providence and sheer goodness. For we’re only insignificant workers and poor ignorant men; and few or none among us are noble, powerful, learned persons or men capable of anything. So, it’s God who has done all that and has brought it about through whatever persons He has seen fit, so that all the glory may revert to Him. So, let’s put all our trust in Him; for, if we put it in human persons or rely on some advantage of nature or fortune, then God will withdraw from us. But someone will say that we have to make friends both for ourselves and for the Company. O my dear confreres, let’s be very wary of listening to this way of thinking, for we’d be deluded by it. Let’s seek God alone, and He’ll provide us with friends and with everything else, so much so that we’ll lack nothing. Do you want to know why we won’t be successful in a certain ministry? It’s because we rely on ourselves. This preacher, that Superior, or that confessor relies too much on his own prudence, knowledge, and intelligence. And what does God do? He withdraws from him and leaves him on his own; and even though he works, whatever he does produces no fruit, in order to make him aware of his own uselessness and so that he’ll learn from personal experience that, whatever talent he may have, he can do nothing without God.”

24. - TRUST IN GOD

"The true Missioner mustn’t be concerned about the goods of this world but cast all his cares on the Providence of the Lord, holding for certain that, as long as he’s firmly grounded in charity and well anchored in this trust, he’ll always be under the protection of God; consequently, no harm will befall him and he’ll lack no good thing, even when he thinks that, judging from appearances, all is going to be lost. I’m not saying this as coming from myself; it’s Holy Scripture that teaches it to us and states that Qui habitat in adjutorio Altissimi, in protectione Dei caeli commorabitur; 1 he who dwells under the sign of trust in God will always be favored by special protection on His part. In that state, he must hold for certain that no harm will befall him because all things work together for his good, and he’ll want for no good thing, especially since, when God himself gives himself to him, He brings with Him all the good things necessary for both body and soul. Therefore, my dear confreres, you have to hope that, as long as you remain firm in this trust, not only will you be preserved from all evil and all disturbing incidents, but will also be showered with all sorts of good things."

25. - LOVE OF GOD

"Let us love God, brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows; for very often many acts of love of God, of devotion, and of other similar affections and interior practices of a tender heart, although very good and desirable, are, nevertheless, very suspect if they don’t translate into the practice of effective love. ‘By this,’ says Our Lord, ‘is my Father glorified, that you may bear much fruit.’ 1 We have to be very careful about

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1He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will remain in the protection of the God of heaven. Cf. Ps 91:1. (NAB)

Conference 25. - Abelly, op. cit., bk. I, chap. XIX, p. 81, excerpt

1Cf. Jn 15:8. (NAB)
that; for there are many who, recollected exteriorly, and filled with lofty sentiments of God interiorly, stop at that, and when it comes to the point of doing something, and they have the opportunity to act, they come up short. They flatter themselves with their ardent imagination; they’re satisfied with the sweet conversations they have with God in meditation and even speak of them like angels; but when they leave there, if there’s a question of working for God, of suffering, of mortifying themselves, of instructing poor persons, of going in search of the lost sheep, of being happy when they lack something, or of accepting sickness or some other misfortune, alas! they’re no longer around; their courage fails them. No, no, let’s not fool ourselves: Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.\(^2\)

“This is so true that the holy Apostle declares to us that only our works accompany us into the other life. So, let’s reflect on that, especially since, in this century there are many who seem virtuous—and who actually are—but, nevertheless, are more inclined to a soft, easy way than to a painstaking, solid devotion. The Church is compared to a great harvest that requires workers, but hardworking ones. Nothing is more in conformity with the Gospel than to gather light and strength for our soul in meditation, reading, and solitude on the one hand, and then to go out and share this spiritual nourishment with others. This is to do as Our Lord did, and His Apostles after Him: it’s to unite the office of Martha to that of Mary and to imitate the dove, which half digests the food it has eaten and then uses its beak to put the rest into that of its babies in order to feed them. That’s what we should do, that’s how we should witness to God by our works that we love Him. Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.”

\(^2\)All our work consists in action.
“We’ll use these words from today’s Gospel, which speak to us of love, as the topic for our discussion of the love Our Lord asks of us. We’ll divide it into three points: in the first we’ll give the motives we have to love Jesus Christ; in the second, we’ll say in what this love consists, giving a sign of it and a few effects; and in the third, we’ll talk about a means of entering into this love, and, if we’re already there, of becoming more firmly established in it. We’ll do this if we’re animated by the Holy Spirit, who is the Love uniting the Persons of the Blessed Trinity within itself and who unites souls to the Most Blessed Trinity. For this intention, let’s make an interior act of recourse to the Blessed Virgin and say, Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis.

“What motives do we have to love Our Lord?”

“To know this, we must reflect on Our Lord as God and as man. As God alone, who He was before He became man, He has commanded us to love Him: Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua because He has created us, etc. What an honor God has bestowed on us in commanding us to love Him! says one of the saints. It would be sufficient if, by a special grace, He permitted us to love Him.

“To recognize how great is our obligation to God in this Commandment, we must consider God as the King of Kings, the Monarch of heaven and earth, etc., our creator and preserver, etc., and consider man as a little earthworm, or, to put it better, a tiny atom in comparison with God.

“We must consider Our Lord both as God and as man. We must love Him in this capacity: (1) because He became man for love of us and to reconcile us with His Father, whose good graces we had lost.
because of the sin of our first father; (2) because He merited for us by His life, Passion, and death the paradise we had lost; (3) to help us to see the eternal Father in Him: *Philippe, qui videt me, videt et Patrem,* and the lifestyle we must lead in order to please Him, etc.

"To know how great this benefit is. We’ll do this if we reflect that, through Him, from the children of iniquity that we were, we have become children of God; from being deserving of hell, we have become worthy of possessing eternal glory.

"The third motive is that Saint Paul fulminates a curse against those who do not love Jesus Christ.

"*In what does this love consist?*

"To love someone, strictly speaking, is to wish him well. In line with that, to love Our Lord means that He wants His name to be made known and revealed to everyone, that He may reign over the earth, and that His Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

"Now, it must be noted that love is divided into affective and effective love. Affective love is a certain outpouring from the one who loves to the loved one, or a pleasure and tender feeling one has for the thing loved, as a father has for his child, etc. Effective love consists in doing the things the loved person commands or desires; it’s this sort of love of which I’m speaking and of which Our Lord spoke: *Si quis diligit me, sermonem meum servabit.*

"The sign of this love, the effect or sign of this love. Messieurs, is the one Our Lord mentions, namely, that those who love Him keep His word. Now, the word of God consists in teachings and counsels. We’ll give a sign of our love if we love His teaching and profess to teach it to others. According to that, the state of the Mission is a state of love, since of itself it’s concerned with the teaching and counsels of Jesus Christ. Not only that, but it also professes to lead the world to the love and esteem of Our Lord.

"*Advantages:*

"If we love Our Lord, we’ll be loved by His Father, which is as much as to say that His Father will wish us well, and will do that in

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4 *Philipp, who sees me, also sees the Father* Cf. Jn 14:9 (NAB)
5 *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word* Cf. Jn 14:23 (NAB)
6 Saint Vincent often refers to the Congregation of the Mission as simply “the Mission.”
two ways: first, He’ll take pleasure in us, as a father with his child; second, He’ll give us His graces of faith, hope, and charity by the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, who will dwell in our souls, just as He gave it today to the Apostles and enabled them to perform the miracles they did.

“The second advantage of loving Our Lord is that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come into the soul that loves Our Lord: (1) through the enlightenment of our understanding; (2) through the interior intuitions They give us of Their love by inspirations, the Sacraments, etc.

“The third effect of Our Lord’s love is that not only God the Father loves these souls, and the Persons of the Blessed Trinity come into them, but They also remain in them. Therefore, the soul of the person who loves Our Lord is the dwelling place of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the place where the Father perpetually begets His Son and the Holy Spirit constantly proceeds from the Father and the Son.

“There are some who are loved by the Father and to whom the three Persons come, but don’t remain there because those souls don’t persevere in loving Our Lord: they also grow lax in the esteem they had for His teaching and for living according to His counsels and the examples He has left us. We loved Him for a year or two in the beginning of our conversion, but we let nature get the upper hand, so we’re living according to our own inclinations, etc.

“Means:

“(1) Meditation on the life and death of Our Lord;
“(2) Reading the New Testament;
“(3) Turning our understanding and will away from the esteem of creatures by mortification, and doing our best to persevere in the imitation of Our Lord.”
One day Vincent de Paul explained to his Community the difference between a state in which God places a person and the one into which He allows the person to fall. The first occurs by God’s Will, and the other happens only with His permission. For example, a state of loss, sickness, contradiction, boredom, or dryness comes absolutely by God’s Will; but one in which there is sin and contravention to the orders given us on His behalf occurs by His permission. For the latter, we have to humble ourselves when we fall into it, doing our utmost, nevertheless, with God’s grace to lift ourselves up and to prevent ourselves from falling into it again. “But, we have to accept the first state, regardless of what it is, because it comes from the Will of God, and we have to resign ourselves to the good pleasure of God to bear with what He pleases and as long as it pleases Him. This, my dear confreres, is the great lesson of the Son of God; and those who are docile to it, and enshrine it well in their hearts, are first class students in the school of this Divine Master. As for me, I know nothing more holy or more perfect than this resignation, when it leads to a total stripping of self and to genuine indifference with regard to all sorts of states in whatever way we’re placed in them, sin excepted. So, let’s hold fast to that, and ask God to grant us the grace to remain constantly in this state of indifference.”

“Consider the very holy dispositions in which [the Christian submissive to the Will of God] spends his life, and the blessings attached to all that he does: he adheres only to God, and God is the one who guides him everywhere and in everything, so he can say with the Prophet, Tenuisti manum dexterae meam, et in voluntate tua deduxisti me. ¹ God holds him by the right hand, as it were; by their

¹You have hold of my right hand, and have led me by your will. Cf. Ps 73:23-24. (NAB)
holding on to one another with entire submission to this divine guidance, you’ll see him tomorrow, the day after, all week long, all year long, in a word, throughout his life, peaceful and tranquil, zealously tending constantly toward God and always spreading in the souls of his neighbor the gentle, beneficent effects of the Spirit that animates him. If you compare him with people who follow their own inclinations, you’ll see his ways of acting reflecting a brilliant light, and always fruitful in results: a notable progress in his person, a strength and energy in all his words. God gives a special blessing to all his endeavors, and bestows His graces on the plans he undertakes for Him and the advice he gives to others. All his actions are very edifying. On the other hand, however, we see that persons attached to their own inclinations and pleasures have only earthly thoughts, speaking like slaves and having only lifeless works. This difference comes from the fact that the latter are attached to creatures, and the former separates himself from them; nature acts in those contemptible souls, and grace acts in those who raise themselves to God and breathe only His Will.”

29. - CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD

At a time when illness was threatening to take several of his priests from him, especially one of the most worthy members of the Company, the saint said to his Community, “We pray that God will be pleased to preserve him; nevertheless, we submit entirely to His Divine Will; for it’s true that we must believe that not only his illness but also the illness of the others, and, in a word, all that happens to the Company, comes about only by His holy guidance and for the benefit of the same Company. That’s why, in asking God to restore health to the sick and to provide for other needs, it may always be on condition that such is His good pleasure and His greater glory.”

30. - THE MAJESTY AND HOLINESS OF GOD

"Brothers, let’s strive to conceive a great—a very great—esteem for the majesty and holiness of God. If our mind’s eye were powerful enough to penetrate ever so little into the immensity of His sovereign excellence, Jésus! with what lofty sentiments we’d be filled! We could easily say, as did Saint Paul, that eyes have never seen, nor ears ever heard, nor mind imagine anything comparable to it.¹ God is an abyss of perfections, an eternal, very holy, very pure, very perfect, and infinitely glorious Being, an infinite Good who encompasses all goods and is incomprehensible in himself. Now, this knowledge we have, that God is infinitely elevated above all kinds of knowledge and all created understanding, should suffice for us to make us esteem Him infinitely, to annihilate ourselves in His presence, and to cause us to speak of His Supreme Majesty with a great sentiment of reverence and submission; and in proportion as we esteem Him, we will also love Him, and this love will produce in us an insatiable desire to acknowledge His benefits and to procure true adorers for Him."

31. - THE SERVICE OF GOD

"Whoever tries to save his life, brothers, will lose it; Jesus Christ is the one who declares that to us, and He tells us that a person can make no greater act of love than to give his life for his friend. Eh, quoi! Can we have a better friend than God! Must we not love all that He loves and, for love of Him, consider our neighbor as our friend! Wouldn’t we be unworthy of enjoying the existence God gives us, if we were to refuse to use it for such a worthy reason? Acknowledging that our life comes from His generous hand, we’d cer-

¹Cf. 1 Cor 2:9. (NAB)
tainly commit an injustice if we refused to use it and to consume it according to His plans, in imitation of His Son Our Lord.”

32. - RESPECT FOR THE RELICS OF SAINTS

Every year, during the Rogation Days,1 the Canons of Notre-Dame had the custom of carrying in procession through the streets of the capital the principal relics of their Treasury, and the church of Saint-Lazare was one of the ones they used to visit. On the eve of one of these processions, Vincent de Paul said to his Community, “We will place ourselves in the disposition of welcoming these precious relics as if they were the saints themselves, who do us the honor of coming to visit us. In this way we’ll honor God in His saints and will entreat Him to give us a share of the graces He poured so abundantly into their souls.”

33. - SIMPLICITY

“God is very simple, or, rather, He’s Simplicity personified; consequently, where there’s simplicity, there God is also found; and, as the Wise Man says,1 the person who walks simply, walks with assurance; whereas, on the contrary, those who are wily and practice duplicity are in constant fear that their craftiness will be discovered, and that, if people catch them in their deception, they’ll no longer be willing to trust them.”


1Rogation days, the three days that immediately precede Ascension Thursday, are days on which a procession of penance and supplication is held.

1He who walks honestly, walks securely, but he whose ways are crooked will fare badly. Cf. Prv 10:9. (NAB)
34. - SIMPLICITY IN PREACHING

“When the Company is working in the missions, it must give itself to God to explain by familiar comparisons the truths of the Gospel. So, let’s strive to form our minds to this method, imitating in that Our Lord, who, as the holy Evangelist states, *sine parabolis non loquebatur ad eos*.¹ Let’s be judicious about using passages from profane authors in our preaching; in addition, this should be done only to serve as a stepping stone to Holy Scripture.”

34a. - SIMPLICITY WITH CRAFTY PERSONS

“You’re going to an area where it’s said that the inhabitants are, for the most part, shrewd and crafty. Now, if that’s the case, the best means to help them is to act very simply with them; for the maxims of the Gospel are totally opposed to worldly ways of acting, and since you’re going for the service of Our Lord, you must also act according to His Spirit, which is a spirit of straightforwardness and simplicity.”

34b. - PRUDENCE IN CONVERSATIONS

“One of the effects of prudence and wisdom is not only to speak well and to say good things, but also to say them at the right time so that they may be well received and beneficial to the persons to whom we speak. Our Lord gave the example of this on several occasions, especially when He was speaking to the Samaritan woman and used the opportunity of the water she had just drawn to speak to her about grace and to inspire her with the desire of perfect conversion.”¹

¹Cf. Mt 13:34. (NAB)


¹Cf. Jn 4:4-43. (NAB)
35. - PRUDENCE

“It’s characteristic of this virtue to regulate and guide words and actions. Prudence helps us to speak wisely and at the right time, causing us to converse discreetly and judiciously of things that are good in their nature and circumstances and to keep silent about and suppress those that are contrary to God or which may harm the neighbor or tend to our own praise or to some other bad end. This same virtue makes us act considerately, in a mature way, and with a good motive in whatever we do, not only regarding the substance of the action, but also regarding the circumstances, so that the prudent man acts in the way he should, when he should, and for the purpose he should. The imprudent man, on the contrary, pays no attention to the manner, the time, or the proper motives, and that’s where he’s at fault, whereas the prudent man, acting discreetly, weighs and measures everything.

“Prudence and simplicity have the same goal and aim, which is to speak and act well in the sight of God. Since one cannot exist without the other, Our Lord recommended them both together.¹ I’m well aware that we’ll find a difference between these two virtues by rational distinction; but, in truth, they’re very closely connected both in their substance and in their purpose. Prudence of the flesh and the world has for its goal the pursuit of honors, pleasures, and wealth; therefore, it’s totally opposed to Christian prudence and simplicity, which distance us from these misleading benefits, helping us to es­pouse solid, lasting benefits. They’re like two good sisters who are inseparable, and are so necessary for our spiritual advancement that the man who knew how to make use of them properly would doubt­less amass great treasures of grace and merits....²

“So, it’s characteristic of prudence to govern our words and actions. In addition to that, however, it has another job, which is to choose means suitable for attaining the goal we set for ourselves.


¹Cf. Mt 10:16. (NAB)

²According to Coste, Abelly adds twenty-six lines here, obviously taken from the conference of March 14, 1659, despite some changes in form.
Since this goal is simply to go to God, it takes the straightest and surest paths to get us there. We’re not talking here about political and worldly prudence, which, aiming only at temporal and sometimes unjust successes, also uses only very dubious and uncertain human means. We’re talking about that holy prudence Our Lord advises in the Gospel, causing us to choose the right means to attain the goal He proposes to us. Since it’s totally divine, it requires means in proportion and in relation to it. Now, we can choose means adapted to the goal we propose to ourselves in two ways: either by our reasoning alone, which is often very poor, or by the maxims of faith that Jesus Christ has taught us, which are always infallible, and which we can use with no fear of error. That’s why true prudence submits our reason to these maxims and gives us as an inviolable rule that we always judge everything as Our Lord judged them. The result is that, when the occasions arise, we may ask ourselves, ‘How did Our Lord judge such or such a thing? How did He act in such or such a circumstance? What did He say and do regarding certain matters?’ and thus we may adapt our whole way of acting in accord with His maxims and examples. So then, let’s take this resolution, Messieurs, and walk confidently along this royal road on which Jesus Christ will be our leader and guide, remembering that He has said that heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away.³ Let’s bless Our Lord, brothers, strive to think and judge as He did, and do what He recommended by His words and examples. Let’s enter into His Spirit to adopt His ways of acting; for doing good isn’t everything; it must be done well, in imitation of Our Lord, of whom it is said, Bene omnia fecit: He has done all things well.⁴ No, it’s not enough to fast, to observe the Rules, to carry out the ministries of the Mission; but we must do this in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, with perfection, for the purpose, and in the way He did them. So, Christian prudence consists in judging, speaking, and working as the Eternal Wisdom of God, clothed in our weak flesh, judged, spoke, and worked.”

³Cf. Mt 24:35. (NAB)
⁴Cf. Mk 7:37. (NAB)
36. - HUMILITY

“It’s a good practice to get down to particulars in humbling matters, when prudence allows us to admit them openly, because of the benefit we draw from this, overcoming our repugnance to reveal what pride might want to keep hidden. Saint Augustine himself made public the secret sins of his youth, writing a book about them so that the whole world might know all the foolishness of his errors and the excesses of his unruly conduct. And didn’t that vessel of election, Saint Paul, the great Apostle who was ravished to heaven, admit that he had persecuted the Church? He even put it in writing 1 so that, even until the end of time, people might know that he had been a persecutor. Indeed, if we don’t watch carefully over ourselves and do violence to ourselves to acknowledge our faults and failings, we’ll say only the things that can give people a good opinion of us, and we’ll conceal those that cause us shame. That’s what we inherited from our first parent Adam, who, after offending God, went and hid himself.

“At various times I’ve made the visitation of certain religious houses, and have often asked many of the nuns to which virtue they were most attracted and valued most highly. I even asked those whom I know were more put off by humiliations. Among twenty of them, however, I hardly found a single one who didn’t say that it was humility, so true it is that everyone finds this virtue beautiful and lovely. How is it, then, that so few people practice it and even fewer have it? It’s because we’re content to think about it but don’t take the trouble to acquire it. It’s delightful to speculate on it, but in practice it has an aspect that’s distasteful to nature; and its practices are displeasing to us because they lead us to choose always the lowest place, to put ourselves beneath others, to endure calumnies, to seek contempt, and to love abjection—things to which we naturally have an aversion. Therefore, we have to overcome this repugnance, and each of us has to make an effort to really practice this virtue; otherwise,

Conference 36. - Abelly, op. cit., bk. III, chap. XIII, sect II, p. 221. Repetition of Prayer. The confere on whom Saint Vincent called for his Repetition of Prayer before he began his conference had acknowledged in all simplicity that an anxiety had prevented him from meditating during the period of prayer.

1Cf. I Cor 15:9. (NAB)
we'll never acquire it. I'm well aware that, by the grace of God, some among us do practice this divine virtue, and not only do they not think highly of themselves, their talents, their knowledge, or their virtue, but they consider themselves very wretched, want to be recognized as such, and put themselves beneath all creatures. I must confess that I never see these persons that they don't put me to shame; for they make me a secret reproach of the pride within me, abominable man that I am. As for these souls, however, they're always content, and their joy even shines forth in their expression because the Holy Spirit, who dwells in them, fills them with peace, with the result that nothing can trouble them. If they're contradicted, they accept it; if they're calumniated, they bear with it; if they're overlooked, they think that's only right; if they're overburdened with work, they do it willingly; and no matter how difficult an order may be, they carry it out willingly, relying on the virtue of holy obedience. The temptations that come to them serve only to strengthen them even more in humility, cause them to turn to God, and, in this way, make them victorious over the devil; consequently, they have no enemy to combat but pride, which never gives us any respite in this life but attacks in various ways even the greatest saints on earth, prompting some to vain complacency in the good they've done, and others in the knowledge they've acquired. The latter are led to presume that they're the most enlightened, and the former to think themselves the best and most steadfast.

"That's why we have very good reason to ask God to be pleased to protect and preserve us from this insidious vice, which is all the more to be feared because all of us are naturally inclined to it. Then, too, we have to be on the watch and do the opposite of what corrupt nature tries to prompt us to do: if it raises us up, let's abase ourselves; if it prompts us to desires of self-esteem, let's reflect on our weakness; if it's a desire to be noticed, let's hide what can cause people to notice us, and prefer lowly, vile actions to those that are showy and respected. In a word, let's often have recourse to love of our own abjection, which is a sure refuge for keeping ourselves safe from similar disturbances that our unfortunate propensity to pride constantly raises in us. Let's ask Our Lord to be pleased to draw us after Him by
the merit of the adorable humiliations of His life and death. Let each and every one of us offer Him, in solidarity with one another, all the humiliations we can practice, and be prompted to this practice by the sole motive of honoring Him and humbling ourselves.”

37. - HUMILITY

“Humility is such a broad virtue, but so difficult and necessary, that we can’t reflect on it enough. It’s the virtue of Jesus Christ, of his holy Mother, of the greatest saints, and, in a word, it’s the virtue of Missioners. But what am I saying? I take that back. I’d like us to have it; and when I say that it’s the virtue of Missioners, I mean that it’s the virtue they need the most and must ardently desire; for this insignificant Company, the least of all, must be founded only on humility as on its characteristic virtue; otherwise, we’ll never do anything worthwhile within or outside the Company. Without humility, we mustn’t expect to make any progress for ourselves or benefit for the neighbor. O Savior, give us this holy virtue, which is characteristic of You, and which You brought into the world and love so much. And you, Messieurs, know that anyone who wants to be a true Missioner must constantly strive to acquire this virtue and make progress in it, being careful above all to banish all thoughts of pride, ambition, and vanity, as being the greatest enemies he can have. As soon as they appear, he must rush upon them to uproot them, and keep a close watch so as not to give them any opening. Yes, I say it again, that if we are genuine Missioners, each one of us must be willing to be considered poor, insignificant creatures, men lacking virtue, treated as ignorant persons who are insulted and despised, reproached for our failings, and made known publicly as unbearable men because of our faults and imperfections.”


1 According to Coste, what follows these words in Abelly is taken from the conference of April 18, 1659.
38. - HUMILITY

"Truly, my dear confreres, if each and every one of us is willing to strive to know himself well, he'll find that it's quite proper and reasonable to despise himself. For if, on the one hand, we seriously consider the corruption of our nature, the inconstancy of our mind, the darkness of our understanding, the intractability of our will, and the impurity of our affections; if, furthermore, we examine thoroughly our works and activities, we'll find that all of that is worthy of contempt. 'Mais quoi!' you'll say to me, 'Do you include in that number the sermons we've preached, the confessions we've heard, the care and trouble we've taken for our neighbor and the service of Our Lord?' Yes, Messieurs, if we review the best actions, we'll find that in most of them we've acted badly as to the way we did them, and often in our intention, and that, no matter how we look at them, there may be as much bad as good in them; for, will you please tell me what can be expected from human frailty? What can nothingness produce and sin do? What else do we have of ourselves except nothingness and sin? So, let's hold it as certain that, in everything and everywhere, we're worthy of being disdained and are always very despicable because of our natural opposition to holiness and the other perfections of God, and to the life of Jesus Christ and the operations of His grace. What convinces us more strongly of this truth is our natural, constant inclination to evil, our powerlessness to do good, and the experience all of us have that, even when we think we've succeeded well in some action or that our advice has been well received, just the opposite happens, and God often allows us to be held in contempt. If then, we strive to know ourselves well, we'll find that in everything we think, say, and do, either in the substance or in the circumstances, we're filled with, and surrounded by, reasons for shame and contempt; and, if we don't try to flatter ourselves, we'll see that we're not only more wicked than other men but, in a certain sense, worse than the devils in hell; for, if those unfortunate beings had at their disposal the graces and means given
to us to become better, they'd make a million times better use of them than we do."

39. - HUMILITY

One day Vincent de Paul said that we should never reflect or dwell on anything good in ourselves but strive to know what is bad or faulty in us, and that this was a great means to preserve humility. Neither the gift of converting souls, he added, nor all the other external talents we had were for ourselves, that we were only their street porters, and with all that we could very well be damned; consequently, no one should flatter himself, or be complacent, or have any self-esteem about that, seeing that God works great things by His own means; but we should humble ourselves all the more and recognize that we're puny instruments that God deigns to use, as He did with the rod of Moses, which worked wonders and miracles and was, however, only a poor rod and a fragile stick of wood.

40. - HUMILITY

"Isn't it strange how clearly we see that individuals in a Company, like Peter, James, and John, should shun honor and love contempt, but the Company, people say, and the Community, have to acquire and preserve esteem and honor in the world? For, I ask you, how can it be that Peter, James, and John truly and sincerely love and seek contempt, and that, nevertheless, the Company, which is composed of only Peter, James, John, and other individuals, must love and seek honor? We must certainly acknowledge and admit that these two things are incompatible; therefore, all Missioners must be content not only when they find themselves personally in some situation of

abjection or contempt, but also when someone looks down on their Company; for that will be a sign that they’re truly humble.”

40a. - HUMILITY

“Brothers, let’s be like that peasant who was carrying the baggage of Saint Ignatius and his travel-weary companions and, seeing that they knelt down when they arrived in some place where they were stopping, he did the same; seeing them pray, he also prayed; and when those holy persons asked him one time what he was doing there, he replied, ‘I’m asking God to do what you’re requesting of Him. I’m like a poor animal who doesn’t know how to pray; I ask Him to hear you. I’d like to say to Him what you say to Him, but I don’t know how, so I’m offering your prayers to Him.’

“My dear confreres, we must consider ourselves as the porters of those worthy workers, as poor idiots who don’t know how to express ourselves and are the refuse of others, and as lowly gleaners who come after those great harvesters. Let’s thank God that He has been pleased to accept our humble services in that. Let’s offer Him, together with our little handfuls, the great harvests of others, and let’s always be ready to do whatever we can for the service of God and the assistance of our neighbor. If God gave such beautiful enlightenment and such a great grace to that poor peasant mentioned in that story, let’s hope that, by doing our utmost, as he did, to contribute to seeing God honored and served, His Divine Goodness will graciously accept our offerings and bless our modest labors.”

"Pay attention to Our Lord’s recommendation to us in these words: ‘Learn of me that I am humble of heart,’ and beg Him to help you to understand them. If He sets us afire ever so little with the desire for humiliations, that will suffice, even though we may not have the knowledge of this virtue that Our Lord did, who knew the connection it has with the perfections of God His Father and the repulsiveness of the human sinner. It’s true that we’ll never see that in this life other than only very obscurely, but we must, nevertheless, have confidence in the midst of darkness that, if our heart is attached to humiliations, God will give us humility, preserve us in it, and increase it in us by the acts He’ll cause us to make of it. For an act of virtue that’s well done disposes us to do another well, and the first degree of humility serves to rise to the second, the second to the third, and so on for the others."

"What is the life of this Divine Savior if not one constant humiliation, active and passive? He so loved it that He never was without it during His life on earth; and even after His death He willed that the Church represent His Divine Person to us by the figure of a crucifix in order to appear to our eyes in a state of ignominy, having been hanged for us like a criminal and suffering the most shameful, infamous death imaginable. And why? Because He knew the excellence of humiliations and the malice of the contrary sin, which not only makes the other sins worse, but makes works imperfect that aren’t bad in themselves, and which can infect and corrupt those that are good, even the holiest ones."


1Cf. Mt 11:29. (NAB)

42. - AMBITION

"God hasn't sent us to have honorable posts and ministries, or to act or speak pompously and authoritatively, but to serve and evangelize poor persons and to carry out the other activities of our Institute in a humble, gentle, and friendly way. That's why we can apply to ourselves what Saint John Chrysostom said in one of his homilies that, as long as we remain sheep by a genuine, sincere humility, not only will we not be devoured by wolves but we'll even convert them into sheep. On the contrary, from the moment we stray from the humility and simplicity characteristic of our Institute, we'll lose the grace attached to them, and we won't find any in brilliant actions. Indeed, isn't it only right that a Missioner who has become worthy in his modest profession of the blessing of heaven and the approval and esteem of others, be deprived of one and the other when he lets himself take on works that smack of the spirit of the world by the prestige he seeks in them and which are opposed to the spirit of his state? Isn't there reason to fear that he may vanish in broad daylight and fall into disorder, in line with what’s said of the servant who became the master, that he became, at the same time, proud and unbearable? The late Cardinal de Bérulle,¹ that great servant of God, was accustomed to

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¹Pierre de Bérulle was born in the Château de Cérilly (Yonne) on February 4, 1575. Ordained a priest in 1599, he was appointed chaplain to King Henry IV shortly afterward. His skill in controversy enabled him to bring several important persons back to the Church, among others the Comte de Laval, the Baron de Salignac, and a judge of the Parlement of Paris. He established the Carmelites in France in 1603 with the support of Mme Acarie and Michel de Marillac, Keeper of the Seals. In 1611 he founded the Congregation of the Oratory, of which he was the first Superior. King Louis XIII entrusted him with the honorable mission of conducting to England Henriette of France, daughter of Henry IV, for her marriage (May 11, 1625) to the Prince of Wales, the future Charles I. Bérulle had great influence on the clergy and gathered around himself the most virtuous and eminent priests of Paris. As soon as Vincent arrived in the city, he sought the assistance and advice of Bérulle. Abelly claimed that the saint lived "about two years" under Bérulle’s roof (*op. cit.*, bk. I, chap. VI, p. 24), but more likely it was four or five months at the most. Bérulle’s intervention is evident in Vincent’s acceptance of the parish of Clichy, his entrance as tutor into the de Gondi family, his withdrawal to Chatillon-les-Dombes, and his return to the de Gondi household. We would like to be able to state that their relationship always remained the same. However, Bérulle did not approve of the nascent Congregation of the Mission and even tried to prevent its approval by Rome, as one of his letters to Pierre Bertin indicated. In 1628, referring to the new Congregation, he wrote, "The plans that you tell me of those who are soliciting the business of the missions by various and, in my opinion, devious ways, should make it suspect and oblige us to put aside the reserve and simplicity with which I consider the affairs of God should be conducted." (Cf. Archives of the Mission, according to
say that it was good to keep oneself humble, that the lowliest states were the surest ones, that there was a certain malignancy in lofty, exalted conditions, that this was the reason the saints had always shunned high offices, and that, in order to convince us by His own word and example, Our Lord had said, speaking of himself, that He had come into the world to serve and not to be served.12

43. - HUMAN RESPECT

One day, when one of his men had accused himself before the others of having acted through human respect, Vincent de Paul, filled with love of God, said that “it would be better to be thrown, with our hands and feet bound, on burning coals rather than to do something to please others.” Then, after starting to list, on the one hand, some of the divine perfections, and, on the other, some of the faults, imperfections, and failings of creatures in order to show the injustice and folly of those who neglect to perform their actions for God, losing their time and trouble by having only base, human views in what they do, he added these words worthy of note, “Let’s always honor the perfections of God; let’s take as the aim of whatever we have to do those that are most contrary to our imperfections, such as His gentleness and mildness, directly opposed to our anger; His knowledge, so contrary to our blindness; His infinite grandeur and majesty, so highly elevated above our lowliness and baseness; His infinite goodness, always in contrast to our malice. Let’s strive to do all our actions to honor and glorify this perfection of God, which is directly contrary to our faults.”

He added that this effort was like the soul of our works, greatly increasing their value and worth. He also recalled, speaking of this, the clothing Princes and great Lords wore on the days of their triumphs

Arch. Nat., M 216, second packet, folio of Fr. Bertin, p. 26, in which this excerpt is no longer found.) At the time, Bérulle had been a Cardinal for a year. He died on October 2, 1629, and his life was written by Fr. Cloysteault. Fr. Ingold published this manuscript in 1880.

2Cf. Mt 20:28. (NAB)
and splendor; for, he said, “clothing is usually prized not so much for
the fabric of which it’s made as for the gold trimming and embroi-
dered adornments, pearls, and precious stones with which it’s embel-
lished. In like manner, we mustn’t be content with doing good works,
but must enrich and increase their value by the merit of a very noble
and holy intention, doing them only to please and glorify God.”

43a. - PURITY OF INTENTION

“God considers not so much our external actions as the degree of
love and purity of intention with which we do them. Insignificant ac-
tions done to please God are not so subject to vainglory as other,
more brilliant ones, which quite often vanish into thin air. In a word,
if we want to please God in great actions, we must accustom our-
selves to please him in humble ones.”

44. - GENTLENESS

“Sometimes we see people who seem to be endowed with great
gentleness, which, however, is very often only a result of their natu-
ral moderation. They don’t, however, have Christian gentleness,
whose characteristic is to repress and stifle the sallies of the contrary
vice. We aren’t chaste because we don’t experience immodest im-
pulses but rather because we resist them when we do have them.
Here in this house we have an example of true gentleness; I’m saying
this because the person isn’t present, and all of you can attest to his
dry, arid temperament. I’m referring to M. . . .; and you can easily
determine whether there are any two persons alive who are as un-
couth and forbidding as we are, and yet, we see this man overcome
himself to the point that we can truly say that he’s no longer what he
used to be. What has caused that? It’s the virtue of gentleness, at

which he's working, whereas I, wretch that I am, remain dry as a bramble branch. I beg you, Messieurs, not to stop at the bad examples I give you; rather—to borrow the words of the holy Apostle—I urge you to walk worthily and with all gentleness and graciousness in the state to which you have been called by God.”

45. - GENTleness

“There are no people more constant and steadfast in doing good than those who are gentle and good-natured, just as, on the contrary, those who allow themselves to give in to anger and the passions of the irascible appetite are usually very fickle because they act only on impulse and fits of anger. They’re like mountain streams, strong and impetuous only when they overflow, but which dry up as soon as their waters are drained; whereas rivers, which represent good-natured people, flow quietly, tranquilly, and never dry up.”

46. - GENTleness in CONTROVERSIES

“When you debate someone, the arguments you use on that occasion make the person see clearly that you want to come out on top; that’s why he’s prepared to resist rather than to acknowledge the truth. The result is that, instead of helping him to open his mind more by this debate, you ordinarily close the door of his heart. On the contrary, gentleness and affability open it. We have a beautiful example of that in blessed Francis de Sales, who, although he was very knowledgeable in controversies, nevertheless converted heretics more by his gentleness than by his doctrine. On this point, Cardinal du Perron used to say that he really worked hard to convince heretics,

1 Cf. Eph 4:1-2. (NAB)
Conference 45. - Abel, op. cit., bk. III, chap. XII, p. 180, excerpt
Conference 46. - Abel, op. cit., bk. III, chap. XII, p. 181, excerpt

1 Jacques Cardinal du Perron (1556-1618), Bishop of Angoulême, who was a member of the Council of Regency after the death of Henry IV (1610).
but the Bishop of Geneva was the one who converted them. Remember carefully, Messieurs, the words of Saint Paul to that great missionary Saint Timothy, *Servum Domini non oportet litigare:* a servant of Jesus Christ was not to get involved in arguments or debates; and I can certainly tell you that I've never seen or known any heretic who was converted by the strength of the debate or the subtlety of the arguments but rather by gentleness, so true it is that this virtue has the power to win people over to God."

47. - GENTleness

(1) To foresee the occasions when we might fail in gentleness, to think about what topics might provoke angry reactions, and form mentally in advance the acts of gentleness we intend to practice on all occasions.

(2) To detest the vice of anger because it displeases God, without, however, becoming angry or growing bitter at seeing ourselves subject to it, especially since we must hate this vice and love the contrary virtue, not because the former displeases us and we find the latter pleasing, but only for love of God, whom this virtue pleases and this vice displeases. By so doing, the sorrow we will conceive of the faults we have committed against this virtue will be sweet and tranquil.

(3) When we feel moved to anger, to stop what we are doing and even what we are saying, and, above all, to make no decisions until this passion has calmed down because actions done while we are agitated like that are not completely guided by reason, which is disturbed and clouded by passion and, consequently, are never perfect.

(4) During this emotional state, to strive to control ourselves to the point of not letting anything show on our face. There is nothing in this contrary to simplicity because we do it, not to appear other than we are, but through a sincere desire that the virtue of gentleness, which is in the superior part of the soul, might pass on to our face, our

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*The Servant of the Lord ought not to quarrel.* Cf. 2 Tm 2:23-24. (NAB)  
Conference 47. - Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. III, chap. XII, p. 179, summary.
tongue, and our external actions in order to please God and the neighbor for love of God.

(5) Above all, to hold our tongue while our heart is agitated, and, despite all the ferment of the anger and all the sallies of zeal imaginable, to say only gentle, pleasant words in order to win people over to God. “Sometimes all it takes is a gentle word to convert a hardened person; a harsh word, on the contrary, is capable of upsetting a soul and causing in it a bitterness that could be very harmful to it.” The saint declared many times that he had used harsh words only three times in his life to reprove and correct others, thinking he had good reason to act that way, and he always wished afterward that he hadn’t because things turned out very badly; on the contrary, he always got what he wanted through gentleness.

47a. - PATIENCE

“The state of pain and affliction is not a bad state: God puts us in it to make us practice the virtue of patience and to teach us compassion toward others. He himself willed to experience this state in order that we might have a high priest who could share our sufferings and encourage us by His example to practice this virtue.

“One of the surest signs that God has great plans for someone is when He sends him distress upon distress and trouble upon trouble. The real time to recognize the spiritual mettle of a soul is the time of temptation and tribulation because the way we are during these trials is the way we usually are afterward. We can acquire greater merit in a single day of temptation than in many other peaceful ones.”

47b. - FRANCIS DE SALES, AN EXAMPLE OF GENTLENESS

On this topic (gentleness) he gave the example of blessed Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, who, he said, was the most gentle, friendly man he ever knew. The first time he saw him, he recognized in the way he greeted him, in the serenity of his expression, and in his manner of conversing and speaking a very special image of the gentleness of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which won over his heart.

48. - AFFABILITY

“We have all the more need of affability because we’re more obliged by our vocation to converse often among ourselves and with the neighbor, and this conversation is more difficult, either among ourselves because we’re from different parts of the country or have very different personalities and moods, or with the neighbor, with whom we often have a great deal to bear. It’s the virtue of affability that does away with these difficulties and which, since it’s like the soul of a good conversation, makes the conversation not only helpful but pleasant as well. It causes us to act with decorum in conversation and to be deferential to one another; and, just as charity unites us as members of one same body, affability perfects this union.”

49. - AFFABILITY

Vincent de Paul recommended particularly to his men the practice of affability toward poor country persons. “Otherwise, they’re put off and don’t dare approach us, thinking that we’re too harsh or are gentlemen too great for them. But, when we treat them affably

and cordially, they think differently about us and are better disposed
to take advantage of the benefit we’re trying to offer them. Now,
since God has destined us to serve them, we have to do it in the way
most beneficial to them, and, consequently, treat them with great af-
fability, taking this advice of the Wise Man as if it were addressed to
each one of us in particular: Congregationi pauperum affabilem te
facito: make yourselves affable to the assembly of the poor.”

50. - THE SPIRIT OF GRACIOUS CONDESCENSION

“Our obedience must not be limited simply to those who have the
right to give us orders, but must go beyond that: for we’ll be very
careful not to fail in the obedience that is of obligation if, as Saint
Peter recommends, we submit to every human creature for love of
God. So, let’s do that and consider everyone else as superior to
us, putting ourselves beneath them—even lower than the lowliest
ones—and let’s anticipate them by deference, condescension, and all
sorts of services. What a good thing it would be if God were pleased
to ground us firmly in this practice!”

51. - THE SPIRIT OF GRACIOUS CONDESCENSION

“In a Community, all those who compose it and are its members
must be gracious with one another. In line with that, the learned
must condescend to the weakness of the unlearned and to things in
which there is no error or sin; the wise and prudent must conde-
sced to the humble and simple: non alta sapientes, sed humilibus
consentientes. And by this same gracious condescension we must not
only approve the opinions of others in good and indifferent things, but

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1Cf. Sir 4:7. (NAB)
1Cf. 1 Pt 2:13. (NAB)
1Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Cf. Rom 12:16. (NAB)
even prefer them to our own, believing that others have lights and na­
tural or supernatural qualities greater and more excellent that we have. We must, however, be very careful not to condescend in bad things be­cause that wouldn’t be a virtue but a serious fault, proceeding from ei­ther a free spirit or some laxity and faintheartedness.”

52. - MORTIFICATION

“Let’s hold fast against our nature; for, if we give it an inch, it will
take a mile. And we can rest assured that the measure of our progress
in the spiritual life must be taken from the progress we’re making in
the virtue of mortification, which is particularly necessary for those
who have to work for the salvation of souls; for it’s useless for us to
preach penance to others, if we don’t practice it ourselves and if it
isn’t obvious in our actions and behavior.”

53. - MORTIFICATION

“Woe betide the person who seeks his own satisfactions! Woe be­
tide the person who flees from crosses, for he’ll find such heavy ones
that they’ll overwhelm him! The man who makes little account of
external mortifications, saying that interior ones are much more per­
fect, makes it rather clear that he isn’t mortified at all, either interiorly
or exteriorly.”

54. - SENSUALITY

“Sensuality is found everywhere, and not only in the pursuit of
worldly esteem, wealth, and pleasures, but also in devotions, in the
holiest actions, in books, and in pictures; in a word, it worms its way into everything. O my Savior, grant us the grace of divesting ourselves of self; please help us to disregard ourselves in order to love You more perfectly, You who are the source of all virtue and perfection and the mortal enemy of sensuality. Give us this spirit of mortification and the grace always to resist self-love, which is the root of all our sensuality."

55. - THE GOOD USE OF ILLNESS

"It must be admitted that the state of sickness is an unfortunate state and is almost unbearable to nature; nevertheless, it's one of the most powerful means God uses to remind us of our duty, to detach us from attraction to sin, and to fill us with His gifts and graces. O Savior, You who have suffered so much, who died to redeem us and to show us how much this painful state could glorify God and serve for our sanctification, please grant that we may understand the great benefit and treasure hidden in this state of illness. It's through sickness, Messieurs, that souls are cleansed of impurities and that those who lack virtue have an efficacious means of acquiring it. No more suitable state can be found in which to practice it; it's in sickness that faith is exercised in a marvelous way; hope shines brightly in it; resignation, love of God, and ample opportunities for the practice of all the virtues are found in it. In it we can know what each man bears and what he is; it's the gauge by which you can probe and discover with the greatest assurance the virtue of each and every person—whether he has a lot, a little, or none at all.

"We never see better what a man is than when he is in the infirmary. It's the surest proof we have for recognizing the most virtuous men and those who are less so. This helps us to see how important it is for us to be firmly grounded in the proper way to behave during illness. Oh! If we only knew how to act like a good ser-

vant of God who, when he was sick in bed, made of this a throne of merit and glory! He surrounded himself with the holy Mysteries of our religion. On the baldachin of the bed, he placed a picture of the Most Holy Trinity; at the bedside, a picture of the Incarnation; on one side, the Circumcision; on the other, the Blessed Sacrament; at the foot of the bed the Crucifixion. Thus, no matter to which side he turned, to the right or to the left, whether he looked up or down, he was always surrounded by these divine Mysteries and, as it were, enveloped and filled with God.1 What a beautiful inspiration. Messieurs, what a beautiful inspiration! If God were to grant us this grace, how happy we’d be!

“We have good reason to praise God that, by His goodness and mercy, there are sick and infirm men in the Company who make of their inactivity and sufferings a theater of patience, in which they show forth all the virtues in their brilliance. We must thank God for having given us such persons. I’ve already said many times, and can’t refrain from saying it again, that we must believe that its sick members are the blessing of the Company.

“Let’s reflect that infirmities and sufferings come from God. Death, life, health, sickness—all these come by order of His Providence and, no matter how they come, they’re always for our benefit and salvation. Yet, some men are very often quite impatient with their ailments, and that’s a serious fault. Others persuade themselves that they need a change, that they should go to this place or that, to this house, that province, or their native region, under the pretext that the air is better there. Why do they do that? They’re men

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1 Dodin tells us (cf. *Entretiens spirituels*, p. 942, n. 1) that this was a pious gentleman known as Bro. Antoine, whom Saint Vincent mentioned in a conference to the Daughters of Charity (cf. *IX*, 332, n. 6). Antoine Flandin-Maillet was born in 1590 in Saint-Geoire (Isère) and died in Montreuil (Ain) on February 16, 1629. The conversions attributed to his prayers, the cures obtained by his laying on of hands, his battles with demons, his relationships with angels, and his enlightened advice wrapped him in a mantle of holiness; his prestige was acknowledged not only by poor and humble persons but also by Princes and the great and powerful. In 1628, the Queen had him brought to Paris so she could converse with this simple, illiterate man, whose sanctity everyone proclaimed. It was at that time that Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, and Fr. Portail had the happiness of meeting him. Bro. Antoine’s portrait hung in one of the rooms of Saint-Lazare. He was not a member of the Congregation of the Mission and there is no indication that he belonged to any religious Community.
attached to themselves, who act like little girls; they’re persons who are unwilling to put up with anything, as if bodily infirmities were evils to be avoided. To shun the state in which God is pleased to place us is to run away from our own happiness. Yes, suffering is a state of happiness that sanctifies souls.”

56. - ZEAL

“Whoever says Missioner, says a man called by God to save souls; for our aim is to work at their salvation, in imitation of Our Lord, who is the only true Redeemer and who fulfilled perfectly this amiable name of Jesus, that is, Savior. He came from heaven to earth to carry out this office; He made it the reason for His life and death; and He constantly exercises this role of Savior by sharing with us the merits of the blood He has shed.

“While He was living on earth, He directed all His thoughts to our salvation, and He still has the same sentiments because that’s where He finds His Father’s Will. He came, and He still comes to us for that purpose. By His example, He taught us all the virtues proper to the function of Savior. Let’s give ourselves to Him, then, so that He’ll continue to exercise this same function in and through us.”

57. - ZEAL

“God is opening up for us a beautiful field of action in Madagascar, in the Hebrides, and elsewhere. Let’s pray that God will fill our hearts with the burning desire to serve Him; let’s give ourselves to Him to do with us whatever He pleases. Saint Vincent Ferrer was encouraged by the thought that priests were to come who, by their fervent zeal, would set the whole earth afire. If we’re unworthy of

2Abelly adds here some material taken from the Conference of June 28, 1658 (cf. XII, Conf. 184).
having God grant us the grace of being those priests, let’s beg Him to grant us at least the favor of making us their images and precursors; but, whatever the case, let’s hold for certain that we won’t be true Christians until we’re ready to lose everything and even to give our lives for the love and glory of Jesus Christ. Let’s resolve, with the holy Apostle, to choose the torments of death itself rather than to be separated from the charity of this Divine Savior.”

**57a. - GREATNESS OF THE BARBARY MISSION**

“This work was considered so great and holy that it gave rise to the institution of some holy Orders in God’s Church, and those Orders have always been highly respected, especially since they were instituted for the slaves, like the religious of the Redemption of Captives,¹ who go from time to time to ransom some slaves and then return home. Among the vows they take, one of them is to devote themselves to the ransom of Christian slaves. Isn’t that excellent and holy, my dear confreres? Nevertheless, I think there’s something more in those who go to Barbary not only to help in the ransom of those poor Christians, but, in addition, remain there to work full time at this charitable redemption, assisting those poor slaves corporally and spiritually at all hours, as well as being constantly attuned to all their needs; in a word, always there, ready to lend them a hand and to help and console them in all sorts of ways in their greatest afflictions and sufferings. O my dear confreres, do you really think about the importance of this work? Does anything resemble more what Our Lord did when He came down to earth to redeem us from the captivity of sin and to instruct us by His words and example? That’s the example all Missioners must follow; for

¹Cf. Rom. 8:35. (NAB)


¹The Order of Mercy (Order of Redemption), whose members are commonly known as Mercedarians, was founded for the redemption of captives by Saint Peter Nolasco in the thirteenth century.
this purpose they have to be ready to leave their native land, their comforts and their ease, like our good confreres in Tunis and Algiers, who have given themselves totally to the service of God and the neighbor in those barbarian, infidel lands."

57b. - PRAISE FOR AID TO THE PROVINCES DEVASTATED BY WAR

"Admittedly, we can think only with admiration of those generous alms God inspired people to make, and of the quantity of clothes, sheets, blankets, shirts, shoes, etc., that have been provided for all sorts of persons—men, women, children, and even priests—along with the large number of albs, chasubles, missals, ciboria, chalices, and other sacred vessels sent for the churches. Those churches were plundered to the point that, without this aid, the celebration of the Holy Mysteries and the practices of the Christian religion would have been banished from them, and those sacred places would have been used only for profane things. It was truly an edifying spectacle to see the homes of the Ladies of Charity of Paris filled with all sorts of clothing and become like warehouses and the stores of wholesale merchants. Those Ladies will doubtless have in heaven the crown of priests because of the zeal and charity they had in clothing Jesus Christ on His altars, in his priests, and in His poor members."

57c. - RECOMMENDATIONS TO SOME MISSIONERS LEAVING FOR DISTANT COUNTRIES

"Go, Messieurs, in the name of Our Lord! It's He who is sending you; it's for His service and glory that you're undertaking this journey and mission; He will also be the one who will guide, assist, and protect you. We hope for this from His infinite goodness; always remain in loyal dependence on His faithful guidance. Have recourse to

Him everywhere and on all occasions; throw yourselves into His arms, as one you must recognize as your very good Father, with the firm trust that He will assist you and bless your work.”

57d. - PRAISE FOR MISSIONARY WORK

“Our Lord recommends to us by those words ('Seek first the kingdom of God') that we have God reign within us and then cooperate with Him in extending His kingdom and making it increase in the conquest of souls. Isn’t it a great honor for us to be called to carry out such a great and important plan? Isn’t that to act like the angels, who work constantly and solely for the extension of the kingdom of God? Is there any state more desirable than ours, which we must not live in or act except to spread and increase the kingdom of God? What reason will we not have, brothers, to respond worthily to such a holy, sanctifying vocation?"

57e. - CHARITY FOR THE FOUNDLINGS

“Isn’t it the duty of fathers to provide for the needs of their children and, since God has put us in the place of those who begot them, to set about saving their lives and seeing that they’re brought up and instructed in things necessary for their salvation; let’s be very careful not to grow lax in an undertaking so pleasing to Him. For, if we should neglect the care of seeing that they’re fed and brought up, after their unnatural mothers have exposed and abandoned them, what will become of them? Could we consent to seeing all of them die, as happened formerly in this great city of Paris?”

Conference 57d. - Abelly, op. cit., bk. III, chap. IV, p. 32, excerpt

\(^1\)Cf. Mt 6:33. (NAB)

58. - FORTITUDE IN PERSECUTION

After telling his Community the story of some persecution that the Barbary Missioners had undergone, M. Vincent added, "Who knows whether God didn’t send this trial to test our fidelity? Do merchants stop going to sea because of the dangers they face, and soldiers to war because of the wounds—and even death—they may be risking? And should we stop carrying out our duty of helping and saving souls because of the difficulties and persecutions to be encountered in it?"

59. - CHARITY

"Each thing produces, as it were, a species and image of itself, as we see in a mirror, which represents objects just as they are: an ugly face appears ugly, and a handsome one looks handsome. In the same way, good or bad qualities are spread exteriorly, especially charity, which, in itself, is contagious and produces charity. A heart truly on fire and animated with this virtue makes its ardor felt; and everything in a charitable man breathes and preaches charity."

60. - CHARITY

In one of his talks to his Community, M. Vincent said that Missioners would be very happy if they became poor by practicing charity toward others, but that they had no fear of becoming so by this means, unless they mistrusted Our Lord’s goodness and the truth of His word.

"If, nevertheless, God allowed them to be reduced to the necessity of going to serve as priests in the villages to earn their living, or even if some of them were obliged to go to beg for their bread or to sleep

under some bush, in ragged clothing and chilled to the bone, and
someone should ask one of them, ‘Poor Priest of the Mission, what
has reduced you to these straits?’ what a happiness, Messieurs, to be
able to reply, ‘It’s charity!’ How that poor priest would be esteemed
before God and the angels!’

60a. - FRATERNAL CHARITY

Fraternal charity is one of the signs of their predestination, since
by it a person is recognized as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. One day,
when he was celebrating Mass on the feast of Saint John the Evange­
list, using the words of this Apostle, Filioli diligite alterutrum! 1 to
exhort his men to love one another, he said, “The Congregation of the
Mission will last as long as charity reigns in it.”

He also said to them, “Charity is the soul of virtues and the para­
dise of Communities. The Saint-Lazare house will be a paradise if
charity is found in it; paradise is nothing other than love, union, and
charity; the principal happiness of eternal life consists in loving; in
heaven, the blessed are constantly devoted to beatific love and, in a
word, nothing is more desirable than to live with those whom we
love and who love us.

“Christian love,” he continued, “formed in hearts by charity, is
not only above love of inclination and the love produced by sensory
appetites, which is ordinarily more harmful than helpful, but even
higher than rational love. This Christian love is one by which we love
one another in God, in accordance with God, and for God; it’s a love
that causes us to love one another for the same purpose for which
God loves us, which is to make saints of us in this world and blessed
in the next; and, for that purpose, this love causes us to look at God
and not anything else but God in every person we love.

“The person who tried to live in a Community without mutual
support and charity,” he added, “would be subject to the ups and


1My little children, love one another. Cf. Jn 13:35. (NAB)
downs of temperaments and actions that clashed with his own, like a ship without an anchor and rudder, that would drift into the midst of rocks, at the mercy of wind and waves buffeting it from all sides and causing it to smash to pieces."

Lastly he added, "Missioners must not only love one another with a holy, interior affection, and make this apparent simply by their words, but they must witness by works and good results, willingly helping one another in their ministries in this spirit and always being ready to go to the aid of their confreres."

He desired ardently that God might infuse this charity into the hearts of all the members of his Congregation, especially since, he said, "By this mutual support the strong will sustain the weak, and the work of God will be accomplished."

60b. - THE NEED TO PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

"We're going to pray for the family of a certain person who has suffered a great loss; we must empathize with our brother and make this a duty toward one another."

Sometimes, depending on the need, he would add, "I ask the priests who don't have any special obligations to offer Mass for the members of this suffering family. I, first of all, am willingly offering to God for them the Holy Mass I'm about to celebrate, and I ask our Brothers to receive Holy Communion for this same intention."

60c. - MAKING ALLOWANCE FOR THE FAILINGS OF OTHERS

"We mustn't be surprised to see others commit faults because, just as it's characteristic of brambles and thistles to be prickly, it's characteristic of the corrupt nature of man to fail, since he is con-

ceived and is born in sin. Even the just man, according to the thinking of Solomon, falls seven times, that is, several times, a day.¹

“The spirit of man,” he added, “has its own kinds of disorders and illnesses, just as the body does, and, instead of being bothered and discouraged by this, he must, by recognizing his wretched state, humble himself for it and say to God, like David after his sin, ‘Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me, ut discam justificationes tuas: It is good for me that you have humbled me, so that I may learn your justifications.’² We must bear with ourselves in our weaknesses and imperfections, but still strive to rise above them.

“If it’s forbidden to judge others rashly,” he continued, “it’s even less lawful to talk about them, since it’s the distinctive feature of charity, as the holy Apostle states, to cover a multitude of sins;³ and this saying of the Wise Man, Audisti verbum adversus proximum tuum? Commoriatur in te! Have you heard anything bad about your neighbor? Stifle it and let it die within you!”⁴

61. - THE SPIRIT OF COMPASSION

“Since the Son of God was unable to have feelings of compassion in the state of His glory, which He possesses from all eternity in heaven. He willed to become man and to be our High Priest in order to share our sufferings. To reign with Him in heaven, we must, like Him, commiserate with His members on earth. Missioners, above all other priests, must be filled with this spirit of compassion, since they are obliged by their state and vocation to serve the most wretched, the most abandoned, and those most weighed down by corporal and spiritual sufferings. First of all, they must be touched to the quick and afflicted in their own hearts by the sufferings of their neighbor.

¹For the just man falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble to ruin. Cf. Prv 24:16. (NAB)
²Cf. Ps 119:71. (NAB)
³Cf. 1 Pt 4:8. (NAB)
⁴Cf. Sir 19:9. (NAB)