April 11, 1655

Speaking to a coadjutor Brother who had just declared that he didn’t have the slightest difficulties with the duties of the house, M. Vincent said, “You have good reason to thank God that Our Lord is granting you this grace. Sometimes God acts like that in the beginning so that people will give themselves wholeheartedly to Him; He leads them first of all by that sweetness that causes them to accept everything, then He has them go to indifference; from indifference, to some petty distaste; from distaste to aversion; from aversion sometimes even to thoughts of blasphemy, aversion to God, to virtue, and to persons who maintain order. That’s a trial God sends to those souls to make them grow in virtue. And those are signs of His love. Then, after testing them in that way, what does God do? He lets them enjoy such great sweetness and consolation that it’s really admirable; and then we can say that the portrait is finished.

“I knew a nun who had such an aversion to good and such great, abominable temptations, that she reached the point of having thoughts of hatred against God, with the result that she sometimes said that, if she were to leave religious life to give herself over to all sorts of sensual delights, she wouldn’t be led to that for the pleasure of those vile things but, by this means, to displease God more by them and take vengeance on Him by going against His orders and laws. And, in the end, what happened after such a trial? When God withdrew her from this state of suffering, He led her into another that was so pleasing and peaceful, filled with such great, admirable...
sentiments of Him that in the end she died in the odor of sanctity. See how God sometimes guides certain souls.

"There's another person I know," he said to us, "who's still alive. She doesn't know what a temptation is, either of the flesh, or of an aversion, or of hatred, etc. Yet, no soul is perhaps more tempted by not being tempted than she is. That seems like a paradox, and yet that's how it is; and she's inconsolable in this temptation because, in Holy Scripture and the lives of the greatest saints, we read that God has made all the souls He has led to sanctity pass through sufferings; He himself, who is the Saint of Saints, willed to pass through them. And this has sometimes even led that person to think she's been damned, since she's outside the state of suffering; for, she says, 'it's stated that anyone who wants to live a holy life will suffer persecution.' I don't suffer anything; therefore I'm not holy.'

"Now, to get back to you, Brother, you who say that nothing causes you any difficulty. I tell you that you have to humble yourself greatly and mistrust that state in which you now are. The true Christian must constantly act contrary to his inclinations, and even more particularly those who have given themselves to God, either in a religious Order or in some Community. Saint Paul states that he did the evil he didn't want to do and had an aversion to doing the good he wanted to do; so then, we have to overcome ourselves in every difficulty and accept the trials and sufferings that come to us, as things presented to us on the part of God, and remain in the state in which He's pleased to put us."

\[^{3}\text{Cf 2 Tim 3:12 (NAB)}\]
\[^{4}\text{Cf Rom 7:19 (NAB)}\]
116. - ELECTION OF POPE ALEXANDER VII

April 1655

“O wretch that I am, pouncing on my food, devouring it like those just mentioned, what reason I have to humble myself...!

“It has pleased Our Lord to give us a Pope. I received this news when I was on my way to the meeting. Cardinal Mazarin’s sister sent it to the Visitation Nuns in the faubourg Saint-Jacques, and they had someone inform me. He’s a good Pope, very knowledgeable about contemporary affairs, and has held the opposite opinion to the ones that have been condemned. The Priests of the Mission will please offer a Holy Mass of thanksgiving, etc. tomorrow, and our Brothers will assist at it and receive Holy Communion next Sunday for the same intention. The Ladies of Charity are to receive Holy Communion tomorrow for that intention.”

117. - OFFERING OUR ACTIONS TO GOD

April 30, 1655

“Or sus, God be praised for all that’s just been said! Let’s strive to benefit well from it, Messieurs. Let’s take great care to offer our

Conference 116. - Manuscript of Bro. Louis Robineau, p. 29. The opening sentence is apparently the concluding thought of a conference on intemperance.

1Fabio Chigi, born in Siena on February 13, 1599, was elected Pope on April 7, 1655, and took the name Alexander VII. He commissioned the construction of the great colonnade of Bernini and confirmed the condemnation of Jansen’s Augustinus and the Jansenists’ Five Propositions. By the Brief Ex commissa nobis (cf. X11la, 417-19) he approved the vows taken in the Congregation of the Mission, and in the Brief Alias nos provided an official interpretation and approval of the Community’s vow of Poverty (cf. ibid. 480-82). He died on May 22, 1669.

2Meeting of the Ladies of Charity.

3In a conference given to the Daughters of Charity on January 6, 1657, Saint Vincent reminded them that when the Queen “saw that the Cardinal’s sister was ill and wasn’t being nursed as she would have liked, said at once, ‘Truly, Madame isn’t being cared for properly, she must have the Daughters of Charity.’” (Cf. X, 209.)

Conference 117. - Repetitions of Prayer MS, f° 17, conclusion of the conference.
actions to God, especially the principal ones; and, even if, in our morning offering, we offer all the actions of the day to God, it’s still good to offer each one in particular during the day. I’m not saying that you have to offer all of them and be perpetually occupied with saying, ‘My God, I offer you what I’m doing,’ but it’s good to do this above all for our principal actions. In that way, everything we do will be pleasing to God. Oh, what a happiness always to please God, to do everything we’ve done for love of God and to please Him! So then, Messieurs, let’s give ourselves to God to do, from now on, all our actions for love of Him and to please Him. By this means, it will happen that every action, no matter how small, will have great merit before His Divine Majesty. Haven’t we just heard what someone said, that it’s this purity of intention that makes all actions equal? God grant us the grace of really profiting by all this!”

118. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

May 23, 1655

“In addition to the obligation we here have as Christians to honor this feast, we have a particular one because, by the Bulls of Approval of the Company, a Pope has given us the Most Holy Trinity as our patron. That should animate all of us, such as we are, to have great devotion to this feast, as also to be very eager not to let any opportunity pass to teach this Mystery. I acknowledge that we’ve been lax in this and that we were more careful about it in the beginning than we are now that the Company is growing. Nevertheless, you see, some theologians hold that those who know nothing of this Mystery and that of the Incarnation are in a state of damnation; Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas even teach that knowledge of

Conference 118. - Repetitions of Prayer MS. f° 18 v°.

1Subheading. Feast of the Holy Trinity.

2Pope Urban VIII issued Salvatoris nostri, the Bull of Approval of the Congregation of the Mission, on January 12, 1633 (cf. XIIIa 245, 304).
these mysteries is a necessary means of salvation. Now, if that’s so, just imagine, my dear confreres, how important it is for us to teach these mysteries to those who are ignorant of them.

“(1) We’re obliged to do this as Christians, for every Christian should instruct another Christian concerning the things necessary for salvation when he knows that he’s ignorant of them.

“(2) We’re obliged to do this as priests—those of us who are priests.

“(3) As Missioners.

“And, my dear confreres, even if some of you aren’t priests and haven’t done your studies, you’re not, however, exempt from this obligation and, whenever you meet some poor person, you must teach him this Mystery if he’s ignorant of it, even to a small number of persons or to a large number. We see that, when there’s no priest, a lay person may baptize a child, and, in the absence of a man, the Church even allows women to do this in cases of necessity. In a word, we must strive to teach everyone about this Mystery. How many good souls do you think there are who never speak to a poor person without catechizing him—even lay women, even to the point where some go into the villages to instruct the poor people and have asked me to allow them to send them to us, when they find some of those good people who might want to make a general confession!

“Our poor Sisters of Charity are doing this with great blessing and success in the villages where they are! Just recently, a Lady told me that she was asking me to send her a Daughter of Charity, mainly to see that poor people were instructed in this Mystery so necessary for salvation, by opening primary schools because most of those poor people don’t go to sermons or catechism classes, and thus are very often ignorant of this Mystery. Just think about that, Messieurs! That’s how God acts when He sees that those who should be teaching aren’t doing it.

“He puts others in their place, and they do it, even persons of the other sex. When I go through those parishes in Paris to visit the Charity, I often ask those good Ladies of Charity, ‘Eh bien, Ladies, how are our Sisters of Charity doing?’ And they reply, ‘By the grace of God, Monsieur, they’re doing very well; all the poor are instructed in
the things necessary for salvation, thank God. *Or sus,* may God be forever praised and glorified!

“I wish, then, (1) that all of us, such as we are, have great devotion to this feast and zeal for teaching this Mystery; (2) that we take the resolution never to be with a poor person without teaching him the things necessary for his salvation, if we think he doesn’t know them; (3) that we earnestly ask pardon of God for our negligence in observing this until now, and that we humble ourselves greatly for it before God.

“We received news that, by the grace of God, good M. Lebas is better and is out of danger. He relapsed three times, and the third time they thought he wasn’t going to make it. I ask the Company to thank God for the favor He’s granted him in having preserved this servant of His, who’s an excellent confere and very virtuous. We haven’t seen him here because he had scarcely made his seminary in Richelieu than he was sent to Agde, where he’s been very exemplary. We thank God for all that, and also for the fact that M. de Martinis, who was sick in Rome, is getting better, but the doctors say he’s not out of danger of relapsing unless he has a change of air.”

---

1Toussaint Lebas, born in Josselin (Morbihan) on November 1, 1625, was ordained a priest on May 25, 1652, eve of the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, and entered the Congregation of the Mission in Richelieu on January 2, 1653. A short time later he was sent to the Agde house, where he took his vows in 1657, in the presence of Thomas Berthe. He was Superior in Narbonne (1671-73).

2Girolamo di Martinis (Jérôme de Martinis), born in Fontana Buona, Genoa diocese, (Italy) on May 15, 1627, entered the Congregation of the Mission in Rome on August 6, 1650, and was ordained a priest in September 1651. He took his vows in October 1652 and renewed them on October 22, 1655. He was Superior in Naples (1673-76).
At the Repetition of Prayer that was made on the feast of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, a seminarian who was making his repetition happened to say that he had kept rather quiet in order to hear God, who was speaking to his heart. M. Vincent corrected him and said, "Brother, that expression you just used, 'I listened to God,' is a little strong; you should say, rather, 'I remained in the presence of God to listen to whether it might please Our Lord to inspire me with some good thought or impulse.' Then he had the repetition continue, saying at the end, "I note, my dear confreres, that, in the meditations all of you are making, each one strives to present a number of reasons, and reason upon reason; that's noticeable. However, you're not making enough acts of affection. Reasoning is one thing, but it's still not enough; something else is needed; the will has to act, and not just the understanding; for all our reasons are fruitless if we don't go on to affections. We don't go far enough to the purpose for which meditation has been instituted. For example, today, the feast of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, we should have said, 'Orosus, why was this feast established? It's to thank God for the institution of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar by Our Lord Jesus Christ on the day before His Passion, for the good of all the faithful.' Next, we should be stirred up to acts of thanksgiving for this great, incomparable benefit of the Son of God, make acts of thanksgiving, adoration, humility, and gratitude to Him for it; ask the angels to help us to thank Him for it, since we're unworthy to do it properly; and exclaim continually to God, 'O Lord, be forever praised and thanked for having given me Your Flesh and Blood for food and drink! O my Savior, how can I thank You worthily for this!' In this way we're engaged in fervent...
acts of the will toward God. For you see, brothers, reason helps us, in truth, to see the beauty of something, but, for all that, it doesn’t give it to us. For example, I see an apple on the tree, and even though I see it very clearly and find it very beautiful, I’m not holding it for all that, I’m not enjoying it. I don’t have it in my possession; for it’s one thing to see something, and another to have and possess it; it’s one thing to see and consider the beauty of virtue, and another to have it. Now, reason helps us to see virtue clearly, but it doesn’t give it to us; just as when one person says to another, ‘Look at this apple; see how beautiful it is’; but, for all that, she doesn’t give it to her to keep. Now, brothers, that’s what reason does in our meditation.

“As for reasons to make us see the reality of the Body and Blood of Our Lord in this Sacrament, we have only to consider what’s noted in Saint John, ‘This is my body; this is my blood; the bread I am giving you is my body; the wine I am giving you is my blood.’ No one doubts the truth of this except heretics, who want to make it understood in another sense. Our Lord himself assures us of this, even by oath, for He says that anyone who’s unwilling to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood will not have eternal life. So, there’s nothing to examine or to go over minutely regarding this. What we have to do in our meditation, however, is to exclaim to God by acts of faith that we must make, as well as acts of hope in this Divine Mystery, of charity, humility, gratitude, adoration, and dependence. Or sus, let’s sincerely ask pardon of God for the faults we’ve committed with regard to this Sacrament.

“We’ve had some news of M. Le Blanc. Last evening I received a letter from good M. Lumsden, telling me that there’s a great persecution going on in that country; also, M. Le Blanc has been moved from the city of Aberdeen, where he was, to a village, together with a Jesuit and another secular priest, with the result that we don’t yet know what’s going to happen. We had thought about sending someone to rescue him, but are finding this very difficult. What’s to be done? Two reasons are preventing us: (1) if we ask for his release, we’ll have to declare that he’s a priest; and that would be to expose him because that’s why he was taken prisoner. The second
thing that also prevents us is that we don’t yet know how matters stand—between France and England.\(^2\) That is—because affairs are embroiled. Scotland was beginning to breathe a little more easily these past few years, and there were several conversions; but, since about ten to twelve days ago, very severe orders have been issued again against the poor Catholics, with the result that poor M. Lumsden isn’t at all safe. He tells me that there has been no news of M. Duiguin\(^3\) for a long time. Perhaps this is due to the bad weather—those mountains are completely covered with snow—for the letter I received yesterday is dated the month of March.

“Have you had them practice the ceremonies?” When M. Admirault\(^4\) answered no, M. Vincent replied that they were supposed to be doing this. “I’ve had someone ask Abbe de Chandenier\(^5\) to say Holy Mass and preside at the Office, and I want the Company to adopt this practice of always deferring (for example, to the Bishops who come to visit us, and to other devout persons) the principal functions that are to be carried out. That’s how the first Christians acted with regard to important persons who came to see them. And it even happened at a Council of Bishops, who complained about other Bishops that, when they went to see them, they didn’t show them this deference, since the ones who received the visit are supposed to defer through humility to the person who visits them. So then, it will be M. de Chandenier, who is a holy

\(^2\)The manuscript notes that the saint said inadvertently, “France and Spain.”

\(^3\)Dermot Duggan (in his letters Saint Vincent spells his name Duiguin), born in Ireland in 1620, was already a priest when he entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 26, 1645. In November of the following year he was sent back to Ireland, returning to France in 1648. Two years later he left for Scotland, where he spent the rest of his life amid great dangers, animated with the zeal of an apostle and the courage of a martyr. He died on May 17, 1657, on the isle of Uist, where an ancient chapel still bears his name and recalls his memory. (Cf. Notices, vol. III, pp. 114-21.)

\(^4\)Charles Admirault, Master of Ceremonies at Saint Lazare. Born in Chinon (Indre et Loire) on September 20, 1622, he entered the Congregation of the Mission on December 1, 1640, took his vows on December 2, 1642, and was ordained a priest in December 1646. For several years he was assigned to the Bons-Enfants Seminary, where he died in August 1661, after a long illness. (Cf. Notices, vol. I, p. 462, lists him as Amirit, in vol. V [Supplement], p. 17, he is listed as Admirault.)

\(^5\)Louis de Chandenier, Abbe de Tourmus.
man, so modest and virtuous, compared to a wretch like me, and who is such a great example to us!"

And turning to M. Portail, he said, "M. Portail, what should be done?" After M. Portail replied, M. Vincent continued, saying that, in the old days, when the Church was just beginning, one of the duties of the deacons and deaconesses—that is, the deacons for the men and the deaconesses for the married women and girls—was to have practice for the ceremonies on the eve of feasts; for example, they had them practice the proper way to bow, to incline their head, to prostrate themselves—for, in that time, they often prostrated themselves on the ground—and so forth. "Oh bien, my dear confreres! Let's strive then to perform this action properly, to make inclinations and genuflections well; for example, to genuflect properly, then to bow, when we walk in a procession."

Then, when M. Portail told him that they didn't bow, M. Vincent replied, "You're right, Monsieur, see how stupid I am, how I myself need to be instructed, and how important it is that we practice this exercise so that those who don't know what to do, or who don't remember how, may be instructed in it."

120. - PRIDE

June 11, 1655

M. Vincent asked M. Alméras his Assistant to see to it that this topic, along with envy and sloth, be given for meditation every month because, he said, "just as water wears away and seeps into stone—even marble—by dint of falling on it drop by drop, so there's reason to hope that, by meditating often on those topics, we'll be moved and incited, by the grace of God, to rid ourselves of those evil vices and to acquire humility, which is the contrary virtue. Sometimes here in our sacristy I contemplate the stone on which
water drips; even though it’s hard and although the water falls only drop by drop, it still wears it away. In the same way, we have good reason to hope that those topics, meditated and meditated over and over many times, with God’s grace will make some impression on our hearts, even though they’re perhaps as hard as that stone. My dear confreres, please tell me what the Son of God came to do in the world; and, once He was here, how did He want to appear? As a humble man.”

Then he cited this passage from David, “‘He was like a beast of burden, etc.’¹ Think about mules; are they proud because they’re well harnessed, laden with gold and silver, and adorned with beautiful plumes? In the same way, Messieurs, if we’re praised or held in esteem—perhaps because we’ve performed some action that dazzled people—let’s pay no attention to that, let’s make no account of it. For, are we the ones doing it? Isn’t it God, Messieurs, who does all that? Isn’t it to Him that all the glory of it is due? My Savior, please give us humility—holy humility. For, you see, brothers, if there are any people alive who must fear vanity, it’s Missioners, because of their ministries; and if there are any people alive who must work to combat this vice, it’s Missioners. Humility is one of the integral parts of the spirit of the Company of the Mission; so, if people tell us that we’re ignorant and stupid, men lacking intelligence and guidance, we have to bear that patiently, not only bear it patiently but be glad to be considered as such.”

¹Cf. Ps 73:22-23 (NAB)
June 13, 1655

"I recommend to the prayers of the Company the kingdom of Poland, which is in a very terrified state because of the huge number of enemies by which it's being attacked. We're praying to God for this because it's a question of His glory, since it's the enemies of the Church who are attacking it. I ask the priests to celebrate Mass today for this intention, as far as possible, and I ask our Brothers to receive Holy Communion. In addition to the reason I've just mentioned, we're obliged to do this also because we've been called to that kingdom to work and establish ourselves there.

"I also recommend our poor, blessed prisoner M. Le Blanc and the other priests in the Hebrides, in the Indies, and in Barbary where our poor Missioners are working with so many blessings from God. Certainly, they must be a good example to those poor slaves whom they're assisting, since we see this in the ones who just arrived here in this house, for, if they were a scandal there, no doubt those good men wouldn't be eager, as we see them, to come to be Missioners.

"Now I'm going to tell you about an admirable conversion. A short time ago, a Calvinist slave was converted to the Catholic religion. From time to time, the Huguenots in England send someone to that country to ransom people belonging to their group. Now, one of the men who had been sent went to that slave and asked him if he wanted him to ransom him. The slave replied that he preferred to be a slave all his life and remain a Catholic than to renounce his reli-

---

Conference 121. - Repetitions of Prayer

1 Subheading. Difficult times in Poland; zeal of the Barbary Missioners; admonition to a Brother.

Two emancipated slaves, Guillaume Servin and René Duchesne, had entered the Congregation as coadjutor Brothers.

Guillaume Servin was born in Amiens (Somme) around 1610. At the end of May 1655 he entered the Congregation of the Mission in Paris as a coadjutor Brother and took his vows there on October 22, 1657, in the presence of M. Baquoy.

René Duchesne, born in Saint Juile-Champgillon (Vendée) in August 1607, entered the Congregation of the Mission as a coadjutor Brother in Richelieu on February 16, 1654, and took his vows on November 1, 1658.
gion to obtain his freedom; and so he refused. What an admirable conversion, Messieurs! In truth, Messieurs, I have good reason to fear that this man may be my judge on Judgment Day.”

Then, calling on a coadjutor Brother to whom he had some admonition to give, he said, “Kneel down, Brother.” And in presence of the entire Company, he said to him, “Brother, I’m obliged to remind you here of some faults you’ve committed but haven’t corrected at all, despite the warnings given you in private and in virtue of obedience.” Then, he mentioned aloud the faults of this Brother, which were so great that I didn’t want to write them down here. Let me just say that M. Vincent used very kind words with him, which showed a spirit filled with charity and compassion, accompanied nevertheless by firmness, forbidding the Brother to receive Communion until he was told to do so, and asking the priests not to give it to him if he presented himself. And he added, “And so that you’ll remember this, my poor Brother, you may not drink any wine for a week, and I ask our Brothers in charge of the pantry to see to that, so that, if he sits at a place where there’s a mug, they should go and remove it from in front of him. You may go, Brother!”

122. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

July 14, 1655

During his Repetition of Prayer, a coadjutor Brother said that he sometimes found it hard to go so often to confession and Communion, especially when some feast days occurred during the week. He feared that this might become a habit, and he might not prepare as well as he would if it happened more rarely. M. Vincent interrupted him, saying, “Brother, you do very well to fear not bringing
all the required dispositions to the reception of the sacraments; still, however, even though you don’t experience interiorly a disposition such as you might desire—or so you seem to think—you mustn’t fail to go to confession and Communion on the days the Rule prescribes, as has been the practice of the Company until now. It’s an abuse, Brother, to think, for example, that, if you were to go to confession and Communion less often, you’d be better disposed. Furthermore, even, as you say, if you were to go less often you might feel more disposed interiorly—or so it seems to you—and if you did that with emotion and tears, it would be very much to be feared, Brother, that this might be an outpouring of nature and self-love, of which the satisfaction and pleasure it would take in something else might make it accept this one. That’s why we must be steadfast in the observance of the Rules and the practices of the Company.

“Yesterday, I reminded a member of the Company once again that he’s exempting himself from meditation and Chapter, and thus from the exercises of the Community; however, we see that he’s doing nothing to correct himself; what should be done about that, Messieurs? Just imagine the suffering of a poor Superior, when he sees the laxity of his subjects and such great laziness, and how much he has to sweat and toil to restore everything to its original state! And God grant that he does it! In that case, we can call that a sort of miracle, so true it is that, once a Community has become lax and given itself over to disorder, it can never return to the original state of perfection from which it has fallen. Saint Paul says2 of someone who had once been converted and totally given to God but later happens to fall from this state, that’s it’s impossible for that person to recover from it—that is, it’s very difficult—and it’s the same for a Community. For this reason, Messieurs, let’s be steadfast in the observance of the Rules.

“What an account a Superior has to render to God if he hasn’t had enough courage to hold firm in seeing that the Rule has been observed, and therefore is the reason why the Company has become

---

2Cf. Heb 6:4-6. (NAB) Although Saint Vincent here attributes the Epistle to the Hebrews to Saint Paul, modern scriptural exegesis has reservations about its authorship.
lax in the practice of virtue! What an account a lax Superior has to render to God! For, not only will he give an account to God of the evil that has been done in the Company (and of which he’s been the cause through his laxity) during the time he’s been Superior, which may be two or three years more or less, but also of the harm that’s done during the time of his first, second, and third successor.

“What an account also to be given to God by a priest or a Brother who has been the cause, by his bad example, of part of the harm done in the Company, or who has been lax in its ministries, or has abandoned them to have less trouble and greater freedom!

“In the early days of the Benedictine Order, their ministry and practice was to staff a number of parishes and to teach and form little children, with the result that members of the nobility used to entrust their children to them to be instructed and taught good manners; many devout persons made donations of a number of possessions, houses, land, and legacies, and had churches built, which they gave to those Fathers and had them erected as abbeys and priories. The lax members thought that this was too much; that’s why they said, ‘Why should we go to so much trouble? Let’s abandon all these parishes and instructions, be content simply with choir, retain two-thirds of the tithes, and give the other third to a Permanent Vicar.’ Let’s recall how they talk, ‘Let’s keep the tithes,’ that is, ‘let’s hold on to the money.’ Look at what they did, Messieurs; they put Permanent Vicars in place and abandoned the instruction of children, and what did God do? Listen to this! He allowed almost all of the abbeys and priories to fall into the hands of laymen, Commendatory Abbots, and simple Priors with no responsibilities, for some of these Priors have only very minor responsibilities, such as seeing that a few Masses are said. That’s the state into which we’ll fall, if God doesn’t have a hand in things.

3In earlier Church law a Parochial Vicar was a priest who either temporarily or permanently took the place of an absentee pastor. When a religious house had charge of a parish, the priest in charge, even though not a member of the house that staffed the parish, exercised all the functions of a Pastor, but the tithes then went to the religious house, which in turn paid the “Permanent Vicar.” This is the proposal being made here.
"'Quoi!' A lax Missioner will say, 'What good are so many missions? Go to the Indies, go to the Hebrides! Go, go—it's too much! To prisons, to the Foundlings, to the Nom-de-Jésus! All that is too much to take on; we should give it up; when M. Vincent is dead, there will really be a lot of changes; we should give up all those ministries; otherwise how can we do it all? Quoi! The Indies, the Hebrides, the prisons, the Foundlings, etc!' The result, Messieurs, will be that we'll have to say, 'Farewell to the missions,' farewell to the Indies, farewell to the Hebrides, the prisons, the Nom-de-Jésus, the Foundlings, Barbary—farewell to all that!' And who's the cause of all that evil? A coward or some lax Missioners filled with love of their own convenience and ease.

'O my dear confreres, when you see that you can well say, 'Farewell to all those ministries!' Saint John said, 'When you see people like that among you, consider them Antichrists.' I say the same to you, brothers: when you see a lax Missioner talking that way, or inclined to have us abandon all those benefits I just mentioned, say boldly, 'Behold the Antichrist.' Yes, brothers, he's an Antichrist. Say, 'Behold the Antichrist is born; there he is!' Eh quoi! And if, when the Company is still in the cradle (for the Company has just been born and is still in the cradle), if, I say, that's the way things are, and it has nevertheless been assisted by the grace of God until

---

The Nom-de-Jésus [Name of Jesus] hospice, founded by an anonymous rich merchant of Paris, who one day brought 100,000 livres to Saint Vincent for some good work. After discussing his plan with the benefactor, the saint earmarked 11,000 livres for the purchase of the house called Nom-de-Jésus, which belonged to Saint-Lazare, and 20,000 livres to enlarge the living space, should it become too small. He also constituted an income of 60,000 livres, to which 20,000 were added from Saint-Lazare, which later retrieved them; he allocated 5400 livres for chapel furnishings and 3600 livres for room and board for 40 poor persons for one year. All this was on condition that the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, together with laymen from Paris whom he would employ, would have the spiritual and temporal direction of the hospital and authority to admit and discharge the poor. The contract was accepted on October 29, 1653, approved by the Vicars-General on March 15, 1654 (the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal de Retz, was in exile in Rome), and ratified in the Parlement by letters patent in November. (Cf. Arch. Nat. M 53.) The work was already in operation in March 1653. Saint Vincent chose 20 male and 20 female artisans who were no longer able to earn their living, to occupy their time, they were provided with looms and tools. Men and women were housed in separate wings; they came together for Mass but were not permitted to see or speak to one another. The Daughters of Charity served them; a Priest of the Mission, in conformity with the terms of the contract, acted as chaplain. Saint Vincent often came to visit and instruct them. (Cf. Xllla, 174, 79, and Abelly, op cit, bk 1, chap XI, pp 211.) The Nom-de-Jésus later became the municipal health center (1802–16), its buildings were on the site now occupied by the offices of the Gare de l'Est.
now, taking on so many good works that are so pleasing to His Divine Majesty, and which He's been pleased to bless, how much greater reason should it do so when it’s more advanced in age and has acquired greater strength than it now has! We see that, if a child has enough strength and courage, even though young and frail, to set out to bring something to a successful close, with what greater reason to do it when he’s older, even twenty-five or thirty years of age. That’s how it should be with the Company of the Mission. Or sus, blessed be God! May God be forever blessed and glorified! May it please His Divine Majesty to grant us the grace that the misfortune I just mentioned may not happen to the Company!" 

123. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

July 18, 1655

M. Vincent earnestly recommended to the prayers of the Company the health of M. Bourdoise, critically ill from apoplexy, and highly exalted that good priest’s zeal for the ecclesiastical state. God had made use of him to lay the foundation of that holy Company of priests of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, although he came from such poor circumstances that he had been able to finish his studies only with the help of the students who used to give him a few pieces of bread. Even when they’d throw it to some dog, hunger forced him to run ahead to snatch it.

M. Vincent also related that M. Bourdoise told him it was a great work to be engaged in instructing poor people, but it was even more important to educate the clergy, since, if they are ignorant, the peo-
pie they guide must, of necessity, be the same. And he was telling
the truth, he was telling the truth.

Then M. Vincent asked God several times to give us a share in
the great zeal this good priest had and in the great benefits he
brought to the Church.

124. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

July 20, 1655

When a coadjutor Brother said that during his meditation he had
repeated interiorly a few verses from the Psalms of David that re­
ferred to trust in God, M. Vincent interrupted him, saying, "Recall­
ing from memory some passage of Holy Scripture and interpreting it
in every way to get some meaning from it and summarizing it is a
good practice."

When another Brother knelt down, asking to be excused from
making repetition, M. Vincent said to him, "Since you’re there on
your knees, Brother, I’m going to remind you of a fault you commit­
ted yesterday. Someone came to see you, and you immediately took
that person into the garden without permission. Brother, that’s not
good; you know that there’s a Rule stating specifically that this is for­
bidden. It has always been the practice to follow this Rule exactly
and to do nothing that’s forbidden, without permission. None of the
older members would act like that. Before he left, M. Alméras was
just telling me that he was edified at seeing how exact the older mem­
bers are; and he told me that when one of them was met in the enclo­
sure by someone who had come to talk to him, he asked him to wait
until he received permission to speak to that person—something he had already done many times.

"I have another admonition to give," he added, "and this concerns all our student Brothers: instead of taking recreation in the garden on days that aren’t free days, they take it in the enclosure.² I’m saying what I’ve seen; recently, I went to the enclosure (for the third time this year) and was surprised to see them there. Aren’t we sufficiently satisfied with the garden? Isn’t it big or broad enough? There are few in Paris as large as ours; if you go into all the houses, to the homes of the merchants, businessmen, palace officials, you almost never see them in their garden; almost all of them have to work night and day; after spending the entire morning at the palace, scarcely have they eaten dinner than they have to go to study some documents to be taken back in the afternoon. And we, we’re not satisfied with large gardens; we have to have the enclosure. And there are even some who aren’t satisfied with the enclosure. Do we have to lead a life that’s . . . how shall I say this . . . lautior? If we could make a French word out of this Latin, we might say, ‘more convenient’ . . . but that word doesn’t express it well enough, maybe ‘more pleasurable, more delightful, living in clover, free and easy, better off’ than people in the world. And don’t you think that the ordinands, who, from their windows, see us strolling aimlessly through that enclosure and those gardens at all hours, with those poor afflicted persons being taken for a walk there and the other people who work there, are saying to themselves, ‘Those men are really living the good life and have nothing to do’?

"I’m really afraid that this is giving scandal. In fact, it’s typical of a man who has nothing to do, is scarcely occupied with God, and is dissipated, to go there at odd hours and without permission—which is never refused when there’s a need. And if someone had a certain condition requiring better air than that of the garden, he’d never be refused—and has never been refused, as far as I know. However, that attachment to this vast property of Saint-Lazare causes a lot of harm.

²The monastic enclosure of Saint Lazare was the largest in Paris and comprised some ninety-two arpents—about a hundred acres—of land.
for there are other houses where there’s no garden. In Crécy, Providence had given us one and has taken it away from us. In Sedan, there’s no garden at all. True, they’re about to purchase a house with a garden in the suburbs so they can walk there sometimes. And when men get bored in those houses, it’s so hard for them to make up their minds to stay there! When they’re there, they say that the air isn’t good, they’re always complaining, they’re not happy, and they write to me. I recommend once again the observance of the Rule that forbids going into the garden and the enclosure outside of the time of recreation stipulated in the Rule, and even less to take anyone there without an express permission.

“There are also priests—yes, priests—not many, by the grace of God, but there’s one often seen at our own gate, looking to see who comes and who goes, and who’s passing by in the street. We see him asking the gatekeepers, ‘Aren’t there any letters for me? There should be. Didn’t someone come to see me?’ As if we didn’t know that the gatekeepers must never say anything! That’s really being dissipated and hardly being occupied with God. Don’t do that any more! I ask the gatekeepers to take note in future of those who do it and to come and say to me, ‘Monsieur, we see such and such a person coming to the gate.’

“I have another admonition to give, and I’m guilty of this along with the others. First of all, when we go through a door, we don’t close it; I always find all the doors open, and I myself, wretched man, don’t close them. It’s bad enough that I don’t see that this Rule is observed, but I’m the first one to break it.

“There used to be a large monastery in Hamburg, one of the most famous in Germany. It’s now so dilapidated, as someone recently wrote to me, that it’s being used as a public thoroughfare. The place where the church was, and where traces of the walls can still be seen, is a marketplace where meat and other things are sold. That’s how God treats those who fail to keep the Rule. Nothing can be seen but the effects of the justice of God, who lays low those who abuse His graces and the ministries He’s given them in His service, lays low this monastery, lays low that Order, lays low this Company. I’m very
much afraid that, through our negligence—and especially mine—our house may also become a public thoroughfare. As soon as someone has entered the courtyard, it’s ‘Where do you want to go?’ ‘To the cloister.’ And there you have two doors open. In the farmyard, it’s the same; and from the cloister into all the dormitories, all the rooms, and to the kitchen; but that door is kept closed.

“At the Jesuits’ house on rue Saint-Antoine, they don’t bring the people in; they have them wait at the gate or on the porch; that’s how the house is laid out. Why, then, do we bring so many people into our cloister? So, I’m asking the gatekeepers, when someone comes to see one of us, to have them wait at the gate or bring them into a room but not into the cloister. If they’re not people to whom we owe great respect, we can say to them, ‘Monsieur (for example), do you mind waiting here; I’ll go look for him,’ and keep the person waiting as short a time as possible. I ask the gatekeepers to hurry to find the men being asked for, and I ask the latter to come as quickly as possible.

“I recommend once again the practice of this Rule, and I direct you to be careful to close all doors. When the Superior says ‘I order you,’ since his authority comes from God we can’t disobey the order without disobeying God and what He’s asking of us; for God is order; God and order are the same thing.”

125. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

July 24, 1655

“I renew the recommendation I made, and which can’t be made too often, of praying for peace, that God may be pleased to unite once again the hearts of the Christian Princes. There’s war in all the Catholic kingdoms: France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Po-

Conference 125. - Recueil de diverses exhortations, p. 78.

1Subheading: General misery caused by wars, working unselfishly, zealously, and devotedly, example given by Missioners in Barbary and Madagascar, plenary indulgence granted to all Missioners at the hour of death.
land—being attacked on three fronts—and Ireland, even in the poor, nearly uninhabitable mountains and rocky areas. Scotland isn’t much better off, and we know the deplorable state of England. There’s war everywhere, misery everywhere. In France, so many people are suffering! O Sauveur! O Sauveur! If, for the four months we’ve had war here, we’ve had so much misery in the heart of France, where food supplies are ample everywhere, what can those poor people in the border areas do, who have been in this sort of misery for twenty years? Yes, it’s been a good twenty years that there’s always been war there; if they sow their crops, they’re not sure they can gather them in; the armies arrive and pillage and carry everything off; and what the soldier hasn’t taken, the sergeants take and carry off. After that, what can be done? What will become of them? They must die. If there’s a true religion . . . what did I say, wretched man that I am . . .! God forgive me! I’m speaking materially. It’s among them, among those poor people that true religion and a living faith are preserved; they believe simply, without dissecting everything; they submit to orders and are patient amid the abject poverty they have to suffer as long as it pleases God, some from the wars, others from working all day long in the great heat of the sun; poor vine dressers, who give us their labor, who expect us to pray for them while they wear themselves out to feed us!

“We look for the shade; we don’t want to go out in the sun; we’re so much in love with our comforts! During the mission we’re at least in church, sheltered from the bad weather, the heat of the sun, and the rain, to which those poor people are exposed. And we cry for help if someone gives us something to do that’s the slightest bit out of the ordinary. My room, my books, my Mass! Well, enough of that! Is that what it means to be a Missioner, to have all our comforts? God acts as our provider here. He takes care of all our needs and more than our needs. He gives us a sufficiency and more than that. I don’t know if we think enough about thanking Him for this.

“We live on the patrimony of Jesus Christ, on the sweat of poor people. When we go to the refectory, we must always think, ‘Have I earned the food that I’m about to eat?’ I’ve often had this thought that puts me to shame: ‘Wretched man, have you earned the bread
you’re about to eat, that bread that comes to you from the labor of
the poor?’ If we don’t earn it like them, at least let’s pray for their
needs. *Bos cognovit possessorem suum*, animals know those who
feed them.² Poor people feed us; let’s pray for them; and not a day
should pass that we don’t offer them to Our Lord that it may please
Him to grant them the grace of making good use of their sufferings.

“I was saying . . . . What am I saying, miserable man that I am!
Recently we said that God expects priests to halt His anger; He ex­
pects them to place themselves between Him and those poor people
like another Moses, to oblige Him to deliver them from the evils
caused by their ignorance and sins, and which they wouldn’t perhaps
allow if they were instructed and if someone was working for their
conversion. It’s up to priests to do this. Those poor people give us
their goods for that purpose; while they’re working and struggling
against poverty, we’re like Moses and must continually raise our
hands to heaven for them. We’re responsible if they suffer because of
their ignorance and sins; so, if we don’t sacrifice our whole life to in­
struct them, we’re the ones who are guilty of all they suffer.

“M. Duval, a great theologian of the Church, used to say that a
priest must have more work than he can do; for, as soon as idleness and
sloth get hold of a priest, every vice rushes in from all sides: tempta­
tions of impurity and so many others! Shall I dare say what . . . ? I’ll
have to think about that; maybe for another time. O Savior! O my
good Savior, may it please Your Divine Goodness to keep the Mis­
ion free of that spirit of laziness and of seeking its own comforts,
and give it an ardent zeal for Your glory, which will make it accept
everything joyfully and never refuse an opportunity to serve You!
We’re made for that; and a Missioner—a true Missioner, a man of
God, a man who has the Spirit of God—must find everything good
and indifferent; he accepts everything, he can do anything; for even
greater reason, a Company or a Congregation, animated and led by
the Spirit of God, can do anything.

“What have our Missioners in Barbary and Madagascar under­
taken? What have they carried out? What have they accomplished?

²*cf. Is 1:3.* (NAB)
What have they suffered? A single man takes on the care of a galley where there are sometimes two hundred convicts: instructions, general confessions to the healthy and to the sick, day and night, for two weeks; and at the end of that time, he gives them a party, going himself to buy a steer and have it cooked; it’s their delight; one man alone does all that! Sometimes he goes off to the farms where slaves are placed, and he goes in search of the masters to ask them to allow him to work at the instruction of their poor slaves; he takes them on their free time and helps them to know God; he gets them ready to receive the sacraments, and at the end he gives them a treat and has a little party for them.”

He also mentioned Brothers Guillaume and Duchesne, who, after having been slaves themselves, were ransomed with the help of the Consul because of the zeal with which they were animated in their work with the poor slaves.

“In Madagascar,” continued M. Vincent, “the Missioners preach, hear confessions, and teach catechism constantly from four in the morning until ten, and from two in the afternoon until nightfall; the rest of the time is spent praying the Office and visiting the sick. Those men are workers, they’re true Missioners! May God in His goodness be pleased to give us the spirit that animates them, a big

---

1 Here, Saint Vincent has Jean Le Vacher in mind.
2 The coadjutor Brothers Guillaume Servin and René Duchesne.
3 Jean Barreau the Consul was born in Saint Jean en Greve parish, Paris, on September 26, 1612. While still young, he left the position of Parliamentary Lawyer to become a Cistercian. Later, he asked Saint Vincent to receive him into his Community and began his novitiate on May 14, 1645. In 1646 Saint Vincent sent him, while still a seminarian, to Algiers as French Consul, in keeping with the wish of the Holy See not to have a priest in the office of Consul. There his dedication to the slaves was limitless. The goodness of his heart moved him more than once to commit himself for sums he did not possess or which did not belong to him; for this he was ill-treated by local authorities and reproved by Saint Vincent. When his companion, Jacques Lesage, became gravely ill, Barreau took his vows before him, although he had not yet been released from the simple vow of religion he had taken as a Cistercian. This dispensation was not requested until 1652. Finally, on November 1, 1661, he was able to take his vows validly in the Congregation of the Mission. He was in Paris at the time, summoned by Rene Alméras, second Superior General, and had only Minor Orders. Barreau was ordained a priest in 1662 or 1663 and spent the remainder of his life at Saint Lazare as Procurator. In 1672 he was associated with the Procurator General, Nicolas Talec. On May 24, 1675, during a serious illness, he made his will, to which he added a codicil on April 7, 1679 (Cf. Arch. Nat. M 213, no. 8.)

4 According to the author of the manuscript biography of Jean Le Vacher, who reproduced part of this discourse, Saint Vincent said here “We see how broadminded and devout he was in dignifying and supporting those wretched slaves, we have the results of it here.”
heart, vast and ample! *Magnificat anima mea Dominum:* our hearts must magnify and amplify God, and may God amplify our souls for that, may He give us a broad understanding in order to be truly aware of the greatness and extent of the goodness and power of God; to know how far our obligation to serve and glorify Him in every possible manner extends; a fullness of will to embrace every opportunity to procure the glory of God. If we can do nothing of ourselves, we can do everything with God. Yes, the Mission can do anything because we have in us the seeds of the omnipotence of Jesus Christ. That’s why no one can excuse himself on the grounds of his powerlessness; we’ll always have greater strength than is needed, especially when the occasion arises; for, when it does, a man feels like a completely new man. That’s what M. X said when he arrived; his strength was redoubled as soon as the occasion arose when he needed it.

“I almost forgot to share with the Company the news I received and for which we’ll thank God. Our Holy Father the Pope has granted all Missioners a plenary indulgence at the hour of death. When M. Blatiron⁸ went to pay him the respects of the entire Company, he asked him for this grace and that of taking the Company under his protection; both were granted to him. Who can understand the fullness of this grace? A plenary indulgence at the hour of death, the application of all the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ! The result is that, at the hour of our death, we’ll be clothed in that robe of innocence that will put us in the state of being pleasing in God’s sight at the moment we have to give Him an account of our life. This Lord of the Gospel banishes from His presence anyone who appears before Him not wearing the wedding garment, which God will give us at the

---

⁸Étienne Blatiron was born in Saint-Julien-Chapteuil (Haute-Loire) on January 6, 1614. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on January 6, 1638, was ordained a priest in 1639, and was placed in Alet (1639-41), Saintes (1641), Richelieu, Rome (1644-45), and Genoa (1645-57). He distinguished himself particularly in the latter post where, as Superior of a new house, he had to organize everything. Saint Vincent considered him one of his most competent Missioners and “a very great servant of God.” (Cf. Abelly, *op. cit.* bk. III, chap. V, p. 48.) Blatiron died in Genoa on July 24, 1657, a victim of his dedication to the plague-stricken. His biography was published in vol. II of *Notices,* pp. 151-203. In the Lyons manuscript there is a report on his virtues, addressed to Saint Vincent.
hour of death by this indulgence, if we’re faithful to our vocation and live and die in the ministry in which He has placed us. This is what we’re going to thank God for, the priests at Holy Mass and the Brothers at Communion; that’s what we’ll do today, please.

“I recommend to your prayers one of the retreatants, who has a very special need. How much good he’ll do, if he’s totally converted; and how much harm, if he isn’t! It’s enough for me to tell you that much to let you see how much he needs to be assisted.”

125a. - PRIESTLY MINISTRY

To these reasons, which prove of so much interest for the welfare of poor persons and especially of the rural poor, M. Vincent joined others, drawn from the very nature and essence of the priestly ministry. He said that God expects priests to stem the tide of His indignation, and He is very pleased that, censer in hand, they place themselves, like Aaron, between Him and His people, to obtain the cessation of the evils that are greatly distressing Him and which too often are the punishment of the sins he himself would not have committed if zealous Pastors had worked at his conversion.

“So then,” he concluded, “it’s a matter of both gratitude and justice that we must render these duties of charity to poor persons. As long as they are suffering and struggling against need and destitution, we, like Moses and following his example, must raise our arms constantly to heaven for them. If they are suffering for their sins, we must be their intercessors with the Divine Mercy: charity obliges us to stretch out our hands to them in order to withdraw them from this; and if we don’t work, even at the cost of our lives, to instruct them and to help them to be totally converted to the Lord, we are, in a certain sense, the cause of all the troubles they are enduring.”

Conference 125a. - Collet, *La Vie de St Vincent*, vol. 1, pp. 503-04, excerpt. The editors have inserted here this fragment from a conference, which seems to follow Conference 125.

1Cf Ex 4:16. (NAB)

2Cf Ex 17:9-12. (NAB)
At the end of Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent said, “I remind the Company in general of a fault that several men are committing here in presence of Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I’ve noted that, when they genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, many don’t go all the way to the floor, or they genuflect very irreverently. I had already noticed this at other times and had decided to remind the Company of it, but I was so wretched as to have forgotten. Since I was a little early for meditation yesterday, I watched the way some were genuflecting, and, in order to remind the Company of this and for fear of forgetting, I made a written note of it. Today I was a little early here as well, and again I noticed the same thing. In order that those who fail to genuflect reverently—as is suitable to the glory and majesty of the living God—may correct this in themselves, I felt obliged not to put off any longer reminding the Company of this, as I do now, so as to be attentive to it. By the grace of God, some make it very well and with great reverence, not only exteriorly but also interiorly; that’s apparent, by the grace of God, and people notice it; some, however, make it very badly.

“The reasons that should prompt us to make this act of abasement with the exterior and interior reverence we should have, and as true Christians must do, is the example of the Son of God and of some other religious Communities. The Son of God prostrated himself with His face to the ground in the Garden of Olives; we see that the Carthusians lie full length on the floor; the Jacobins genuflect and then make a deep bow. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed on the altar, people go down on both knees with deep humility, adoring the majesty of God.

“Another reason is the example we owe to all the persons who come to this house and who see us and observe us from head to toe.
They come here to recollect themselves and to learn how to live well, so many of the clergy who pass through here, the ordinands, the retreatants, who, if they see that we’re satisfied to genuflect only halfway to the floor, for example, may think that they don’t have to do more, and may say, ‘Since those Priests of the Mission do only that, I don’t have to do more, for, if they were supposed to do it, they undoubtedly would.’ The men in the other houses may say, ‘That’s how they do it at Saint-Lazare.’ And that’s how everything begins to go downhill, and it’s through the negligence of the Superior. You see, faults committed in a Community are imputed to the Superior, if he fails to correct them or people continue to commit them; and God will ask him for an account of this.

“I myself haven’t given the example I should have. Mais quoi! My age and my bad legs prevent me from being able to do it. Nevertheless, if I see that the Company doesn’t improve, I’ll force myself to do it as best I can, so as to give the example to the Company, even if I have to get myself up by leaning my hands against the floor. Granted, this is difficult for the elderly, for, once someone has reached sixty-five or sixty-six years of age, he begins to have a hard time getting up. The infirm and those who have physical problems—men like M. Boudet, for example—have some excuse; but, as for the others, I don’t know of any. They’re obliged to give this example to everyone who sees and observes them.

“You see, my dear confreres, the copy is usually no better than the original; if there are defects in the original, there are usually some in the copy. The Saint-Lazare house is the original which the other houses and everyone who comes here take as an example, and on which they make copies. If, then, the original is defective, what will the copies be like?”

Or sus, may God, by His holy grace, be merciful to us! I ask the Company to pay special attention to this.

1Abelly adds here (op. cit., bk. III, chap. VIII, sect. I, p. 80) two sentences that are not in our text: “So I ask you, my dear confreres, to pay close attention to this and to act in those circumstances in such a way that interior reverence always anticipates and accompanies exterior reverence. God wants to be adored in spirit and in truth, and all true Christians must conduct themselves in this way, after the example of the Son of God, who, prostrating Himself face to the ground in the Garden of Olives, accompanied this devout posture with a very profound interior abasement, out of respect for the sovereign Majesty of His Father.”
and I ask M. Admirault to be alert to those who fail in it and to take note of them in order to admonish them of it afterward.

"Don't you remember, my dear confreres, what I told you before, that someone who has learned a motet in music and then wishes to learn a second and a third finds it easier to learn the second than he did the first, and much easier to learn the third than the first or even the second? So, today we have a little difficulty performing a certain act of virtue or religion; the second time we'll have less, and the third even less than the second, and in this way we become more and more perfect. Don't you also recall what I told you previously? . . . Or sus, I won't go any further; we'll stop here, please."

At that moment M. Vincent thought of some reason for not finishing what he had begun, so he concluded by recommending to the prayers of the Company those who asked him to do so and by accepting the acts of humility of a few others who had asked pardon of God for some faults they had committed.

127. - CHASTITY

July 30, 1655

"Oh bien! Let's earnestly ask God for this virtue of purity, Messieurs. If we have this virtue, it will attract many others; if we don't, both we and the Mission are lost. We have a very special need of it, since we're constantly in circumstances where we need it. O Savior, grant us the grace of honoring that admirable purity You willed to have on earth!

"Tomorrow we celebrate the feast of a great saint, Saint Ignatius, who had this virtue to a very high degree and passed it on to that great, holy Company he instituted. At the beginning of that Company, everyone admired the young men living among them in great purity, although they were continually in dangerous circumstances.

Conference 127. - Recueil de diverses exhortations. p. 84.
One day someone asked one of their priests what they were doing to preserve such great purity; he replied that they carried with them something that preserved them: sobriety and custody of the exterior senses. May God in His goodness be pleased to give us a share in that spirit He has spread so abundantly in that holy Company!

“Let’s strive to imitate it in its sobriety and custody of the senses and to use the other means that have been mentioned to maintain ourselves in great purity. But the greatest means is to turn frequently to Our Lord in every circumstance and at every moment; turn to Our Lord and have great devotion to His purity and that of the Blessed Virgin. Let’s ask Him for this grace; I feel that, if we beg Him earnestly for it, He’ll have mercy on us. All the priests who have no special obligation will celebrate Mass tomorrow for this intention; the Brothers won’t be receiving Communion tomorrow, but they’ll ask God for this on Sunday and will offer their Communion that God may be pleased to give this precious gift to the Company. How edified I was recently by one of our Brothers, living among savages, about whom someone wrote me: men and women go about almost naked; he works among them and sees all that. But what am I saying? He doesn’t presume to see it, he doesn’t look at them, and thus he’s free of impurity. O Sauveur! Recently I had the report of this shown to the Ladies of Charity, and they were all moved with consolation at seeing what powerful assistance God gives in such circumstances. This is what we’ll ask of God, please, through the intercession of Our Lady, Saint Joseph, our Guardian Angels, Saint Peter, and Saint Ignatius.”
At the end of Repetition of Prayer, M. Vincent took the opportunity of speaking of the fact that a coadjutor Brother on duty in the pantry had knelt down and asked pardon of God for talking very loud and for not correcting himself of this. “It’s true,” M. Vincent then said, “that there’s a lot of noise in that pantry, so much so that it disturbs those nearby and prevents them from hearing the reading. Even though attention has been called to this, there’s been no improvement; and, what is worse, when someone knocks to summon you, you don’t answer; you turn a deaf ear. Brother, that’s a great fault. Correct it, Brother.

“I don’t know where all the noise we make comes from or why we have so little silence among us now. In the beginning of the Company, silence was better observed, and people spoke more softly than we do now. This has come about because someone among us is hard of hearing, and we’ve had to speak louder to make ourselves understood; so we’ve continued to speak in a loud tone of voice. We have to admit that there’s been a great falling off in that area in our conversations and that people are talking very loud. All that’s my fault, for I alone am guilty of whatever’s wrong in the Company; I myself speak too loudly and give this bad example to the Company, and I don’t see that this is corrected.

“I think Saint Benedict says that the first step in humility is silence, silence. Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion, and a Doctor of the Church has expressed this verse as Te decet silentium, Deus, in Sion. We’ve seen ordinations, where fifty or sixty men are be-
ing ordained, carried out without any noise. At the Collège des Bons-Enfants, for example, where, in the beginning, we received the ordinands, we saw all that take place in that little, confined space in marvelous silence. By the grace of God, some in the Company give great example in this; oh yes, there are some—many, in fact—by the grace of God!

"Some time ago there was a good Doctor, now dead, who had the custom of coming every year to make his retreat in this house, and I always had the honor of serving him. One day, when he was making his communication to me, I asked him what his predominant passion was. He thought for a while and then replied, 'You're giving me a lot to think about, Monsieur; my reply, however, is that those of us from the North are very little subject to passions—not that we don't have a few, but not generally speaking.'

"And, in fact, since that time I've been on the watch and have seen from experience that what he told me is true, namely, that persons from the North are much less prone to allowing themselves to be carried away by passion and fits of anger, and that those from the South and the warmer countries are more so. So you see that, in certain cities—in Constantinople, for example—there are members of the civil administration, that is, people who go through the entire city, into the markets and fairs, with constables and sergeants, to visit and note those who speak too loudly and make too much noise, just as you see those deputized merchants in Paris who go from shop to shop, and if they find someone who has lost his temper and is talking too loudly, with no other kind of trial they immediately make him stretch out on the pavement, where he's beaten with a stick twenty or thirty times. Now, those people, the Turks, do what they do as a matter of policy; with what greater reason must we do it, as a matter of virtue.

"One resolution, among others, that this good Doctor I just mentioned took during his retreat, was to try to imitate in a certain respect another Doctor of the Sorbonne, now a Bishop, who gives

---

'A spiritual exercise in which a person, outside of the confessional, discusses with his/her director the state of his/her soul and the efforts to be made to strive for perfection.'
very good example. He's also a Prelate endowed with a very high degree of virtue, whom I used to see every day and with whom I used to converse.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ is the true model and that great invisible portrait on whom we must fashion all our actions. The most perfect men living here below on earth are the visible, tangible pictures who serve as models for us to regulate all our actions well and make them pleasing to God.

"I wish you could see, Messieurs, the silence there is at the Louvre and the way people talk to one another. You'd sometimes see forty, fifty, eighty, or a hundred persons there waiting, talking with one another in a low voice, with the result that you could hear a pin drop at the other end of the room. In the residence of the late Cardinal Richelieu, where I've been many times, there was a marvelous silence; and in the residence of the present one also you see everyone speaking politely, respectfully, and reservedly with one another.

"If you could only see how those Doctors of the Sorbonne take their recreation together; it's so beautiful! They have a pathway where they walk in threes and fours, speaking cordially, quietly, and respectfully to one another. As for me, I must confess that I don't know why our recreations are going so badly, seeing that this is contrary to polite conversation, common courtesy, and even common sense. Our student confreres are the most guilty in this, and I myself first of all, for not giving the good example I should.

"People ask how it is that, in the Parlement, some Chambers have a better reputation than others, and no other reason is given than the fact that, since the Chief Justices and Councillors of those

---

Jules Cardinal Mazarin (Giulio Mazarini) was born in Pescina in the Abruzzi (Italy) in 1602. studied in Spain as a youth, and served in the papal army and the papal diplomatic corps. He met Richelieu in 1630 and represented the Pope in negotiating the peace of Cherasco with France in 1631. Mazarin had hardly begun preparing for the priesthood—he received tonsure in 1632, but never became a priest—when he was assigned to other important diplomatic posts: Vice-Legate of Avignon (1634), then Nuncio in France (1635-36), in which positions he demonstrated the ability and flexibility of the most subtle statesman. He became a French citizen in 1639, and Richelieu obtained a Cardinal's hat for him in 1641. Before Richelieu's death (1642), he recommended Mazarin to Louis XIII. He became the principal minister of Queen Anne of Austria during the regency of Louis XIV (1643-61) and, until his own death in 1661, was the absolute master of France.
Chambers started out right and established a way of treating affairs in a sound manner and with all possible knowledge, the others who followed him preserved this same spirit and jurisprudence and passed it on to those who came after them, and these latter to those who have followed them. In this way that high regard and reputation continued and has been preserved until now.

"Rechab slept in a tent and never drank wine. When his children saw that, they said, 'Our father sleeps only in a tent and drinks no wine: why shouldn’t we do likewise? Are we better than he? He’s given us this example; why shouldn’t we benefit from it?' They did, and their children in turn said, 'Our fathers acted that way; we have to imitate them.' And so, from generation to generation, for the space of three hundred years, the children of Rechab kept that custom, which pleased God so much that it’s said in Holy Scripture that he blessed Rechab’s family. So, my dear confreres, you see what good example can do and how important it is in the beginning to lay a firm foundation and set a good example on which those who follow us can build.

"Oh, what a strict account I’ll have to render to God. I who am not giving the Company the example I should! And what I say of myself must be understood also of all those who are the oldest members of the Company: for not only will we be guilty of the harm we’re doing personally, but we’ll be guilty likewise and will render an account to God of the harm that those who come after us will do because of our having left them neither the example we should nor the manner of behaving and of doing things as is suitable for true Missioners, and as the Rules and holy customs of the Company require of us, if we don’t do penance for this.

"So, we see that the sin Adam committed has passed into all his children, even down to ourselves, and will do the same to those who come after us. And if Adam hadn’t done penance for his sin and for the bad example he gave to all his posterity, not only would he have been punished for his personal fault but also for the faults his children and all his posterity would have committed because of him.

7Cf Jer 35 (NAB)
"On the other hand, how many good works and holy acts of virtue will be due to the good members of the Company who have laid a firm foundation and given good example! For, in the measure that those who follow them do good and maintain themselves on the right path they traced out for them, their glory will increase and they'll receive their reward for this from God in heaven. Shouldn't that encourage all of us, brothers, to begin anew, from now on, to make good progress, to be exact in the practice of the Rules and holy customs of the Company, to keep silence, and to adopt a way of conversing with one another that's as pleasing to God as we can imagine? Let's ask this grace of Our Lord and receive Communion for that intention today."

129. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

August 4, 1655

"I have an admonition for our Brothers in the seminary. I have a piece of advice to give them today so that they'll know how to act in those matters (of which it had just been a question). It's certain that, when charity dwells in a soul, it takes full possession of all its powers; it gives it no rest; it's a fire that's constantly active; once a person is inflamed by it, it holds him spellbound. O Sauveur! The memory wants to remember nothing but God; it holds in horror all other thoughts, considering them bothersome and rejecting them. Only those that bring to mind His well-beloved can please it. His presence must, at all costs—it absolutely must—be made continually close.

"There are the eager desires of the understanding, a pressing effort to see and discover new means to have this presence. Those aren't good; others are needed; if I could practice that, I'd have it; it has to be done; but I still have this devotion; how can I harmonize it with that one? It doesn't matter, both are necessary. And even if he

Conference 129. - Recueil de diverses exhortations, p. 89.

1Subheading: Excesses to be avoided in the love of God.
adopts that new devotion, he seeks others, and yet others. That poor person takes on everything and, for all that, isn’t content. He goes beyond his strength, is left weighed down by this, and thinks he never has enough of them. O gentle Savior, how will this end? The will is all caught up in it and is obliged to produce such frequent acts that it can’t do them; they’re acts upon acts repeated, redoubled at all times and places—at recreation, in the refectory—you see these men all excited; they think of nothing else; they don’t let up, even in gatherings and conversations. In a word, here, there, and everywhere there’s nothing but ardor, fire, and flames, continual acts. They’re always beside themselves.

“What danger and risks there are in those excesses, those eager desires, and those fits of enthusiasm! Mais quoi! Is there any risk in loving God? Can we love Him too much? Can there be any excess in something so holy and divine? Can we ever have sufficient love for God, who is infinitely loveable? It’s true that we can never love God enough and can never go to excess in this love if we consider what God deserves from us. O Savior God, who could rise to that amazing love You show us, even to shedding for us wretched creatures all Your blood, of which a single drop is infinitely priceless! O Savior! No, Messieurs, that can’t be; no matter what we do, we could never love God as we should; that’s impossible; God is infinitely loveable. Still, we have to be very careful that, even though God commands us to love Him with all our heart and with all our strength. His Goodness doesn’t, however, want us to go so far as to damage and ruin our health by these acts; no, no! God doesn’t ask us to kill ourselves for that.

“A few men in the seminary—three or four—caught up and inflamed with this desire, attached such importance to constantly producing acts day and night, always straining themselves, that poor human nature was unable to withstand such violent action. In that state, the blood becomes heated and, burning up with such ardor, sends hot vapors to the brain, which soon catches fire; this is followed by dizziness and pressure, as if they were wearing a blindfold; the organs become weak and many other difficulties ensue. We become absolutely useless for the rest of our days, and all we do is languish until death, which we bring on much sooner.
“We think all that is desirable and that it’s good to be reduced to that state by the love we have for God. Dying like that seems the most beautiful way to go; it’s to die of love, to be a martyr—a martyr of love. It seems that those blessed souls can apply to themselves the words of the Spouse and say with her: Vulnerasti cor meum; it’s You, my loving God, who have wounded me; You’re the one who has broken and pierced my heart with Your burning arrows; You’re the one who put this sacred fire in my inmost being, causing me to die of love. Oh, may You be forever blessed! O Savior, vulnerasti cor meum!

“Among the sacrifices offered to God in the Old Law, holocaust was the most excellent one because, in recognition of the sovereignty of God, the victim was burned and consumed entirely on the altars, without saving anything. Everything was reduced to dust and ashes for the glory of God. I think we could call those souls victims of love—holocausts—since, without holding anything back for themselves, they are consumed and perish because of it. O Dieu! How glorious it is to die like that and what a privilege it is to die of such beautiful wounds!

“Nevertheless, we still have to be very careful about that: there’s a great deal of danger in it and many mishaps; it’s better—much better—not to get so excited but to restrain yourself, without bursting your brains trying to make this virtue perceptible and almost natural; for, in the end, after all those vain efforts, you have to let go, you have to loosen your grip; and take care, watch out that you don’t end up growing completely weary and falling into a state worse than the one in which you were, into the worst condition of all and from which one scarcely ever rises. Saint Paul says that it’s impossible for someone who has once loved and tasted the sweetness of devotion, and then lost an appreciation for it and grew weary of it, to be able to recover it. When he says that this is impossible, he’s saying that it’s extremely difficult and almost requires a miracle.

\(^2\) You have ravished my heart. Cf. Sng 4:9 (NAB)
\(^3\) Cf. Heb 6:4-6 (NAB)
“That, then, is very often what you get for worrying so much, that’s what you get; that’s what you get for trying to make virtue perceptible to yourself: a distaste for all sorts of devotions, for virtue, and for the holiest things, and only with the greatest difficulty and trouble do you get over it. *O Sauveur!* What usually happens to those persons who torture themselves and do serious damage to their health is that, becoming ill—which always happens, for such great constraint ends in that—and, despite the fact that they have to slacken off, there’s no other way to keep up the large number of acts they were producing daily; so, three or four suffice: and if they used to do fifty, they can do only one or two—or even none at all. They have to refrain from them completely until they’re back on their feet, if—which rarely happens—they can even do that, for, as a rule, they’re crippled by this for the rest of their days, along with all that ensues.

“You have to be very careful about all that. I entreat the Directors to pay very close attention to it. It happens in the beginning: when you start to taste the sweetness of devotion, you can’t get enough of it, you think you never have enough, and you plunge too deeply into it. ‘Oh! I must constantly have this presence of God, I must cling to it.’ We’re at its mercy; it gets a grip on us; we’re bound to it by such invincible persistency that we make ourselves ill over it, as we said a little while ago. Oh, it’s too much, too much!

“Very often that’s how the devil tempts us; when he can’t induce us directly to do evil, he prompts us to try to take on more good than we’re able to do and keeps overloading us until we’re overwhelmed by a weight that’s excessive and by such a heavy burden.

“Virtue always lies in the middle, my dear confreres; each virtue has two vicious extremes; no matter from which side we happen to move away, we fall into one of these faults; for our actions to be praiseworthy, we have to walk a straight line between those two extremes. For example, the charity we mentioned has its two extremes, which are bad, namely, to love little or not at all, and to love too ardently and passionately. Never to think of that, nor to make any act of it or to do it rarely is a lack of concern; it’s laziness regarding charity, which is never idle; but also to perform acts that
heat up our blood and drive us crazy is to go to excess in this matter and to fall into the other vicious extreme. Virtue lies in the middle; the extremes are never worth anything.

"So then, I ask M. [Delespiney], who's in charge of the seminary, to be attentive to this at communications; yes, Monsieur, please keep an eye out for this and see to it that they don't change for the worse; those that are too fervent must be given moderation for fear that they may go to excess; those who, under the pretext of not inconveniencing themselves, have no fervor at all and make no acts must be prodded and awakened a little; they mustn't fall into indifference and become lax. Now, these mental strains usually come from an immoderate desire to make progress, from self-love and ignorance, and because people want to make virtues and spiritual matters felt tangibly. They try to rise from the first step to an eminent degree of virtue. They don't understand the frailty of our nature and the weakness of our bodies, and they undertake things beyond their strength. From this it happens that poor human nature, which is stifled and hampered, complains, cries out, and obliges us to give in. We have to make provision for the necessities of nature, since God has made us subject to them, and adapt to its weakness. That's what God wills; He's so good and just that He asks for nothing more; He's well aware of our woes and, in His compassion and mercy, supplies for our defects. We must act very simply with Him and not be so anxious about this; His goodness and mercy will provide whatever we need.

"I remember something the Bishop of Geneva said on this topic—divine words, worthy of such a great man: 'Oh,' he said, 'I wouldn't want to go to God, if God didn't come to me!' Such admirable words! He wouldn't want to go to God, if God didn't first come to him. Words like these come from a heart perfectly enlightened in the science of love! That being so, a heart truly filled with charity, which understands what it is to love God, wouldn't want to

---

4Gabriel Delespiney. Born in Grandchamp (Calvados), entered the Congregation of the Mission on August 5, 1645, and took his vows on January 25, 1656; he was Superior in Toul (1648-52) and Marseilles (1659-60)

5Saint Francis de Sales
go to God unless God anticipated him and attracted him by His grace. That’s a far cry from wanting to carry God away and draw Him to himself by hook or by crook. No, no; in those cases, nothing is gained by force.

“When God wants to communicate himself, He does it effortlessly, in a perceptible, very pleasant, gentle, loving way; so, let’s ask Him often and with great confidence for this gift of meditation. On His part, God asks for nothing better; let’s pray to Him, but let’s do it with great confidence, and be assured that, in His great mercy, He’ll grant it to us in the end. He never refuses when people pray to Him humbly and confidently. If He doesn’t grant it in the beginning, He does so later on. We have to persevere and not become discouraged; and if we don’t have that spirit of God now, in His mercy He’ll give it to us if we’re steadfast—perhaps in three or four months, more or less, or in a year or two. Whatever happens, let’s be resigned to His Providence, hoping entirely in His generosity and allowing God to act; let’s always be very courageous. When God in His goodness grants a certain grace to someone, what the person considered difficult becomes so easy that he finds pleasure in the very thing he used to find so hard; in fact, he’s truly quite amazed by this unexpected change. *Hic est digitus Dei, haec mutatio dexterae Excelsi.* That’s when we have no difficulty feeling that we’re in the presence of God; it becomes almost natural and never ceases; we even have great satisfaction in it. We mustn’t force ourselves or try to form specific words interiorly, tying our stomach in knots. God understands quite well without our speaking to Him; He sees the deepest motivations of our heart; He’s aware of even our slightest feelings.

“O Savior, to reveal our needs to You, all we have to do is to open our mouths; You hear the softest sigh, the slightest movement of our soul, and by a gentle, loving impulse we draw down on ourselves more incomparable graces and blessings than by those extreme acts of violence. O Savior, You know what my heart wants to

---

5According to Fr. Dodin *op. cit.*, no. 52, p. 179, Saint Vincent is using here parts of two citations from the Old Testament. “The magicians said to Pharaoh. ‘This is the finger of God’” (Ex 8:15), and “...that the right hand of the Most High is changed” (Ps 77:11).
say; it turns to You, fountain of mercy; You see its desires; they tend only to You, they aspire only to You, they want only You. Let’s say to Him often, Doce nos orare; give us, Lord this gift of meditation; teach us yourself how we should pray. This is what we ask of Him today and every day with confidence—great confidence—in His goodness."

130. - POVERTY

August 6, 1655

“This topic is so important that I think it advisable to continue it the next time; we’ll discuss it again next Friday, and we have reason to hope from the goodness of God, who acts in accord with the disposition of His subjects, that He’ll give us even greater graces; for, as we’ve just said, it’s poverty that must maintain us. What will become of the Company if attachment to worldly goods infiltrates it? What will become of it? The saints tell us that poverty is the crux of religious Orders. We’re not religious; it was expedient for us not to be. We’re unworthy of being religious, even though we live in Community; but we can say that poverty is the crux of Communities and especially of ours, which has greater need of it than others. It’s this bond that frees it from all earthly things and attaches it to its God. O Savior, give us this virtue, which attaches us inseparably to Your service, so that we may neither want nor seek anything but You alone and Your glory! Or sus, blessed be God!

“Now, the poverty we profess is a simple vow we take to give up worldly goods in order to serve God, to live in common, and to have nothing of our own. This must be understood with regard to use: those who have benefices renounce them, and those who have other property either give it up or leave to the Superior the disposition of the fruits derived from it, and all live in common. Thus, some don’t

7 Teach us to pray. Cf. Lk 11:1. (NAB)

Conference 130. - Recueil de diverses exhortations, p. 94
have more than others. Although there are some who have posses­
sions, they don’t have personal use of them, even though they retain
possession of the capital. Should it unfortunately happen that they
lose this spirit and want to leave the post where God has placed them,
they resume the enjoyment of their property and income when they
leave, after the Pope or the Superior has dispensed them from the
vow. Blessed be God! It’s true that, if they die in the Mission—be it
here, or in the Indies, or elsewhere—they have the disposition of their
goods as something belonging to them personally and may do what­
ever they wish with them, leaving them to whomever they please,
without the permission of the Superior. This right that a person has
over his patrimony and over any inheritance doesn’t prevent us from
living in holy poverty.

“If we have property, we don’t have the use of it, and that makes
us like Jesus Christ, who, having all things, had nothing. He was the
Master and Lord of the whole world, He made the goods that are in it;
yet. He willed, for love of us, to deprive himself of their use; even
though He was Lord of the whole world, He made himself the poor­
est of all men and even had less than the smallest animals: Vulpes
foveas habent; volucres caeli, nidos; Filius autem hominis non habet
ubi caput reclinet.1 but the Son of God does not have a stone on
which to rest His head. O Sauveur! O Sauveur! What will become of
us if we attach ourselves to the goods of this earth? What will become
of us after the example of the poverty of the Son of God? Ah, may
those who have possessions not desire the use of them if they have re­
nounced them; and may those who have none not want to have them!

“In the beginning of the Church, all those who wanted to be­
come priests renounced their possessions: Dominus pars haereditatis
meae et calicis mei.2 A priest must renounce everything in order to
have God alone—You alone, O Savior! Isn’t that enough? Isn’t that
only right? Should he be thinking about anything else? Dominus
pars haereditatis meae et calicis mei.

1Foxes have dens, the birds of the sky have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay
his head. Cf. Mt 8:20. (NAB)
2The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup. Cf. Ps 15:5 (D-RB)
“So, in the beginning, a man embraced poverty in order to become a priest; there were very few priests, only those who were needed, as many as there were benefices. And, when a priest happened to die, the person chosen for the benefice took Orders, with the result that very often men were appointed before they became priests. In the end, however, it was judged advisable and expedient—even necessary—to have more priests. That’s why, even though a man might not have a benefice, he was admitted to Orders with a patrimonial title, and in this way, the number of priests increased. Now, this title varies according to the place, or at least the Bishops have required more in one place than in another. In Paris, fifty écus are required; elsewhere it’s one hundred, and in other places eighty suffice. There are some that are satisfied with fifty livres, more or less.¹

“In the beginning, then, priests took a sort of vow of poverty—even Saint Basil, Saint Jerome, and others I can’t recall. So, the saints, the first Christians, not only the priests but all the others embraced poverty. *O Sauveur!* All the first Christians took the vow of poverty, *nec quisquam eorum quae possidebat aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant illis omnia communia,* none of them considered what he owned as belonging to him personally, but everything was in common among them; they sold their possessions and laid the money they received for them at the feet of the Apostles, who then distributed it to each one according to his need. We even see that someone who was tempted to divest himself of all his goods was severely punished by Saint Peter, who carried out an act of justice, causing Ananias to die, and his wife shortly after him, having them put to death at his feet by the power of God that was in him; and by the authority it gave him, he punished them on the spot.² Saint Basil and Saint Jerome, basing themselves on the fact that Saint Peter performed an act of justice by having Ananias and his wife killed at his

²Throughout this edition the various denominations of money have been left in French, since no adequate, unchanging value in American dollars can be assigned. In the time of Saint Vincent, one écu equaled three livres; one thousand livres could support two priests and a Brother for one year on the missions (cf. V, 485).

³No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. Cf. Acts 4:32 (NAB)

⁴Cf. Acts 5:1-11 (NAB)
feet before everyone in the whole Church, assure us that the first
Christians took a sort of vow of poverty.

"What a happiness for the Mission to be able to imitate the first
Christians and, like them, to live in common and in poverty! O
Sauveur! What a benefit for us! Let's all ask God to give us in His
mercy His spirit of poverty. Yes, the spirit of poverty is the spirit of
God; for to despise what God despises and value what He values, to
seek what He approves and to be attached to what He loves, is to have
the spirit of God, which is nothing else than to have the same desires
and affections of God, to adopt the sentiments of God. This is what
the spirit of God is: to love like Him and His followers the poverty to
which the spirit of the world is opposed, that spirit of ownership and
ease that seeks its own satisfaction, that spirit of attachment to
the things of this earth, that spirit of the antichrist—yes, of the
antichrist—not of that antichrist who is to come shortly before Our
Lord, but of that spirit of wealth opposed to God, and those maxims
contrary to the ones the Son of God taught.

"Or sus, courage! Let's avoid that spirit of damnation and ask
God to give us His spirit, which is the spirit of poverty. Let's ask Him
to preserve it in us; for, it has always been present in the Little Com-
pany, thank God—that spirit of abandonment of all things, which
causes us to leave everything for God, which detaches us from com-
forts, times, and places, here and in the Indies. Yes, by the grace of
God, it's present in the Mission. A man is going a hundred leagues
away: 'When are you leaving for that place a hundred leagues from
here, Monsieur?' 'Today or tomorrow, even this morning.' Men go
just as easily to Rome four hundred leagues away.

"O Savior, it's Your spirit that does this; You're the one who gave
this spirit to the Mission. In thirty years I don't think I've found more
than one man who refused to go here or there; no, I haven't. Blessed
be God! But what are those men looking for who always want to pos-
sess things and never have enough, no matter what they have? What
are they looking for? I know very well: they want to enjoy them-
selves to the full. Shall I say it? . . . We'll have to think about that.

"Goods are called means because people don't want them just for
the sake of having them but in order to get something else; those who
seek them want to pass the time, enjoy themselves, have things the way they like, raise themselves up. O Sauveur! Is that being a Missioner? Is that the spirit of the Mission? No, no; the latter is founded on poverty; and whoever has this spirit has everything; he can do anything; he fears nothing; and God, who never fails those who have left all for Him, increases their strength when they need it; He also gives renewed strength, as M. Mousnier,\(^6\) who is in Madagascar and gives me news of this, tells me.

“My dear confreres, let’s all ask God for this spirit, that He’ll separate us from all worldly goods in order to unite us to himself. Together, let’s all please ask Him for this spirit, without which it’s impossible to live in Community. Let’s pray for this during the coming week; perhaps, by His grace, He’ll inspire someone on Friday, who will come to enkindle in us this spirit of poverty. Let’s try this week to find the means of obtaining it. O gentle Savior, give it to us; we entreat You yourself to grant us this spirit, which will cause us to seek only You alone. It comes from You, it depends on You, so we most humbly entreat You to give it to us. Ah, Messieurs! Let’s be earnest in asking Him for it; if we have it, we’ll have everything, and we’ll be happy if we die in this spirit. What an honor, what happiness, and what glory to die like the Son of God died! Is there any greater benefit? Could we desire a better or more glorious end? That’s how we’ll die, if we live in the spirit of poverty. We must hope for this from the infinite goodness of God.

“Friday we’ll continue with this same topic, \textit{in nomine Domini}.”

---

\(^6\)Jean-François Mousnier, born in Saintes (Charente-Maritime), entered the Congregation of the Mission on December 19, 1643, at eighteen years of age, took his vows on January 1, 1646, and was ordained a priest in 1649. After distributing alms in Picardy, he was sent to Madagascar, where he died in 1655. His biography is published in vol. III of \textit{Notices}, pp. 129-46.
"There's an important matter, of which the outcome is uncertain, that I recommend to the prayers of the Company. We'll please offer it to Our Lord, that it may please Him in His mercy to give it His blessing."

M. Vincent also recommended to the prayers of the Company Messrs. Mousnier and Bourdaise, who, he said, are on the island of Madagascar and are daily exposed to new dangers, that God in His mercy may be pleased to give them the spirit of Saint Lawrence and help them, like this great saint, to be steadfast to the end and to overcome all the difficulties that may arise.

He also recommended many other persons to the prayers of the Company, among others one of the retreatants, saying, "I entreat you, my dear confreres, to thank God for making so many persons feel drawn to make a retreat here: it's wonderful: the many clergy from town and country who leave everything for it; the many persons who ask every day to be admitted and insistently request this far in advance! What a great reason to praise God! Some come to me and say, 'Monsieur, I've been asking for this favor for a long time; I've come here so many times without being able to obtain it.' Others say, 'Monsieur, I have to go away; I have responsibilities; my benefice requires my presence. I'm on the point of departure, grant me this favor.' Still others say, 'I've completed my studies and have to withdraw and reflect on what I should become.' Yet others say, 'Monsieur, I really need this; if you only knew, you'd soon grant me this favor.'

"What a great favor! What a great grace God has bestowed on this house, to call so many souls to it for the holy exercises of a retreat and to use this family as an instrument for the instruction of..."
those poor souls! What else should we think about but winning a soul to God, especially when the person comes to us? We should have no other intention and should aim only at that, and that alone. Alas! Those souls have cost the Son of God so much, and it’s to us that He sends them to restore them to His grace. O Messieurs, let’s be careful not to make ourselves unworthy of this lest God withdraw His hand from over us. It does happen that some get no benefit at all from it; they come because they have to and only for their own comfort, but, for the few who don’t make good use of it, this shouldn’t make us grow tired of helping the others; we mustn’t penalize so many good souls who benefit greatly from it. What good results, what marvelous results! I’ve already told you that; today I’m only going to give you an example.

“On the last journey to Brittany I took five years ago, as soon as I arrived there a very upright man came to thank me for the grace he said he received in making the retreat here. ‘Monsieur,’ he said, ‘I would have been lost without it; I owe you everything because it gave me peace of mind and helped me to adopt a way of life that I continue to live, by the grace of God and to my greatest satisfaction. Ah, Monsieur! I’m so indebted to you for this that I talk about it everywhere, in all the gatherings in which I find myself: I tell people that, without the retreat I made, thanks to you, at Saint-Lazare, I would have been damned. O Monsieur, how grateful I am to you!’ That delights me.

“How unfortunate we’ll be if, through our own laziness, we force God to take this grace away from us! To tell the truth, not everyone benefits from it in that way, but isn’t the kingdom of God composed of the good and the bad? It’s a net that takes in all kinds of fish, good and bad; for all the favors God grants, there are persons who abuse them; nevertheless, that doesn’t stop Him from granting them. How many there are who have been unwilling to benefit from the passion and death of Our Lord! O gentle, merciful Savior, You see that most people don’t appreciate them, and yet You still died, even though You saw that multitude of unbelievers who make light of them, and that great number among us who despise and trample underfoot Your Precious Blood. There’s no good
work they don’t profane, nothing so holy that they don’t abuse it; but for all that and for all these abuses we must never withdraw from them on the pretext that some people make poor use of them; we mustn’t become lax and grow cold in our spiritual exercises just because everyone doesn’t benefit from them. What a loss and what a misfortune if we should weary of that grace God has given us over all other Communities and deprive God of the glory He draws from it! What a misfortune! Woe betide me and woe betide the man who, through his laziness, the fear of losing his comfort, or his love for having a good time when he should be working, will diminish the fervor of this holy practice! No matter what happens through the fault of certain people, however, we must never grow lax. Let’s always be very courageous; God, who gave us this grace, will maintain it in us and even give us greater ones. Let’s have greater hope, be stouthearted in the face of difficulties, and have unwavering courage. Only that cursed spirit of laziness gives up at the smallest contradiction; there’s not the slightest discomfort it doesn’t avoid, no responsibility it doesn’t fear, no satisfaction it doesn’t seek; this self-love ruins everything. Let’s banish this cowardice far from us; let’s ask God in His mercy to preserve for us what he has so generously granted us; it’s a great gift He has given to the Company; let’s ask His Goodness that we may not make ourselves unworthy of it by our carelessness; let’s pray fervently to Him.

“O Savior, create in us that spirit of Saint Lawrence which caused him to triumph amid the flames of the rage of all hell; create in our hearts that divine fire and ardent fervor that will cause us to triumph over all the obstacles of the devil and of our evil nature, which may oppose what is good; stir up in us an ardent zeal to procure Your glory in all our ministries so that we may persevere constantly in them until death, after the example of that great saint whose feast we are celebrating. We beg this of you through his intercession.”
132. - POVERTY

August 13, 1655

“It’s difficult, Messieurs, to have a clear idea of the importance of the virtue of holy poverty. It’s the support of Communities; the Holy Fathers say that it’s the fortress wall of all religious Orders; it’s their rampart; it’s what defends and preserves them.

“Would to God, Messieurs, that we could conceive clearly today how important it is for us and how necessary it is that we have great love for holy poverty! O Savior, please give us a share in Your insights so that we might know and love this virtue. Ah, if we could discover its beauty, if God were to do us the favor of showing it to us, who among us would not feel his heart inflamed by the desire to have it? Who would not love to be poor?

“Now, Messieurs, this evening we’ll conclude the conference on poverty as we profess it as a simple vow; some other time, if the opportunity presents itself, we’ll be able to discuss it in greater detail as a remarkable virtue; for this virtue encompasses many others, and there are also several vices that wage war against it; for this evening, however, as I was thinking of what should lead us to an exact practice of poverty, this is what popped into my head: namely, that we’ve given our word on it to the Superior. We’ve promised to keep it very strictly. It’s with that intention that we came here; it’s on that condition that we were admitted; we’ve pledged our word on this to the Superior; we’ve made it an obligation; the promise is made. Isn’t it true, my dear confreres, isn’t it true that this was explained to you when you came, and you were told, ‘See if you can adopt this practice and can keep holy poverty exactly. Ponder this; think about it.’ You took the time to do that; you thought about it before God; you made a resolution about it in His presence; I’m not speaking about the fact that you promised it to God, we’ll talk about that a little later. So then, having really given it serious thought, you felt you could do it, and you said, ‘Yes, Monsieur, I do want this, with the grace of God, and I
promise you to observe holy poverty everywhere and in all things.' That’s what you voluntarily committed yourself to do after holy, serious reflection. Isn’t it true, my dear confreres, that this is what happened and that, when the Superior saw that you had made up your mind to do it, he then admitted you?

"Would you want now to break your promise and go back on your word, which men of the world keep so religiously, and without which a man isn’t a man? Yes, a man who doesn’t keep his word isn’t a man, he has only the appearance of one, but he’s an animal, a wild animal, that deserves to be driven from the society of men. O Sauveur! What is a man who doesn’t keep his word? He’s the worst—yes the worst, the most despicable—of all men. In fact, the world itself, which puts up with all sorts of wickedness, can’t tolerate that one. The man who doesn’t keep his word once he has given it is detestable before God and others. God treats such people as His enemies and as wicked souls; yes, that’s how God treats those who fail to keep their word, even in worldly matters: Declinantes in obligationes adducet Dominus cum operantibus iniquitatem, adducet cum operantibus iniquitatem. ¹ He’ll put people like that, who make no account of their promises, in the rank of sinners; He’ll chastise like sins their failure to keep their word. Adducet cum operantibus iniquitatem. O Savior! If those who don’t keep their word in worldly matters are treated so severely, how then are those who fail to keep their word in such a holy matter treated? How are those who fail in the obligation they’ve accepted to observe holy poverty treated, Messieurs? O Savior, if You punish in the same way as sin the failure to keep one’s word in earthly matters or worldly things, which You prize so little and which are as nothing in Your sight, how harsh will Your punishment be against those who fail to keep their word in regard to holy poverty, the virtue that concerns You, that belongs to You, that’s proper to You? In what place will

¹But those who turn aside to crooked ways, may the Lord send down with the wicked, send down with the wicked. Cf Ps 125:5 (NAB). But such as turn aside into bonds, the Lord shall lead out with the workers of iniquity, he shall lead them out with the workers of iniquity. Cf Ps. 124:5 (D-RB)
they be? Where will You put them? Ah, Savior! No doubt, in the
lowest place of all, in the most shameful that can be imagined.

"Let's fear, Messieurs, let's fear going back on the word we've
given the Superior regarding holy poverty. You know, Messieurs,
when a man has failed to keep his word in the world, he's dishonored
forever; it's a disgrace for him that he can't efface. What a reason for
being ashamed! He carries his reproach with him everywhere; he
takes his torturer wherever he goes; everyone looks on him with
scorn; they point him out, saying, 'Look! There's that liar, that de-
ceiver, that imposter! After giving me his word, he hasn't kept it at
all! Look at that trickster who came to my own house to promise me
something, then made a mockery of it and broke his word; look
at that good-for-nothing, insincere man! What an unparalleled in-
sulting person!'

"Now, if this is said rightly among men about someone who's
careless about keeping his promises, what should be said when
someone among us fails to keep the word he gave to the Superior re-
garding such holy things, both for the glory of God and for his eternal
salvation? What must be said about that? But what shouldn't people
say about it? What shame should an insincere man who has betrayed
the Company not have! What greater disgrace than to have gone
back on his word! I don't think there's anyone like that among us, un-
worthy of any society; no, by the grace of God, I don't know of any.
That's the first reason that must lead us to love holy poverty, the
word we've given to the Superior, and, if we don't keep it, we're dis-
graced forever, becoming the vilest man of all. A man who doesn't
keep his word is a...

"I say even more: we've taken a vow of poverty. I've put forth as
the first reason that we've made a promise to the Superior. Now, in
the second place, I say that we've also promised it to God; we gave
our word to God himself, solemnly declaring that we'd observe holy
poverty religiously. To make a promise to God! O Sauveur! If we're
so strictly obliged to do what we've promised to a man—the Supe-
rior—what an obligation we have, my dear confreres, to do what
we've promised to a God! How great it is! Who can understand it?
To have pledged our word to God—to a God! To have given our word
to a God whose majesty is immense! Who among angels or men can conceive of the extent of this obligation! And to break it, to fail in it, to make a mockery of it! O Sauveur! Of what punishments do we not make ourselves worthy!

"If it’s intolerable to be called a deceiver by a man of the world, what will it be when all men, all the angels, and all creatures re-proach us for our betrayal? What will it be like when God himself says to us, 'Oh, there you are, there you are, you insulting man! There you are, you villain, you liar, you coward; you who came into my house, even up to my altar, and gave me your word, only to break it shortly after. You perfidious person who vowed to me, who promised me on my altar only to deceive me; a traitor who enlisted under my banners, only to abandon them, follow the troops of my enemy, and serve the devil! So there you are, you traitor! Traitor! Traitor!'"

"O my dear confreres, where do we stand in all that? Who could endure those terrible words? Who would not be crushed by them? What horrible thunderbolts! To break our word to a God, and to a terrifying God! Alas, Messieurs! What shall we do? We must tremble and have recourse to His infinite mercy.

"Here, then, Messieurs, are the two motives we must have for observing the vow of holy poverty: because we have given our word to the Superior and to God. The third one that occurred to me is that, without this holy virtue, it’s impossible to live in peace in a Community like ours; and not only is it impossible to live well in it, but it’s impossible even to persevere in it for very long. So, in the third place, Messieurs, I say that it’s extremely difficult—if not impossible—for a person who has in mind the desire to acquire things, to be able to carry out his duty with us, to live according to the regulations he has embraced, and to follow the regular routine of the Company. And how can a man who thinks only of his own pleasure, of doing what he pleases, of eating fine food, of having a good time (for that’s the goal of those who have this insatiable desire for possessions), how can such a person be exact in carrying out the purpose of the Mission? It can’t be done. The practice of virtue, the regulations, and the good order of the house are incompatible with that love of riches and of his
personal satisfaction. It's very difficult to think at the same time of two such contrary things; it's impossible to put them into practice. Let's reflect on that, Messieurs, let's reflect on it, please.

"The spirit of the Missioner must be to consider his own perfection before all else. That's what the first article of our Rules recommends, following the principle of true charity, which must begin with ourselves, getting rid of our faults and acquiring the virtues suitable to our situation and vocation.

"Let's take a look at how that man who thinks only of riches can carry out this commandment. The man who wants to acquire them, who isn't content with his own situation, thinks night and day of nothing but the means he can use to acquire possessions; he has to have things depending on his mood; he has to have them and has to find the means to acquire them. That's all he thinks about; when he's alone in his room, he daydreams, 'Are we always going to be like that? No, no, things won't be like that; once I've done this, acquired that, and once we've reached that point, we'll do this, that, and the other thing.' And his poor mind gets bogged down with a thousand other thoughts.

"At night, he's still thinking about it; and when he wakes up, his first thought is 'Do we have to get up at four o'clock? The bell is ringing; will I always have this bothersome bell attached to my ears? It's still very early; that clock is too fast; how can we get up so early! I didn't sleep well during the night; I need another hour's rest. But they'll come to get me up. M. Vincent, who's always shouting, will come; he'll yell at me (what an annoying agitator!). "Monsieur, what are you doing there? Everyone is at meditation; you're the only one still in bed. What's wrong with you, Monsieur? Get up!" At meditation someone will say, 'Where's M. X? He's not here yet; he doesn't come to meditation any more; something's the matter.' They'll think even worse things.

"What's to be said about all that? Maybe he'll get up. He gets out of bed all upset, turning similar things over in his mind. Does he get up for love of God. Not at all. He does it because he's afraid of people making him feel ashamed. 'What will they say?' That's what he fears; that's what makes him get out of bed and come to meditation.
“And judge for yourselves, Messieurs: what can a man so well disposed do at meditation? O poor meditation, how badly you’ll be made! And You, my Savior and my God, how poorly this person will converse with You! Either he’ll fall asleep or he’ll be thinking about everything but what he should be thinking before God, in the presence of His Divine Majesty, before which the angels tremble. Wretch that he is, he’ll be thinking about means of acquiring things, and he’ll use this sacred time, destined for communing with God, to feed his emotions and to daydream about silly things and perhaps about something worse.

“And the Divine Sacrifice? Those thoughts will come back to him, and he won’t do much better there. But how will he recite his Office? Like everything else, with countless distractions.

“If those whose mind is as far removed from worldly ambitions as the sky is from earth and think of nothing every day but to rid themselves of them more and more are unable to do so, how in the world can you expect those who have their whole mind and their whole affection attached to earth to be exempt from that? How can this be done? It’s impossible, Messieurs; you know that better than I do.

“But what about being exact in our observances? Ah, God only knows! What about humility? Nothing so contrary to it. What about charity toward others? The desire to have possessions makes a man think only of himself. What about patience, gentleness, friendliness, kindness? What about that candor so strongly recommended? God knows. Chastity? God knows. How can you expect a man who never thinks of anything but his own pleasure and satisfaction or how he can have a good time and be comfortable, how can you expect him to be able to practice virtue? How? In a Community, everything is opposed to his desires; everything is a burden to him; he does things only by halves or if he’s forced to do them—unless perhaps he does them to satisfy his vanity and passion.

“What if he has to give a mission? It’s in a village where there are only poor peasants and old ladies. Oh, Monsieur is careful not to go there! If he thinks he’s going to be asked, he never fails to have a good supply of excuses; and a poor Superior is obliged to accept
them with a groan; what else could he do? But, if it’s an important mission, where there’s plenty to satisfy his vanity, he’s my man. He goes after it; he makes his request and does all he can, directly or indirectly, to be sent there. ‘Certain people will be there who’ll hear me preach; certain others will also be there; I’ll have many prominent persons of quality at my sermons—a great crowd; I’ll work wonders there; people will talk about me afterward, saying, “Now there’s a good Missioner, an excellent preacher, a fine man.” ’ That’s just what he needs; it’s the food on which that poor spirit feeds. ‘M. X will tell people about me; and M. Y as well; and the good impression I’ll leave of my ability will help me to get that office on this occasion.’

‘O Sauveur! Is that being a Missioner? It’s being a devil, not a Missioner. His spirit is the spirit of the world. He’s already in the world in heart and affection; all that’s in the Mission is his carcass. To seek his ease, to enjoy his pleasures, to live in clover, to have people think highly of him is the spirit of the world, and that’s what he’s after; that’s his spirit.

‘Messieurs, remember that riches are resources; they’re means, that is, people want them in order to get something else, and that’s the only reason a person wants to have possessions—to use them for the acquisition of honor or pleasures. That’s why he wants to have them. Now, how can you expect that a man who aspires to that, who’s unable or unwilling to observe any of our practices, who’s already in heart and affection in the world and all that’s here is his carcass, who wants and seeks after everything worldly men want and seek after, can remain steadfast in his vocation? That’s impossible; you can see that. Messieurs; he’s no longer here; he’s here in body only. After failing to keep his word to the Superior and breaking the promise he had made to God, all he thinks about is to gratify his passion and seek pleasure, no matter what the cost.

‘What conclusion shall we draw now about all this, Messieurs? What conclusion shall we draw, except what the Apostle and the Holy Spirit conclude, that cupiditas, radix omnium malorum.2

---

²Avarice is the root of all evil.
There's no evil in the world that doesn't spring from this accursed passion to possess. Greed, avarice, love of riches—there's the source of all sorts of ills. *Cupiditas, radix omnium malorum.* The person subject to this avarice bears within himself the principle, the origin, and the source of all evil, *radix omnium malorum.* There's nothing of which a man bitten by this desire, bearing its stamp, is not capable; he has within himself all he needs to be capable of committing every kind of insolence; there's no crime so shocking, so fearsome, so horrible, of which a man attached to his own interests can't easily become guilty. *Radix, radix omnium malorum,* it's the seed and the root of everything. *Radix,* the root; look for no other cause; there you have it.

“What I say about this isn't, thank God, because I'm aware that anyone here is affected by this evil; but that can happen; I say it ad praeventionem. Long before the evil occurred, the Son of God said to His disciples, 'Be on your guard; there it is; I see it coming; it's at the door; be on your guard.' I'd like to say the same, if I may, so that we may avoid that horrible monster, the most terrifying that hell can produce. If, thank God, there are none in the Company now, there may be some soon. *Venient ad vos in vestimentis ovium, intriseucus autem sunt lupi rapaces.* Under this gentle appearance, under this sheepskin, may be hidden the heart of a ravenous wolf. Be on your guard; let each man be on his guard; there may be some.

“There were only twelve in that holy Company of Our Lord; yet, one of them was affected by this evil. We have a frightening example in that unfortunate Judas, who clearly illustrates this truth: *cupiditas, radix omnium malorum,* that there's no crime so scandalous that a man who wants to have possessions may not commit. Saint Gregory and the other saints reflected in fear on that appalling fall of accursed Judas. Let's consider a little with them by what rationale that vile sin made him do it, in order to make him fall into the most horrible one of all. He had the common purse; everything was at his discretion and in his hands; he managed and did with it what-

---

3 By way of prevention.
4 *They come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves.* Cf. Mt 7:15 (NAB)
ever he pleased. But this strong desire to have possessions made him grumble against his companions; he begrudged them everything; he even became angry with persons who tried to honor his Master by their generous gifts, because the gifts didn’t go into his purse; he feathered his own nest; he stole the money of the community and of the poor. What else? He even regretted what was spent on the Son of God. Next, he went off with the enemies of his Master; he lived and conversed with them. And in such company how did he rip his Lord apart? O Dieu! He passed Him off as an imposter, a seducer, a magician. And, in fact, that’s how He was treated afterward. In a word, he sold Him like an animal and the most unworthy, villainous of all men; he personally handed Him over to His enemies, under the pretext of friendship; afterward, he went off and, tormented by remorse for his crime, the wretch believed that His Master was not kind enough to pardon him. O gentle Savior! O God of mercy! That’s despair. He hanged himself by his own hand. Hanging there, he burst asunder and spewed forth his accursed insides, where the desire for possessions had made him conceive so many crimes. In the end, he went to hell. So, Judas was damned; you see where the desire for possessions plunged him, after having led him from crime to crime, even to committing deicide—killing a God! After all that, don’t we have reason to be fearful, since a man chosen by the Son of God, a man who always lived in His company and sat at His table arrived, by this vice, at the height of abomination!

“This vice, like others, slips in imperceptibly. In the beginning, it’s a small thing: minor comforts; then greater liberty. The lion cub is growing. Small pleasures, then greater ones; then, like Judas, we must have possessions; all sorts of artifices are used—justly and unjustly—like Judas, who sold his Master; in the end, this viper becomes so furious that it bursts the entrails of the one who raised and hatched it in its womb.

“A few of those men—two among others—left here; that desire to possess in order to have a good time is what lured them away; don’t think it was anything else. So then, the two of them left, and, after living in a way that God only knows, they died, as I’m about to tell
you, so that you may have a better idea of this monster. One of them, after having led—O Dieu—a wild life, died, but what a death! Shall I say how? No, it's better for me to keep silent about it. As for the other, when he fell ill and was on the verge of dying, he sent for a priest from this house. So, someone went to him. Before he died, he made his confession, saying, 'Ah, Monsieur! Among the many sins I've committed and which are weighing me down at this moment, I'm terribly tormented, in addition to the remorse of having abandoned my vocation, by the fact that, when I left, I took with me 500 livres belonging to the Mission; this is really tormenting me. Alas, Monsieur, now it's impossible for me to repay them! Have pity on me. Please explain to M. Vincent the deplorable state to which I'm reduced; beg and entreat him in the name of God to have compassion on my soul and to forgive me that sum of money so that, if I die, my soul may be freed of this debt; and, if I recover, I'll do all in my power to pay it back.'

"What's all that? Taking such a large sum of money, hiding it, keeping it for such a long time! See what avarice that is! Ah, that monster is really terrifying! Moved by compassion, I did forgive it—if I'm permitted to forgive it. I'm telling you this so that you may see better the horror of this crime and this insatiable desire to possess, which ruins everything, turns everything upside down, sparing not even the most holy things.

"This afternoon I was wondering if it were true that poverty was such a beautiful thing, and that a virtue could be so beautiful that Saint Francis used to call it his lady. How ravishing it is! It seemed to me that it was endowed with such excellence that, if we could have the happiness of the slightest glimpse of it, we'd fall in love with it immediately and never want to be separated from it; we'd never leave it and would seek it above all the goods of this world. Oh, if God were to grant us the grace of opening the curtain that prevents us from seeing such beauty; if only He were to lift, by His grace, all the veils that the world and our self-love cast before our eyes, Messieurs, we'd be immediately delighted with the charms of that virtue which delighted the heart and affections of the Son of God! It was the virtue of the Son of God; He willed to have it as His own; He was the first to
teach it; He willed to be the master of it. Before Him, people didn’t know what poverty was; it was unknown. God didn’t will to teach it to us through the prophets; He reserved that to Himself, and He Himself came to teach it to us. In the Old Law, they didn’t acknowledge it; only riches were esteemed; no consideration was given to poverty because they didn’t recognize its merit.

"It’s in Ecclesiastes, but that was under the Old Law, in which poverty wasn’t acknowledged; its excellence had reserved that for the Son of God, who was to preach it to us by word and example. O Savior, merciful Savior, reveal to us yourself by Your grace the beauty of this virtue, so exalted that You yourself came to teach it to us! All His sermons begin with it. In Saint Matthew, he places it first among the eight beatitudes. He makes it, as it were, the basis of His teaching and of perfection. To a man who had kept all the Commandments of God He says, *Si vis perfectus esse, vende omnia quae habes et da pauperibus.*\(^5\) Sell all your belongings; leave everything; keep nothing for yourself; it’s the gate, the entrance to perfection; it puts us in a perfect state—not that it’s our perfection, but because it’s a necessary disposition to arrive at it, and a condition, a state through which we must pass and in which we must be to become perfect; whereas, on the contrary, the desire to have possessions is a state that opens to us the broad, spacious way to every sort of evil. But let’s see what this state of poverty is, what this virtue is, and in what it consists, which is the second point.

"Alas! I’ve spent too much time on the first point. Time is flying. I’ll finish soon, so please bear with me, my dear confreres. Saint Paul said, *supportate me, supportate me.*\(^6\) Please, then, bear with me a little this evening; just have a little patience until I finish.

"Now then, poverty is a voluntary renunciation of all worldly goods for the love of God, in order to serve Him better and to reflect on our salvation. It’s a renunciation, a relinquishment, an abandonment, an abnegation. This renunciation is exterior and interior, not just exterior. We mustn’t renounce all our exterior possessions

---

\(^5\) *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor.* Cf Mt 19:21. (NAB)

\(^6\) *Put up with me, put up with me.* Cf 2Cor 11:1. (NAB)
only; this renunciation must also be interior and come from the heart. Along with our possessions, we must also give up the attachment and love of possessions, and have no love for the perishable goods of this world. It’s doing nothing, it’s making a mockery of an exterior renunciation of goods, if we hold on to the desire to have them. God asks primarily for our heart—our heart—and that’s what counts. How is it that a man who has no wealth will have greater merit than someone who has great possessions that he gives up? Because the one who has nothing does it with greater love; and that’s what God especially wants, as we see with the Apostles.

“There are countless acts of this virtue; besides the one our brother just mentioned, I can think of three main sorts, and they concern lodging, food, and clothing. We can practice holy poverty in everything, being satisfied with what God gives us, just as we can sin against it by being discontented, complaining, grumbling, and murmuring. But, O Sauveur! What valid reason can we have for complaining about all that? What do we lack? And what person in the world has all that we have here? We have not only what we need to protect us from heat and cold, but also, thank God, from the slightest inconvenience.

“This building is sufficiently large and comfortable. We have beautiful gardens and an enclosure. Eh Dieu! The Apostles and disciples of Our Lord didn’t have such comforts. And didn’t the Son of God lack them? Like those who followed Him, He suffered nakedness, cold and heat, hunger and thirst. And what do we have to suffer? Nothing! We don’t want to put up with anything; we’re not satisfied with this building or its furnishings; we have to have papered rooms and upholstered chairs; we must have beautiful books and fine furniture. This cursed spirit of having whatever can gratify our sensuality is never satisfied.

“As for food, where can you find better bread, better wine, better meat, or better fruit? What’s lacking? What men in the world have all that? Alas! How many people—and persons of rank at that—don’t have what we have! A Councillor in the Parlement would be happy with it. As a rule, men of gentle birth don’t have anything more, except perhaps those who have venison and wild game. I know
Bishops who live and are satisfied with a helping of meat like we get. And these are Bishops! O Sauveur! What may people say of us, if, after that, we’re not satisfied? That we want to live more comfortably here, more splendidly, more as we please, to live better than people in the world. Yet, we’ve given that up! O Sauveur! I don’t know of any who complain about this, thank God; but let’s anticipate the evil; it can happen; let’s anticipate the evil; ad praeventionem.

“It’s also contrary to holy poverty to be dissatisfied with the books we have; and, by the goodness of God, there are plenty of them here, and of several sorts. We also sin against this virtue by acting as if we own them—as if they were for our personal use alone; and that happens only too often. We take books, we carry them off, we make them our own. And this vice affects everyone, sometimes even those thought to be the most virtuous. Not three days ago someone in the Company—shall I say it—the Superior of one of the houses, told me, ‘When M. X left here, he took with him. . . .’ Shall I say it? No, I shouldn’t; the human mind might start thinking, ‘Who left? Who was sent away?’ And if I’m telling you all this, it’s only to help us realize the distortion of this accursed avarice and the beauty of that beautiful virtue of poverty.

“There are many other acts, those our brother just mentioned, and countless others that I’m omitting.

“Or sus, my dear confreres, let’s examine ourselves now; let each one take a look into his conscience and say, ‘Let’s see, don’t I have some attachment to this or that? If that’s the case, and we feel guilty, let’s eliminate this evil spirit, this devil, from among us. If our conscience doesn’t reproach us on that point, fine! In nomine Domini! Blessed be God! Blessed be God! I’ve finished. Now, have a little patience so we can look at some means.

“Our Brother mentioned the means of means: to ask it often of God, to ask Him to give us this spirit that’s proper to Him and which He shares with His children; to make our meditation often for this purpose, for poverty is a gift—a great gift—from God.

“Another means is to grow to love it by every way imaginable. We’ve given our word on this to the Superior; we’ve promised it to
God; without poverty we can do nothing. No, my dear confreres, a Missioner will never be a Missioner without the virtue of poverty. We couldn’t last without this virtue. Reflect often on its beauty: it’s the well-beloved of God, the very virtue of His Son, His Mother, and His friends. The horror of that spirit of independence and of the desire to possess things, which is opposed to it and lures us from the post where God has placed us, causes us to abandon our vocation; for what are those persons who leave looking for? Doubtless, to put themselves in a more perfect state. They want to have wealth in order to serve God better in the world. They’ll be in a holier state; they’ll live more perfectly in the world because the world is a more perfect state. As you see, that’s what they claim. Or maybe they want to gratify themselves, to have a good time, to live in clover, to enjoy fine food. Of necessity it has to be either one or the other; there’s no middle course: they leave either because they’ll be in a more perfect state in the world, or because they’ll have more freedom there.

“The world is a more perfect state; it’s sanctity itself; people live better there than on retreat! Alas, Messieurs! See how they fool themselves. What’s left, then, is to seek their independence and to have a good time; that, I tell you, that’s why they leave. Remember that. That’s why some men have left. We can see in this how detestable this desire for appropriation is and how lovable holy poverty is, since it places us and maintains us in a state of perfection which we couldn’t attain without its assistance. It’s a necessity for anyone who wants to follow the Son of God to become perfect; he must leave everything. Vade, vende omnia quae habes et da pauperibus. It’s the first of the beatitudes; it’s the legacy the Son of God left to His dear children in this world.

“A third means—an excellent and very beneficial one—is to make acts of it often, as our Brother has said. We have favorable opportunities always and everywhere. We have to make both exterior and interior acts of it at least once a day—one act each day. Yes, my God, I willingly renounce all the goods of this world; I don’t want to have any of them; I’m content to be without them, since it pleases You. So, my Savior, I’ve left and renounce willingly once again, for love
of God, all the goods I might have had in the world, not for our parents' sake—for that's loving our parents and not God—but it's for love of God, it's for God, for God that we must renounce our possessions, not to enrich our parents. Those who have greater devotion and a stronger spirit can make two acts of poverty daily—even up to three—in order to have their souls imbued with the spirit of holy poverty, from which all sorts of good things come to us, and by which we rise to the highest perfection.

"Orsus, blessed be God! These means will suffice, along with the others that each of you have thought of, since you don't have time to say more about them, and because I've already gone on too long. My dear confreres, all of us unanimously will ask God for this spirit of poverty; and I entreat you, my dear confreres, I beg you by the poverty of the Son of God, by the depths of the mercy of Jesus Christ, and by all that's dear to you, not to let a day pass without performing some act of holy poverty—not murmuring, being satisfied with what God has given us. Ah! How happy we'll be to suffer something for the sake of holy poverty, to be poorly housed, to lack comforts while on mission, here or otherwise! How many men in the world are without shelter! And even the Son of God! Vulpes foveas habent et volucres caeli nidos; Filius autem hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet.7 But I also ask and recommend as strongly as I can to those who look after poverty, to provide for the needs of others, not allowing them to lack anything, and once a week—and twice rather than once—to be careful to ask each one individually what he needs and to take care of it; and I entreat all of you to say what your needs are. The man in charge of providing for the priests should be very careful of this. I recommend to those responsible for this with the Brothers and seminarians, in a word, with all those entrusted to his care, to be very diligent and exact about it. But also, let's not be bothered with thinking, like people of the world, of what we'll get or not get; let's live without worrying, and think only of our salvation and of serving God. What a happiness to be free from all those pressing concerns

7Foxes have dens, the birds of the sky have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Cf. Mt 8:20. (NAB)
and to live in holy poverty, where God is our Provider! Let’s be lovers of this beautiful virtue; let’s ask God often for it.

“Yes, my Savior, my most merciful Savior, we entreat You most humbly to give us the grace to practice, for the rest of our lives, this holy virtue, which was proper to You and which You came to teach us; we beg You, by the depths of Your mercy, to give us this spirit and a share in the great love You have for this virtue.

“I ask the priests to celebrate Mass for this intention, and our Brothers to offer their Communions at the first opportunity, that God, by His holy mercy, may pour this spirit upon us and on all the Orders that need it. Let’s hope for this grace from His goodness. Blessed be God!”

133. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

August 16, 1655

M. Vincent took the opportunity to speak about what a Brother cleric said at the beginning his Repetition of Prayer, namely, that, when he tried to place himself in the presence of God, he began to wonder if it was true that Our Lord was present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar or whether this wasn’t a trifle. At that point M. Vincent interrupted him, saying that it wasn’t proper or very respectful to talk like that, and he shouldn’t be doing it. He added that to dwell on such thoughts would be, in a certain sense, to doubt the truth of the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. ‘Is He there or isn’t He?’ “Now that’s a serious fault, and it gives me reason for telling you, my dear confreres, that I fear several of you are not making your meditation properly—although it’s one of the best means we can have to acquire virtue—and that you’re wasting too much time searching for reasons and passages, and to
adapting and arranging them, which is not really meditation but rather study. You say to yourself, 'If I'm questioned, I have to say something,' so you waste time preparing what you have to say. Now, Brothers, you shouldn't be doing that.

"A few days ago, someone in the Company, who comes from the country, told me he felt that the Company had grown lax with regard to meditation and the way of making it. You see, those who come from outside and have been away from the house for a while see the faults much better than those who have been here all the time.

"I recall that one day I went to see the late M. de Marillac, who was a great servant of God and a very prayerful man. On entering his study, I immediately spotted a cobweb on the crucifix that was on his prie-dieu. Thinking that perhaps the spider had woven the web during the preceding night, I had the curiosity to go closer to get a good look at it, but I saw a few signs that made me realize it had already been there for some time. Then I said to myself, 'O my Lord, doubtless this great servant of God is so recollected and so humbled before the Majesty of God that he wouldn’t dare look at the image here on earth of Him who is in heaven because he has so much respect and reverence for Him.' Now, to discern the means of doing something well, we have to consider the advantages and disadvantages, what may be useful and what may be harmful—at meditation, for example. I’m going to say something about that.

"(1) Those who go to it apathetically and for form’s sake; when a person acts like that, going to meditation in that way is a great obstacle to making his meditation well.

"(2) The spirit of curiosity, causing a man to go over things with a fine-tooth comb, trying to find many passages to relate in order to show off; that’s anything but meditation, for meditation must be

---

2Michel de Marillac, the uncle of Saint Louise, was born in Paris on October 9, 1563. He helped Mme Acarie to establish the first Carmel in France: his influence, purse, and time were at her service. Five members of his family entered Carmel. Named Keeper of the Seals in 1629, he drafted the Code Michau (the first French code of law), which the Parlement did not want to register. Cardinal Richelieu accused him of conspiracy and imprisoned him in Caen, then in Châteaudun, where he died on August 7, 1632. His heart was given to the Carmelites of the rue Chapon, and his body was buried in the chapel of the Carmelites in the faubourg Saint-Jacques.
made only to make us better and to help us correct our faults and acquire the virtues contrary to our failings; and that’s what causes headaches and stomach aches. Having considered that, the first thing to be done at meditation is to place ourselves in the presence of God in one of the four ways the blessed Francis de Sales teaches. One day, Commander de Sillery said to me on this subject that a saint had told him that what he found most helpful in making his meditation well was first to place himself properly in the presence of God, considering that God saw and looked on him and had His eyes fixed on him. Then, we can make the usual acts and go on to the second part of meditation, which is the body of the meditation, and contemplate the subject, be it a virtue, a vice, or some Mystery.

“For example, today the subject of our meditation is the love of God and the reasons we have to love God. Alas, Brothers, we don’t have to look for many reasons to excite us to this love! We don’t have to go outside ourselves to find any; we have only to consider the good things He’s done for us and continues to do for us daily. And to oblige us even further, He has commanded us to do it. You see that this subject of itself sets our will afire.

“When, at meditation, the soul is immediately set afire, what need is there for reasons? For example, when a person needs light in the

---

3Noël Brulart de Sillery, Commander of the Knights of Saint John of Malta in Troyes, held the highest posts at Court, was the Queen’s First Squire, then her Knight of Honor, and Extraordinary Ambassador to Italy, Spain, and later in Rome to Popes Gregory XV and Urban VIII. Renouncing public life, he left the magnificent Hôtel de Sillery, sold his possessions, and, toward the end of 1632, went to live in a modest house near the First Monastery of the Visitation. Saint Vincent, his director, had brought about this miracle. When he saw the Commander detached from the world, he helped him make good use of his immense fortune. He took him to prisons and hospitals and initiated him in works of charity. Sillery began his priestly studies in 1632 and was ordained a priest in 1634, celebrating his first Mass on Holy Thursday, April 13, 1634, in the chapel of the Visitation. He gave generously to religious Congregations, especially to the Visitation, the Congregation of the Mission, the Monastery of the Madeleine, the Jesuits, and Carmel, and, together with Saint Vincent, tried unsuccessfully to organize a seminary in the House of the Templars in Paris. Since he died on September 26, 1640, at the age of sixty-three, his priestly life was short, but it was replete with works of charity. Saint Vincent assisted him in his last moments and celebrated his funeral service. (Cf. *Vie de l’illustre serviteur de Dieu Noël Brulart de Sillery*, *Histoire chronologique* [1843], vol. 1, pp. 290-307; cf. also, Marcel-Martin Fosseyeux, “Contribution à l’histoire du monastère de la Visitation Sainte-Marie du faubourg Saint-Antoine au XVIIe siècle,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire de Paris et de l’Île-de-France*, [1910], pp. 184-202.)

4In a note: “It is believed that this is Francis de Sales.”
place where he is, what does he do? He strikes his flint to make a spark, and, at the same time, brings his wick close to it and lights his candle. When he’s done that, he’s satisfied; he doesn’t keep on striking the flint or go to look for another to light a spark, because he has one and no longer needs it; it’s already done, and the light he has suffices to make things clear for him. In the same way, as soon as a soul begins his meditation and has considered a reason, and this reason suffices to set his will afire with the desire for virtue or to turn away from vice, and that suffices to make him see the beauty of the former or the ugliness of the latter, please tell me what need that person has to look for reasons elsewhere. All that would serve only to upset him and make his head and stomach ache.

“What’s to be done after that? Should we stop there, satisfied with being fired up in that way and convinced of the subject on which we’re meditating? By no means, rather we have to move on to resolutions and the means of acquiring the virtue or avoiding the vice on which we’re meditating. If it’s a virtue, we have to see the obstacles and the occasions that may cause us to fall into the contrary vice, and then take appropriate means to put them into practice. My God, from this day on I want to begin in earnest, and, for this purpose, I intend to do such and such a thing.

“That, my dear confreres, is how our meditations should be made; above all we have to be very careful to thank God for the thoughts He gives us; gratitude is a disposition for receiving new graces. Let’s ask God today, at Holy Mass and in our Communions, to grant the Company the grace to act in this way and to give it the gift of prayer. Let’s not be satisfied with asking for this gift for ourselves alone, but also for the whole Company in general.

“This is the period when the Company has fewer commitments than at any other time because of the temporary halt of the missions. During this time we’re accustomed to getting some practice either in controversy or in preaching, to composing sermons and sharing them with one another—as we used to do when the Bishop of Alet

\[\text{Nicolas Pavillon was born on November 17, 1597. As a very young priest he placed himself under the direction of M. Vincent, who had him teach catechism and work in the missions and the Charities, where his presence was deemed useful. More than once he entrusted him with the}\]
was here in this house—or to explaining Holy Scripture. I thought
we’d do well to practice preaching, in order to see how each one is
getting along because a year ago a certain man preached in such a
way, but now has changed and preaches differently; in this way
we’ll see which men are doing it properly. Previously, we some­
times did this in the refectory, but I think it will be a good idea to do
it privately somewhere else so we can see how well each man is do­
ing. The priests and seminarians will come for this. Each will take
his turn, beginning with the priests, followed by the students and
the seminary, who will also come for it. I’ll go first, then M. Portail.
I can’t do it tomorrow or the day after because of some business I
have; God willing, it will be on Thursday; we can do it after Vespers
in the hall at Saint-Lazare.

“Last Friday, I gave the Company reason to be scandalized be­
cause I was shouting so loud and clapping my hands that it seemed
like I was annoyed with someone; that’s why I ask pardon of the
Company for this.”

conferences and retreats for priests. Appointed to the diocese of Alet in 1637, Pavilion accepted
it only on the saint’s urging. This new office did not deter him from his apostolic works; he gave a
mission in Rueil at Richelieu’s invitation, then in Saint-Germain-en-Laye at the King’s request.
He was consecrated at Saint-Lazare on August 22, 1639, and went to his diocese accompanied by
Etienne Blatiron. A zealous, intelligent Bishop, dedicated to reform, he justified the expectations
placed on him. His episcopate would have been more fruitful had he been more on his guard
against Jansenistic ideas. Saint Vincent begged him in vain to sign the formulary against
Jansenism. Pavilion died on December 8, 1677. There are several biographies of him, notably
that of Etienne Dejean, Un prêtre indépendant au XVIIe siècle, Nicolas Pavillon, évêque d’Alet
(1637-77) [Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1909].

6 In the margin: “Note: For this purpose, M. Vincent went on his knees before the whole
Company, then went off to vest for Mass.”
134. - METHOD TO BE FOLLOWED IN PREACHING

August 20, 1655

"Euntes in mundum universum, praedicate Evangelium omni creaturae: Go into the whole world, in mundum universum, and preach the Gospel to every creature. These are the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ, taken from Saint Mark, chapter 16. I think, Messieurs, that these words, which Our Lord said to His Apostles before ascending to heaven, are also addressed to the entire Company and, in particular, to those destined for preaching. I've often been very consoled—and it consoles me even today—to see that God has granted us the grace, as He did for His Apostles, of sending us out to preach His word throughout the world. O Sauveur! We have the same mandate as the Apostles! So we see, by the mercy of God, a man going off joyously to carry this word to the ends of the earth. You have only to say to him, 'Monsieur, when are you leaving for Italy, for Poland?' Those men are always ready, by the grace of God; they go everywhere like the Apostles, and they preach the word of God the way the Apostles preached it.

"How did the Apostles preach? Very plainly, simply, and familiarly. That's our style of preaching, too; plainly and familiarly in ordinary language. To preach like an Apostle, Messieurs, that is, to preach well and in a helpful way, you have to approach it with simplicity, using familiar speech, so that each person will be able to understand and profit by it. That's how the disciples and Apostles preached and how Jesus Christ preached; God has bestowed a great favor on this insignificant, wretched Company in giving us the happiness of imitating Him in that.

"We have to admit, Messieurs, that this method isn't observed everywhere; in order to turn out something useful along with the pleasant, the great perversity of the world has constrained preachers to use fine words and subtle ideas and to make use of anything that may suggest eloquence, so as to satisfy them in some way and to do what-

Conference 134. - Manuscript of Conferences

1Cf. Mk 16:15. (NAB)
ever they can to put a stop to the wickedness of the world. But, Sauveur! what good is this pompous rhetoric? What progress do they make with that? None that’s obvious; unless, perhaps, they’re trying to preach to themselves! So then, it’s to the Little Company, in preference to others, that God, in His mercy has willed to turn to give it His own method. That method comes from God; men have nothing to do with it; and the effects make us see that it’s from God. So, I’m going to give this conference on that method of preaching, and then, one after the other, we’ll continue, even down to the seminarians, so that every one of us may be able to learn this method.

“My sermon, then, is on the method of preaching well. And, so that by dealing with the method I can follow it myself, I’m dividing my sermon into three points: in the first we’ll see the reasons urging us to love this method; in the second, I’ll explain in what this method consists so that we may be familiar with it and can put it into practice in the future; and in the third, I’ll set forth some means to help us to attain this method.

“For that, we need the grace of God. O Savior, we humbly entreat You to shed it upon us. O Holy Spirit, we beseech You to do this through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. And because we’re engaged here in familiar conversation, we greet her only in our hearts, which I ask you to do.

“The first point, Messieurs, concerns the reasons we have for adopting the familiar method of preaching that God has been pleased to give to this Little Company. The first reason is its effectiveness. This method is very effective, very effective, in enlightening the understanding and moving the will, in showing clearly the splendor and beauty of virtue and the horrible ugliness of vice, and in giving people all they need to extricate themselves from the quagmire of sin and to get on the beautiful path of grace and the practice of good works. This great effectiveness is easily seen by the consideration of what is achieved by means of the method. Let’s take a look at its effects, Messieurs, let’s see what it produces.

“I declare that this method contains all that needs to be put forward to persuade people well; it neglects nothing at all that can contribute to convincing and winning them over. I venture to suggest
that no other way of preaching is so effective—at least as far as I know. No, I repeat that there's no way of preaching now being followed that's so suitable for winning hearts and producing great effects. Please don't take my word on this; see for yourselves, Messieurs, consider carefully all the methods we observe in preaching, consider carefully and judge sincerely and according to what your heart tells you, according to your conscience. Place your hand on your heart before God, and tell me if there's any more powerful method to reach the goal and attain its purpose than ours.

“Following this method, the first thing we do is to explain the reasons and motives that may affect and incline the mind to detest sin and vice and to seek virtue. But it's not enough to tell myself how much I'm obliged to acquire a virtue, if I don't know what that virtue is or in what it consists. ‘I see clearly that I really need it and that this virtue is very necessary for me, but, Monsieur, I don't know what it is or where to find it. Alas! I don't know, miserable man that I am, how can I put it into practice unless you do me the favor of showing it to me, of teaching me in what it principally consists, and what are its works and purposes!’

“That brings us to the second point, which does all that; for, according to our method, after the reasons that should incline our hearts toward virtue, we show in the second place in what that virtue consists, its essence and nature, its properties and functions, its acts and those contrary to it, and the signs and practice of that virtue. You open the curtain and discover fully the splendor and beauty of that virtue, explaining familiarly and simply what it is and which acts of it must be practiced especially, always going into detail.

“‘Orsus, now I see clearly what it is, in what that virtue consists, the actions in which it’s found, and its acts. I think I know all that well; it's all good and very necessary, but it's really hard, Monsieur! What are the means of attaining it, the means of putting this beautiful, desirable virtue into practice? I don't know what I’m obliged to do or what approach I should take. What shall I do?’ Fine, Messieurs, do you honestly think that it's enough to have given that person reasons and to have explained to him in what the virtue consists if you stop there and leave things at that? I don't know, but frankly I don’t think
that's enough; what's more, if you leave him like that without giving him any means to practice what you’ve taught him, in my opinion I think you’ve made hardly any progress; you’re not serious; you’ve done nothing if you stop at that; you’re not serious. And you see that better than I do, Messieurs, for how can you expect me to do something, even though I know I really need and want to do it, if I don't have the means of doing it? How do you expect me to do it? That’s not being serious; it can’t be done. But give that man the means—and this is the third part of the method—give him the means to practice that virtue, and that satisfies him.

“What does he lack now? Doesn’t that man have what he needs to strive for the virtue? Is there anything that remains to be said? No, I can’t think of anything. You’ve shown him, first of all, the great benefits of that virtue, the great losses that might occur from being deprived of it, and all the evils of its contrary vice. You’ve shown him how important and necessary it is; then, you’ve let him see and have pointed out to him what it is, in what that virtue consists, the means, and how to practice it; in a word, you’ve provided him with the means to acquire it. After that, what remains to be done in order to guide and incline a man in the practice of virtue? What remains, Messieurs? Please tell me, do you know of anything else? Do you, Messieurs? If so, would you do me the favor of telling me?

“As for me, I never knew of any nor do I know of any now, for what is done, what’s required when someone wants to convince a man of the love and practice of something? Nothing but this: you’re shown the great benefits accruing from it, the drawbacks of taking the opposite course; you’re helped to see what it is, you’re shown its beauty; and, in a word, if the means of acquiring it are placed in your hands, there’s nothing more to be done. Nothing more is done to convince and win over a man, regardless of who he is. And that’s our method; that’s what the little method does. There’s no point going off and wasting time in anything else. I solemnly declare to you in all truth, as old as I am, that I don’t know nor have ever heard it said that anything else was needed to persuade a man. Daily experience proves to us that, when the powerful reasons we have for doing something are given, our soul immediately endeavors to do it, our
will embraces it and needs nothing more; it wants it, it wills to have it; we desire nothing else but opportunities wherever they're found and the means of making it our own. Don't you sense this, Messieurs? Isn't it true that this is how it happens and not otherwise? And is anything else needed? *O Dieu!* Not that I know of.

"You see clearly then the great efficacy of the little method; you see it clearly, Messieurs; but, so that this efficacy may appear more clearly and distinctly, if possible, let's take something ordinary, a familiar example. When we want to persuade a man to take a job, to accept an office, to get married, what do we do, if not to point out to him the pleasure, the benefit, and the honor that come with all that and the great advantages to be found in it?

"If someone wants to influence a man to become Presiding Judge, what strategy does he use? All he has to do is to point out to him the advantages and the great honor that go with the office: ‘A Presiding Judge, Monsieur, is the highest ranking man in the city; everyone is deferential to him; there’s no one who doesn’t hold him in high regard; his authority gives him great credibility in society and in the courts; he can do anything. O Monsieur, a Presiding Judge! He doesn’t defer to a Bishop: sovereigns themselves accede to him and pay him great honor. A Presiding Judge! He can oblige others to do things, please anyone he likes, acquire a good number of friends, and have himself respected everywhere. Oh, oh, Monsieur, a Presiding Judge! That’s really great!’ And then he goes on to tell him the other advantages of being Presiding Judge.

"At first you see him burning with desire to have this fine high position. And what does the person tell him to enkindle this desire in him? The advantages, as you see, that are in this office, the reasons and motivations obliging him to have it. But is one content with that? Not at all; it must come down to this: what is the office of Presiding Judge, Monsieur? In what does it consist? What has to be done in this position? What is it? ‘You’re the highest-ranking law officer in the court, that great and honorable body; you’re its head; you never have to plead a case; you assign the cases; you’re the one who takes the votes of the others and pronounces judgment.’"
And there you have a man eager to acquire the office of Presiding Judge, and who knows already in what it consists. But with all that he has nothing if the means of obtaining this office aren't suggested to him; he'd be right to become angry and complain of that impertinent counselor who came to him to make him want this office, without suggesting to him any means to obtain it. But if the man who gives the advice also tells him the means, 'Monsieur, you have this much income here, this much money in another place; take a certain sum from this place and a certain amount from the other; furthermore, I know M. X, who has this office to sell; and M. Y is a close friend of mine and of him. I'll have the two of them get together; we'll work it out; we'll do this and that; we'll obtain this and that,' then that's serving a man well and putting him on the surest path to attain the high position of Presiding Judge, whereas, if, after showing him the great advantages of this office and familiarizing him with it, the person were to leave him without giving him the means of obtaining it, he would have achieved nothing but to disturb the peace of that man and cause him trouble. There's nothing in the world where we don't use the same means, when we want to convince someone; it's the most effective way to do it, and it's impossible not to accept it, if we're really intelligent.

Messieurs, the same holds true for spiritual matters; and to incline a man's mind to them I know of no other means than to point out clearly to him the advantages accruing from it, in what they consist, and what must be done to have them; so, there's no intelligent person who doesn't assent to these powerful reasons. And who could hold out against this method, since it contains in itself everything that can incline men to strive for the acquisition of something: the advantages and disadvantages that may result from it, in what it consists, and the means of obtaining it? As for me, I see no better method and am more convinced of this truth than of anything. Who doesn't see it? It's so obvious that you'd have to be blind not to see it. O Sauveur! So, Messieurs, that's the first reason we have for adopting the practice: its efficacy, its great efficacy.

My second reason is that it's the method Our Lord Jesus Christ himself willed to use to convince us of His teaching; it's also by this
method that the Apostles made the word of God known throughout the world. O Savior, it’s Your own method! Yes, Messieurs, it’s the method the Son of God used to proclaim His Gospel to us. O Savior! The Son of God, who was the Word and Eternal Wisdom, willed to treat the loftiness of His Mysteries in language that seemed lowly, ordinary, and familiar. And will we be ashamed to do this? Will we be afraid of losing respect if we act like the Son of God? O Sauveur!

“But where do we find that the Son of God used this method? In the Gospel, in the Gospel. Here are the three points of the method used in His sermons. Let’s take a look at how He did it. When Jesus Christ preached . . . what? Take poverty, for example; in Saint Matthew He makes it the first of the beatitudes and begins all His sermons with it: Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.2 blessed are the poor of heart and of affection because the kingdom of heaven is their portion. This is the first reason the Savior of the world puts forth to incline people to love poverty: Beati pauperes; blessed are the poor. What a great reason to love poverty, since that’s what brings happiness! But in what does this beatitude consist? It’s this, like a second reason that confirms the first: Quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. And after these reasons, He teaches us what poverty is. When the young man came to find Our Lord to learn from Him what he should do to ensure his salvation, Jesus told him, Vende omnia.3 sell everything, keep nothing for yourself. And that’s the perfect expression and explanation of what poverty consists in: in perfect renunciation of all earthly things, total renunciation; vende omnia. He also gives His disciples the means to do this when He says to them shortly after, ‘It’s more difficult to . . . , I say: it’s easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter paradise;4 the gate is very narrow,5 and those persons who are inflated and encumbered with possessions can’t

2Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Cf. Mt 5:3. (NAB)
3Sell all. . . . Cf. Mt 19:21 (NAB)
4Cf. Mt 19:24. (NAB)
5Cf Mt 7:13-14. (NAB)
pass through it. What a powerful means, a powerful means, for
drawing people after Him! It goes to the extreme, it includes the ne-
cessity of one’s salvation; there’s no way to do it if the heart is
attached to riches. What a powerful means for embracing poverty!

“This, Messieurs, is the whole method in Our Lord’s sermons;
as we just saw, He explains the reasons, the acts, what it is, and
gives powerful means.

“That brings us to the Apostles; how did they convince people of
the truths of the Gospel? By preaching them in the vernacular, in a
simple, familiar style. We see this in all their writings; non in
persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis.6 We don’t make use of
the subtleties of eloquence to attract you to our side: we don’t flatter
you with beautiful, pleasing words; we don’t use sophisms of hu-
man prudence: non in persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis;
we’ve said only what was necessary to give you a simple knowl-
edge of virtue, which is in the faith we preach to you, dealing with
you in all simplicity, without trying to surprise you, quite plainly, so
that you may see—not by our skill and ingenious arguments, but by
the virtue of God, which shines forth in lowliness and simplic-
ity—the truth of the Mysteries we’ve come to preach to you; non in
persuasibilibus humanae sapientiae verbis, sed in ostentione spiri-
tus et virtutis.7

“After the Apostles, all the apostolic men who followed put their
method into practice, preaching familiarly, without that ostenta-
tious eloquence full of vanity. Whoever says ‘Missioner,’ Mes-
sieurs, says ‘Apostle;’ so then, we have to act like the Apostles,
since we’re sent, like them, to teach the people, to whom we must
go quite plainly in all simplicity, if we want to be Missioners and
imitate the Apostles and Jesus Christ.

“The third reason in favor of the little method is the consider-
ation of the great results that have come from sermons given ac-
cording to this method. If I had to tell the slightest part of what God
has been pleased to bring about by this method, I’d never come to

6... not with the persuasive words of human wisdom.
7Not with the persuasive words of human wisdom, but with the convincing power of the Spirit.
Cf. 1 Cor 2:4. (NAB)
an end. We have so many examples of this that I wouldn't finish by this evening. Let's just take one or two of them in order the better to discover the great benefits of the little method. Here's one, without equal, of something that didn’t reach us; I've never heard—I, with all my white hair—I’ve never heard that any preacher ever came to that. *O Sauveur! O Sauveur!* Several of you, Messieurs, know that bandits are thieves in Italy; they terrorize the countryside, stealing and pillaging everywhere; they're criminals and murderers—and there are many murders in that country because of the vendettas that are rampant there; they eat one another alive, refusing to forgive, so fanatical are they. People of that ilk, after getting rid of their enemies to escape being tried in court, and even many other wicked people, lie in wait on the highways and live in the woods in order to rob the poor peasants and strip them of their possessions. They’re called bandits, and there are so many of them that they’re all over Italy; there are very few villages—almost none—where there are no bandits. Now, then, when the mission had been given in some of those villages, the bandits who were there gave up that wicked way of life and were converted, by the grace of God, who willed in that to make use of the little method. That was something we had never heard of; it was unheard of! No one had ever seen bandits give up their thieving, for any reason whatsoever. And that, Messieurs, is what God was pleased to bring about by this poor, insignificant Company, preaching according to the little method.

“*O Sauveur! Isn’t it true, M. Martin,* that the bandits in Italy were converted during our missions? Isn’t it true that you were

---

8Jean Martin, born in Paris on May 10, 1620, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 9, 1638. He was ordained in Rome on April 25, 1645, and that same year was sent to Genoa to found a new house. Saint Vincent probably had no Missioner more gifted in drawing crowds and converting souls. In 1654 Martin was recalled to France and placed in Sedan as Superior and Pastor; then, in 1655, he was sent to Turin for the new establishment founded by the Marchese di Pianezza, Prime Minister of State. There, as in Genoa and Sedan, the zealous Missioner knew how to soften the most hardened hearts. He was given the name “Apostle of Piedmont” and his fellow Missioners were called “the holy Fathers.” In 1665 René Alméras asked him to head the house in Rome. This was a painful sacrifice for Martin, but he resigned himself to it. Subsequently, he was named Superior in Genoa (1670), Turin (1674), Rome (1677), Perugia (1680), and again in Rome in 1681, where he died on February 17, 1694. His obituary, written by one of his contemporaries, is in the Archives of the Mission in Paris. It was published, with some corrections, in vol. 1 of *Notices*, pp. 269-372.
there? We’re here in an informal discussion; please tell us how that came about.”

M. Martin: “Yes, Monsieur, that’s how it was; in the villages where we gave the mission, the bandits came to us for confession, like the other people; that’s what usually happened.”

“O Sauveur, isn’t that amazing! Bandits converted by sermons given according to the little method! O Messieurs, bandits converted!

“But here’s the other little example, which is almost just as admirable. A short time ago, someone wrote me from l’Ausun, that the mission had been given in . . . , a village on the seacoast; and it was seminarians from here—yes, seminarians—who gave that mission: maybe there was someone else, but there were definitely two seminarians; doubtless someone else was with them. There had been a shipwreck on that coast; merchandise and other cargo the ship was carrying were washed ashore: everyone in the village of which I’m speaking and in the surrounding area rushed to the spot as if they were sacking a town and carried off anything they could get their hands on—some a bundle of goods, some took fabric, some seized clothing—in a word each one carried off whatever he could take, with no qualms of conscience. That was robbing the poor, unfortunate merchants who had been shipwrecked. So, when the mission had been given in those villages, following the little method, they returned to those poor merchants whatever had been taken; after they had been exhorted and preached to according to the method, they resolved to give back everything. Some brought back the bundles of goods; others, the fabric; others, money; others, not having what they could pay back right away, gave their word to make restitution.

“These, Messieurs, are the effects of the little method! Go find me something similar in that affected delivery, in that great pomp, and amid that vain display of eloquence; find me something similar. Very rarely do we see a single person converted by such preaching in the course of Advent and Lent year after year. We observe this in Paris. What restitution do we see from all those eloquent sermons? Do you see a large number of conversions, Messieurs? Alas, it
would be hard to find one, a single one! Yet, by the grace God has been pleased to give this insignificant Company with its little method, one mission results in such great success and wonderful conversions that nothing like it has ever been seen or heard.

“Lastly, Messieurs, I cite experience—your own experience, Messieurs; what progress have you not made wherever you preached according to this method? What conversions have we not seen? A man and woman who were leading a bad life came to you, saying, ‘Ah, Monsieur, we’re giving up our bad practices! Ah, Monsieur, from this very moment we’re separating forever! Ah, Monsieur, I promise you I’ll never see her again!’ What’s that? What’s that? Grudges, deep-rooted antagonisms which seemed to have no remedies for the future, the greatest divisions—haven’t people been reconciled by the power God has given to your sermons preached according to the method? In a word, there’s no sinner whom grace has touched by means of the little method, who hasn’t come to cast himself at your feet, crying for mercy. You know this better than I; I’m not telling you something you haven’t seen and, furthermore, done.

“O Dieu! What good results this method has produced wherever we’ve gone! What progress! How much greater they’d be if I, a miserable man, had not prevented them by my sins! Alas, wretch that I am! I humbly ask pardon of God for this. O Savior, forgive this wretched sinner, who spoils all Your plans, who opposes and contradicts them everywhere; in Your infinite mercy, forgive me for all the obstacles I’ve placed in the way of the good results of the method You have inspired, and of the glory You would have received without me, a wretched man. Forgive me for the scandal I give in this matter, as in all that concerns Your service. And you, Messieurs, please forgive me for the bad example I’m always giving you and for which I ask your pardon.

“The last reason—which I’ll explain very briefly—is drawn from our salvation, for which we’re here and in this world. Alas, Messieurs, how afraid I am! What great danger there is for those poor preachers who limit themselves to beautiful ideas and the way they put their thoughts together, choosing words that are in vogue but making little account of what would be most helpful. Ah, how I fear for those peo-
pie! And what makes me more fearful in this matter is Holy Scripture; you know all its words—I don’t, but I know the sense of it, and here it is: a prophet cries woe to the person who, being in a high place from which he catches sight of the ravenous wolf entering the fold, seeing this enemy doesn’t shout with all his might, ‘Save yourselves, save yourselves, here comes the enemy, save yourselves, save yourselves!’ Woe to that man, if he doesn’t cry out as loud as he can, ‘Save yourselves!’ But that’s exactly what those preachers do when they don’t consider the benefit of their hearers above all things; even though they see the enemy, they don’t breathe a word; they sing you pleasant tunes instead of sounding the trumpet, ‘we’re going to be lost; look, here comes the enemy, let’s save ourselves, let’s save ourselves!’

“Ah, Messieurs, how fortunate we are, since our method diverts us far from those perils; but beware, beware, if we disdain it! Let’s be very careful that, to satisfy our vanity on that point, we don’t lay ourselves open to the curse of the prophet, vae, vae; woe to that man! Why go into the pulpit, why preach, if not to lead people to save themselves, to cry out, ‘There’s the enemy, there he is, watch out, save yourselves, save yourselves!’ If we distort the word of God, if we use it to show off or to be esteemed so that people will say, ‘Now there’s an eloquent man who’s very capable; he has depth and talent,’ will we not, alas, bring upon ourselves the curse of false prophets? Won’t God have good reason to forsake us in the end because we weren’t concerned about abusing the most holy things to give our vanity a little gratification, since we will have used the most efficacious means of converting souls to satisfy our own ambition? Alas, Messieurs! What great reason we have to fear and, in a certain sense, to despair of the salvation of those persons who change remedies into poison and have no other method of treating the word of God than that furnished them by prudence of the flesh, their moods, what’s fashionable, and their whims! And God grant that it’s not from vanity and pride! God grant that it’s not pride! O Savior! Don’t allow anyone in this Little Company, totally at Your service, to fall into such great danger that he ends up by abusing Your holy word in that way! No, Lord, we hope from Your goodness that in Your mercy You won’t allow that.
“So then, we’ve just seen four reasons why we must be strongly attached to the method of preaching that God has been pleased to give the Company. The first reason is its great effectiveness, since it omits nothing that should be brought forward to persuade people, which the other methods don’t do—at least not as effectively. The second is that it’s Our Lord’s manner of preaching, which the Apostles followed. The third is that its effects are marvelous; it produces excellent results; all of you have had experience of this. Lastly, there’s the great danger of being damned, to which we’re exposed if we act otherwise; in addition, we might end up being less helpful to those who listen to us. Let’s not dwell any longer on this; you know all that better than I do, Messieurs, and you’d express it much better than I, much more emphatically and efficaciously. The word of God in the mouth of a miserable, earthly person like me has no effect. So then, after those serious reasons we’ve just seen, there’s nothing—except perhaps my own great imperfections—that can hinder us from being closely attached to the little method. Is there any other that’s more suitable, easier, and better, Messieurs? If you know of any, do me the favor of telling me; tell me, Messieurs, is there any better one? Personally, I know of none, and I’m sure that all of you are quite convinced of this from what I’ve just said to you about it. I’m the only man—wretch that I am—who spoils everything, who can’t adopt this holy practice; but, with the help of God, I’ll strive to learn it and to imitate some members of the Company to whom God has given this special gift and who use this holy method in a wonderful way.

“Let’s move on to the second point. In what does the method we’re discussing consist? What is it; what’s the method? It’s a virtue which helps us in our sermons to retain a certain disposition and style adapted to the level of our listeners and for their greatest benefit. That’s what it is, that’s its essence and nature.

“It’s a virtue; our method is a virtue, a virtue, an order; but this word *order* seems too broad, not exact enough; *latius patet,*⁹ so let’s call it a virtue, even though it’s a method, for virtue is found in

⁹*It extends more broadly.*
order, but not every method is virtue. That’s why I say that our method is a virtue because virtue disposes us to good, and this method also disposes us to good, for, by observing it, we preach in a way helpful to everyone and adapt ourselves to the capacity and level of our audience. Our method is also a virtue because it’s the daughter of charity, the queen of virtues. Charity causes us to adjust to everyone so that we can become helpful to everyone, and the method, which incorporates this lesson of charity, does the same.

"Moreover, I myself don’t know very well in what this method consists; but, Messieurs, I think all of you know it and its characteristics, thank God. It causes us to be very simple in our talks, as simple as we can be, speaking very familiarly, in such a way that even the least intelligent person can understand us, without our resorting to distorted language, or words that are too popular, but using common language clearly, purely, and simply, without affectation. In this way it seeks only the comfort and convenience of the listeners; it stimulates, it instructs, it enkindles the heart, it easily turns people away from vice and persuades them to love virtue, producing the best effects wherever it is used well.

"But is that what the method involves, Monsieur?" Yes, Messieurs, effects, characteristics, definition, and nature—it’s in these things that the method precisely and principally consists; but, since we don’t have time to go into detail and get down to the fine points, and because I myself, wretched man that I am, don’t know them—I who have reached this age without being able to learn this method because of my laziness, stupidity, and ignorance, so vulgar and stupid am I, a dumb animal, a coarse brute, ah, what a poor beast—M. Portail, who’s supposed to speak to us tomorrow, will go into particulars with us about it and teach us what to do to practice it well. He’ll be so good as to do that. I’m asking him to kindly speak on this method; he’s well versed in it and will be good enough to teach it to us.

"What’s that? The clock is striking three quarters past the hour. Please bear with me a little longer, Messieurs, wretch that I am. So then, let’s say something on the third point; let’s see what means we can use to adopt such a useful method. For a man who has in view
only the glory of God and the salvation of souls, it’s really easy to begin to do this. When we try to refer everything to those goals, it’s easy to follow the method, which is expressly for that purpose. But it’s a question of making ourselves believe in it; we have to be determined to gain greater esteem for it. If I follow this method, people might say, ‘What a poor man he is; he should say something beautiful; he has to use another approach. Come now, come now! He really has to preach differently.’ Eh bien! What’s all this fanfare? Is he trying to show that he’s a fine public speaker, a good theologian? That’s strange because, with all that, he’s taking the wrong road. Perhaps he’ll be admired by a few persons who hardly understand him; but, that’s not the right way to win the esteem of wise persons.

“To pass for an intelligent person and to have the reputation of being a very eloquent man, you have to be convinced of what you want the listener to adopt, and lead him away from what he has to avoid; and those priests do just the opposite. Are they to pass for good orators before prudent men? No doubt if you ask one of them, ‘Why do you preach? For what purpose do you proclaim the word of God?’ he’ll reply, ‘First of all, to convert; second, to disengage people from vice and incline them to virtue.’ To convert people is their goal; that, they say, is what their objective is; that’s what they should aim at—I don’t say obtain, for that doesn’t depend on them—but in all their talks, they, on their part, should say and do what they think is suitable for attaining their goal. And when a man has said everything appropriate for persuading others, then he’s a preacher, a good preacher: he’s achieved his goal, he’s done well. But that doesn’t consist in picking and choosing his words, composing fine sentences, expressing in an unusual way the ease of his ideas, proclaiming his discourse in a high-pitched tone of voice, a declamatory tone that goes over the heads of the people. Do those persons achieve their goal? Do they really win others over to love of devotion? Are the people touched, and do they then hasten to do penance? Do great conversions result? Far from it! Far from it! Yet, those are the pretensions of those great orators, those are their pretensions! Or else they were aiming at acquiring a reputation for themselves and having people say, ‘This man really speaks well; he’s eloquent, he has beautiful thoughts, he ex-
presses himself in a pleasing manner.' That's the only fruit of his sermon. *O Sauveur!* Is that your intention, Messieurs? So you go into the pulpit, not to preach God but yourselves, and—what a crime this is!—to use something as holy as the word of God to nurture and stir up your own vanity! *O Sauveur! Divin Sauveur!* We must then, Messieurs, we must then, in the first place, have the right intention, not wanting or having in mind anything in this work but what God is asking of us, aiming only at the conversion of our listeners and an increase in God's glory; and once we've purified our intention in this way, it will be very easy for us to adopt the most useful method we have for that, as we see and experience every day.

"Another means: *attende tibi;* attend to yourself, don't undo by your actions the progress you've made by preaching; don't destroy on the one hand everything being built up on the other; we have to preach mainly by good example, good example, being faithful to regulations and living as good Missioners, for otherwise, Messieurs, we do nothing, we do nothing; and for someone who might be living a disorderly life, this method might do more harm than good; apart from the fact that he can't practice it, at least for any length of time, it's totally contrary to living like a free spirit. We ourselves must have true sentiments of devotion and put it into practice in order to help others conceive true sentiments of devotion. If a man doesn't have a high regard for virtue and great love for his ministry, it's certain that he'll never really achieve it. How can someone who's careless himself, not obeying any regulations and living as a free spirit, help others to turn away from this? That's a travesty. People will say to him, *Medice, cura te ipsum.* 11 So, that's clear; nothing is more obvious. So then, *attende tibi:* we have to keep an eye on ourselves first of all and observe the practice of the regulations and customs of our vocation, since that's how we do God's Will. *Attende tibi.* This is another means of rapidly acquiring that excellent method of preaching.

10 Cf. 1 Tim 4:16. (NAB)
11 *Physiciam, cure yourself.* Cf. Lk 4:23. (NAB)
“A third, very efficacious means is to love this holy method, really love it. Why don’t we use this method? It’s because we don’t love it, we prefer to follow our moods, our imagination, and the rules of I don’t know what secular person; we have an aversion for this method, we don’t love it. I’m afraid, Messieurs, that we give only lip service to the good things about it, but in our hearts, in our hearts, oh . . . ! ‘I don’t know . . . . I’m afraid this method doesn’t suit us, that we find it bothersome and inconvenient, that it’s difficult for us.’ Ah, Messieurs! And this method has been given by God, it comes from God; He himself practiced it; the Apostles retained it; it’s the method of the Apostles and of the Son of God himself, the method of the Son of God, the method of Eternal Wisdom; and we reject it, we don’t want it, we don’t like it! We who profess in a very special way to follow Our Lord and who call ourselves His servants, we despise and refuse His own method, which He taught us and gave to us! O Sauveur! O Sauveur! What must people be saying of us? That we love what God hates and hate what God loves. O Sauveur! Ah, Messieurs! Instead, let’s all be united unanimously this evening for that purpose, so that every one of us may love this method more and more. Would to God that, by His grace, I might have obtained that favor this evening, which I ask of you by all the love you have for the glory of the Son of God, and by the depth of His mercy!

“Ah, I’m a wretched man who doesn’t know how to keep things short; bear with me, Messieurs! Would to God that we might all have one same heart, closely united in observing this divine method! M. Portail, I’m united with you for this purpose, you to whom God has given it, and to M. Alméras, who also has this gift; I’m united with you with all my heart and solemnly promise to do my best in future to adopt this divine method.

“‘But, Monsieur, would you allow me to state some objections to that and would you be willing now to listen to our reasons?’ Ah, would to God that I had the time; I’d willingly listen to you! Yes, of course, let’s take a quick look at it, as time permits; let’s clear up the difficulties the human mind can create regarding what we’ve just said.

“‘How can we use this method and observe its three points in dealing with all kinds of subject matter! Apart from the fact that it
would be extremely distasteful and annoying, that’s difficult—even impossible—without taking a risk.’ So it is; so it is. Using the same method would be boring in the long run; the human spirit is so fickle that it soon tires of even the best things. But, apart from the fact that our missions are short, you can disguise it in such a way that people won’t see your strategy and discover your method, sometimes by changing the order of the points, putting one before the other; sometimes having only two. There are many other ways that don’t come to mind just now. Furthermore, the method is different for different topics: there’s one method for dealing with the feast of a saint, another for discussing a Mystery, another for a parable, another for explaining a text, another for the Gospel of the day and the other topics for sermons. M. Portail, who knows well all these ways of preaching appropriately, will kindly explain all those methods to you because I myself don’t know them, but, with the help of God, I want to learn them from him and from others to whom God has given this gift.

‘But, Monsieur, aren’t other methods just as good as that one? We see so many learned, excellent preachers who aren’t familiar with your method; yet, they’re quite successful and preach very well.’ Messieurs, every method can be good and holy; I don’t mean to criticize any of them here; God forbid! Furthermore, God uses whomever He pleases and any person who seems good to him to procure His glory: Potens est de lapidibus istis suscitare filios Abrahae.\(^\text{12}\) He can raise up children of Abraham from these stones. God is all-powerful and, if He chooses, He can use the hardness of this stone to soften the most hardened hearts and lead them to a holy conversion and penance. O Sauveur! With all that, Messieurs, how many people do we see converted by all those methods? We have the experience of our own method; you have it. Messieurs; but with those now popular and fashionable you have the experience of the opposite; they always go over people’s heads, only skimming or touching the surface. A little noise, that’s all there is! So many sermons are preached every day in this large city in the course of so many Advent and Lenten seasons; but find me one man, from among

\(^{12}\text{Cf. Mt 3:9. (NAB)}\)
those very persons who have been listening to those sermons for thirty or forty years, who has become better because of them! *O Sauveur!* You’d have a hard time finding a single individual, a single man converted after listening to all those sermons; and what’s that in comparison with the good results we see produced by the little method! That convinces me that, since there are none that produce such great results, neither are there any that are as good and that it should surpass all others—at least among us, who seek only the salvation of souls.

“We know that this is the method of the Son of God and of the Apostles, and the one that very important persons—and not only us, poor wretched men—have used and are still using, and it’s the method of the preachers who work miracles and of Bishops and theologians. The Bishop of . . . used to say to me that, even if he were to preach a hundred thousand times, he’d never use any other method. M. de Sales, that great man of God, used to tell me the same, as have so many others, so many others. *O Seigneur!* I’m ashamed to mention them.

“And don’t think, Messieurs, that this method is only for the rural areas, for the lower classes, for peasants. Ah! To tell the truth it is quite excellent for the lower classes, but it’s also very efficacious for better-educated listeners, for cities, and in Paris, in Paris itself. During the mission given at Saint-Germain, people came from everywhere, from every district of this large city; we saw people from every parish, including persons of quality and theologians—even theologians. We preached to all this large crowd using only the little method. When the Bishop of Boulogne,13 preached, he never used

---

13François Perrochel, a cousin of Jean-Jacques Olier, was born in Paris on October 18, 1602. Animated by the spirit of M. Vincent, he was one of the devout, zealous priests who worked under the saint’s direction and gave missions in several places, especially in Auvergne, Joigny, and the faubourg Saint-Germain. He was a member of the Tuesday Conferences and was present at the meetings in which retreats for ordinands were organized. As Bishop-elect of Boulogne, he was invited to give conferences to the ordinands at the Bons-Enfants and was so successful that the Queen wanted to hear him. Moved by his words, she gave the Saint a generous donation to help defray the retreat expenses. Perrochel was consecrated in the church of Saint-Lazare on June 11, 1645. His episcopate was one of the most fruitful and glorious known to the Boulogne diocese. In 1675, worn out by age and infirmity, and unable to govern his diocese properly, the Bishop resigned; he died on April 8, 1682. (Cf. Eugène-François Van Drival, *Histoire des évêques de Boulogne* [Boulogne-sur-Mer: Berger frères, 1852].)
any other. And what good results we had! *Dieu*! What good results! They made general confessions, just as in the villages, and did so with great blessings. *Or sus, Dieu*! Did anyone ever see as many people converted by all those polished sermons? *Caeli caelorum*! They go right over their heads. The only conversion that takes place is that the listeners say, 'Yes, that man certainly knows a lot; he says some beautiful things.'

"But let's go further: the little method is for the Court, good for the Court. The little method has been used twice at the Court and was, if I dare say, well received there. It's true that the first time there was great opposition to it—great opposition; nevertheless, it had very good results, very good results. The Bishop of Alet\(^{14}\) was the preacher again. By the grace of God, with the little method he managed to overcome every opposition. The second time, one of our own men, M. Louistre,\(^{15}\) did the preaching, and there was no objection to it, thank God; the little method. I, a wretched man, dare say that the little method triumphed there; we saw marvelous results there. At the Court, the little method at the Court! And then, you say it's only for uncultured people and for villages. In Paris, in Paris, and at the Court, everywhere, there's no better method and none as efficacious; for, Messieurs, the best method is the one that uses everything necessary to win over our listeners; and ours leaves nothing behind that could be suitable for this end. You decide. So let's all adopt this humble but powerful method.

"Here's a fourth means, after which I'm going to stop: it's to ask God fervently and often for it; it's a gift of God so we have to ask for it..."

"Ah, it's striking quarter after! *O Sauveur*! I've finished, I've finished. So then, there are four means for adopting this method: purity of intention, watching carefully over ourselves—*attende tibi*—love for this method, love, love for it—and asking God often to give it to those whom He has chosen to advance His glory by this

\(^{14}\)Nicolas Pavillon.

\(^{15}\)Jean Louistre was born in Nantes, in the Chartres diocese, entered the Congregation of the Mission on March 14, 1637, at the age of twenty-four, and took his vows on March 14, 1642.
means, since, by His mercy, there are several of them in the Com-
pany. Blessed be God!

"Divine Savior, You who came to earth to preach to us in sim-
plicity and to teach us this holy method by Your own example, we
humbly entreat You to help all of us to adopt Your spirit of simplic-
ity and to give us this holy method by Your grace, so that, by this
means, we may effectively proclaim Your holy word and carry it
throughout the world like Your disciples, to whom You gave it. O
Savior, gentle Savior, spread this spirit of method upon us. Let's
hope that, by doing our part, God will grant us this grace. M. Portail
will kindly speak to us much better tomorrow on this holy method.

"And now I've finished. Blessed be God! There are many things
that could be said, but it’s too late. I always go on too long, I always
waste time, I’m a burden, like a big brute.

"I don't think anything can prevent us now from taking on this
method of preaching. Will it be pleasure? O Dieu! That, more than
anything else, helps us to preach with greater satisfaction. I don't
think that all the pleasures in the world can equal the slightest one we
get from this method. What greater pleasure can a preacher have than
to see his hearers come to him, to see them weep, as has often hap-
pened to you yourselves? Isn't it true that you often see your audi-
ence in tears? And when you want to leave, you have to sneak away;
isn't it true, Monsieur, that they run after you? Please answer me
honestly, tell us how it happened, is that the case? ‘Yes, Monsieur,
we don’t know what to do to get away from the people.’ O Sauveur!
Is there any greater satisfaction in the world than that? To see all your
people visibly moved by your preaching! What other satisfaction can
a speaker have than to get what he’s seeking! What greater pleasure
is there? And from your own experience, Messieurs, that’s what is
obtained every day by the little method.

"To what can you aspire? The conversion of the people? Eh! Af-
ter your sermons preached with this method they all flock to you, so
convinced, that they’re ready to do whatever you tell them. What
greater pleasure, what greater pleasure! O Sauveur!

"Do you want to acquire honor? Is there any method in the world
in which more of it is to be found? It shouldn’t be used for that pur-
pose; that would be a diabolical intention. But, Messieurs, is there any greater honor to be acquired for us than to be treated like the Apostles, like the Son of God? Alas! We’re given the same praise that was given to Jesus Christ. ‘Blessed are the wombs that bore you!’ people say to the Missioners. When they leave, the people cry after them, ‘Blessed are the breasts that nursed you! How happy your mothers must be!’ O Sauveur! What more was said of the Son of God? And all these praises and many others that bother you are said to Missioners, when they use only the little method. So then, there’s a great deal of honor involved and pleasure to acquire in this; however, that’s not why we’ll adopt it, but for love of God, from whom we get it.

“‘But this method is so lowly! What will people say of me for always preaching like that? For whom will they take me? In the end, every single one of them will despise me, and I’ll lose my honor.’ You’ll lose your honor! O Sauveur! Is it losing your honor to preach in the way Jesus Christ himself preached? To treat the word of Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ himself willed to treat it is to have no honor? To speak of God as the Son of God spoke of Him is to lose your honor? O Sauveur! O Sauveur! So then, Jesus Christ, Word of the Father, had no honor! To preach sermons as you should, in simplicity, in familiar and ordinary speech, as Our Lord did, is to have no honor; and to do otherwise is to be an honorable man? To distort and falsify the word of God is to have honor? To dissimulate the word of God—the sacred word of God—so pretentiously, to put a mask on the word of God and make it look like a courtesan filled with vanity? O Sauveur, Divin Sauveur! What’s all that? What is it, Messieurs? To say that preaching the Gospel as Jesus Christ did is to lose one’s honor! That’s as much as saying that Jesus Christ, who was Eternal Wisdom, didn’t really know how to treat His own word, didn’t understand it clearly, and should have acted in a way other than He did. O Sauveur, what blasphemy! And that’s what’s said, if not outright at least tacitly and in the heart; if not outwardly before others, at least before God, who sees the heart; and people dare to utter those horrible blasphemies before God, who sees the heart, and to say those things to His face! And they’re ashamed be-
fore others! Before God! O Savior, merciful Savior! Alas, Messieurs! You see clearly that it’s blasphemy to think and to say that we lose our honor by preaching as the Son of God preached, as He came to teach us, as the Holy Spirit instructed the Apostles to do.

“One day I asked M. X, ‘But, Monsieur, please tell me how Saint Vincent Ferrer preached and converted so many people, attracting such crowds from everywhere, with the result that they had to send escorts after him?’ ‘Here’s how,’ he replied. ‘That great man preached plainly and simply, making himself understood clearly by everyone.’ O Sauveur! O simplicity, you’re really very persuasive! Simplicity converts everyone. It’s quite certain that, to convince and win over the human spirit, we have to act simply; we usually don’t manage to do this by using beautiful, set speeches; they shout aloud and make a lot of noise but do nothing else. All those beautiful, studied speeches ordinarily touch only the inferior part of us. Perhaps they cause fear by shouting in I don’t know what kind of a tone; they heat up the blood and stir up desires, but all that is in the inferior part, not the superior part; reason and intellect are in no way persuaded. And all those impulses of the inferior part do nothing, if the understanding isn’t convinced; if reason doesn’t grasp it, everything else soon fades, soon fades, and the preaching remains useless. So, long live simplicity and the little method, which is the most excellent one and the one by which greater honor can be acquired and the mind persuaded, without all that shouting that bothers the listeners! Eh, Messieurs! That’s so true that, if a man now wants to be considered a good preacher in all the churches in Paris and at the Court, he has to preach like that, with no affectation whatsoever. And people say of the man who preaches in that way and who preaches the best, ‘That man works wonders, he preaches like a missionary, like a missionary, like an Apostle.’ O Sauveur! And M. X told me that eventually we have to come to that. And in truth, to preach otherwise is the height of impertinence, it’s trying to preach ourselves and not Jesus Christ.

“He preaches like a missionary! O Savior! You have granted the little, insignificant Company this grace of inspiring it with a method everyone wants to follow; we thank You for this with all our
strength. Ah, Messieurs! Let’s not make ourselves unworthy of this grace, which everyone esteems so highly that people say of an excellent preacher, ‘He preaches like a missionary.’ Alas! How would it be if we were the only ones to despise it! Wouldn’t God have good reason to complain that we make so little account of this great gift He’s given us in order to share His inspirations with us and, through us, with everyone!

“Orsus, blessed be God! I ask you, Messieurs, to offer Mass for this, and you, Brothers, to receive your next Communion for this intention.”

135. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

August 22, 1655

M. Vincent recommended to the prayers of the Company a few persons who had asked for them, among others, the Bishop of Luçon, who was seriously ill. “He’s a Bishop who has been very kind to us and has always shown great love for the Company; he has a large share of God’s goodness. In gratitude, we’ll ask God to give him what’s most fitting for His glory.

“I also ask your prayers for our priests in foreign lands. A few days ago, I learned that M. Le Blanc had been released; it was the Principal of the Scots College who told me. I’m not sure if that’s the case; I’ve received no letters about it. We’ll thank God for everything about this, for we’ll keep asking His Divine Goodness to give him the strength to bear whatever Divine Providence will be pleased to allow to happen to him, to endure the sufferings to be encountered if he has been released—and even death, if God wishes

Conference 135. - Recueil de diverses exhortations, p. 75. A shorter version of this same talk, written somewhat differently, is in Repetitions of Prayer. MS, f° 29.

1Subheading: Illness of the Bishop of Luçon; news of Missioners in Scotland, Barbary, Madagascar, and Genoa; exhortation to zeal and detachment.

2Pierre Nivelle; he died on November 10, 1661.

3Francis White.
that of him—and always to be totally resigned to His good pleasure. All he’d have to say to be freed entirely is ‘I’m not a priest’; but he prefers to die rather than to say ‘I’m not a priest.’ If he did, they’d let him go immediately, and the door of the prison would be opened to him.

“We’re also going to pray for Messrs. Duiguin4 and Lumsden, who are working in those parts. O Sauveur! What good results they’re having there! You’ll have to read what’s been written about this. The Ladies themselves have collected some documents and letters and are reading them with sentiments of devotion and blessing. O Sauveur!

“As for the men in Barbary, the Le Vachers5 and the others, who are working under such difficulties with so much to put up with in those lands, and who don’t say a word about them, make nothing of them. . . , yet, they have something to suffer from everyone, Turks and slaves, and have to make visits, deal with, and talk to those poor prisoners, and to run here and there, but they don’t mention this at all; on the contrary, we see from their letters that they’re content to suffer, and they ask for more—they want even more sufferings. O Sauveur! Let’s ask God to give this spirit to the entire body and heart of the Company. What a great blessing from God, who deigns to make use of this Little Company for that, doing us the honor of suffering for Him in the person of some of our members, in M. Le Blanc and the others! What a great grace He gives us in sending us to carry His word in this way throughout the world!

4Dermot Duggan.

5Jean and Philippe Le Vacher. For the biographical sketch of Jean Le Vacher, see Conf. 109, n. 1.

Philippe Le Vacher, born in Ecouen (Val-d’Oise) on March 23, 1622, entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 5, 1643, and took his vows on August 5, 1646. He was part of the first group sent to Ireland in 1646. Recalled to France in 1649, he was sent to Marseilles, where he was ordained a priest on April 2, 1650, and sailed for Algiers as Vicar Apostolic and Vicar-General of Carthage. He returned to France in 1657 to collect alms for the captives. His absence, which was supposed to last only a few months, lasted two years. He set out again in September 1659, reached Barbary, and in 1661 accompanied Bro. Jean Dubourdieu to Algiers, where the latter was destined to replace Jean Barreau, French Consul in that city. Le Vacher paid Barreau’s debts, settled a number of business matters, and finally left Barbary in 1662, accompanied by seventy captives whom he had ransomed. He was sent to Fontainebleau, where he led a most exemplary life until August 5, 1679, the day of his death. (Cf. Notices, vol. III, pp. 595-606.)
“There were some religious who had set sail for the place where our Missioners are in Barbary but, once they were there, they encountered such great difficulties that they had to come back home; but, thank God, our men are still there and, by His mercy, are successful in their work. Let’s take care not to make ourselves unworthy of this great grace lest God withdraw it from us. Recently a Cordelier \(^6\) said to me, ‘Ah, Monsieur! What a great blessing! O Dieu! What progress can be made!’ He asked their General for an Assistant for the men who are in the Indies and the Orient, in order to be able by this means to take care of many needs where they are. He requested this at their General Chapter but was refused for many reasons. So, this Father said with great feeling, ‘Be careful that God doesn’t deprive you of that grace He’s given you and punish you by taking this calling from your group and seeing that no one goes to those lands again!’ He showed those strong feelings about this, saying to me, ‘O Monsieur, the great blessing God has given you of. . . . ’ I shouldn’t be saying this.

“Let’s be careful that God doesn’t deprive us of this grace. It has pleased Him to make use of this little corps to carry out His plans. Let’s be like that little peasant who was carrying a sack and, seeing his master kneel down to pray, did the same, with his little sack on his back. When asked what he was doing, he said, ‘I’m asking God to do what you’re requesting of him; I’m a poor idiot, who doesn’t know how to say anything to him, so I’m asking him to listen to you; I’d like to say to Him the things you’re saying, but I can’t; so I’m offering Him whatever you’re saying to Him.’

“Ah, we’re the ones carrying the sack, those poor idiots who don’t know how to say things, those little gleaners who come after the great missionaries. Let’s thank God for being pleased to accept our services; let’s offer Him the great harvests of others with our little handfuls, let’s be always ready to do whatever we can for the service of God and the neighbor. If God has given such a great blessing, that’s not enough; if He gave such beautiful illumination and great grace to that peasant that he deserved to be mentioned in

\(^6\)Franciscan.
history, let’s hope that, by doing all we can to contribute to the honor of God in what depends on us, God will do the rest and receive in good part and bless our little labors and offerings.

“He uses whomever He pleases to do great things. Look at our men who are in foreign lands, among others M. Le Blanc; he doesn’t say a word; they’re not people who have made a display of themselves; and you see the great things God is doing through this servant of His and the others. Let’s hope in God and be fully resigned to His Holy Providence.

“We’re also going to pray for the others, M. Bourdais and M. Mousnier. O Sauveur! A few days ago I was talking to one of those priests who has come back from that country; what did he not say to me about M. Nacquart!7 What a great servant of God! With what feeling he spoke to me about him! How much good he did! O Sauveur! What a great loss this servant of God is, but what a great gain as well! Sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum. That makes me hope that his martyrdom—for he died for God—will be the seed of Christians, which God, in view of his death, will give us the grace to bring to fruition. And about M. Gondré,8 O Dieu! What sentiments, what sentiments! I always have that man before me, his great

---

7Charles Nacquart, born in Treslon (Marne) in 1617, entered the Congregation of the Mission on April 6, 1640. After ordination he was sent to Richelieu. Designated for the first group to be sent to Madagascar, he arrived there on December 4, 1648. He had learned the native language so well on the voyage to Madagascar that in a short time he was able to draft a brief summary of Christian doctrine, *Petit catéchisme, avec les prières du matin et du soir*. . . . (Paris: Georges Josse, 1657). (Cf. also Abelly, *op. cit.*, bk. II, chap. I, sect. IX. §5 and §6.) A new edition of Nacquart’s work, edited by Ludwig Munthe, Élie Rajaomarison, and Désiré Ranaivosoa, was published under the title of *Le catéchisme malgache de 1657* (Antananarivo: Egede Instituttet, 1987). He converted several Protestants, baptized seventy-seven Malagasy, and regularized the situation of the French who were living with indigenous women. He evangelized not only Fort-Dauphin, but also the entire interior within a radius of roughly thirty miles (cf. *III*, 538, 570, and 592). Exhausted by so much work, Nacquart died on May 29, 1650. In vol. IX of *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission* are found his letters, diary, and testament, taken from old copies preserved in the Archives of the Mission, Paris.

8Nicolas Gondré, born in Assigny (Seine-Maritime), entered the Congregation of the Mission as a subdeacon on April 11, 1644, at 24 years of age. During his novitiate he was ordained a deacon and was sent to Saintes. In 1646 he returned to Paris and was ordained a priest. In 1648 he volunteered for Madagascar, where he arrived on December 4; but God, satisfied with his good will, called him to himself on May 26, 1649. Saint Vincent had a high esteem of Gondré’s virtue and considered him “one of the best subjects in the Company.” (Cf. *Notices*, vol. III, pp. 43-56.)
gentleness and modesty; I still remember the fine talks that man of
God gave us amid the flurry of getting ready to set sail. O Sauveur!
Blessed be God! Blessed be God!

"Or sus, let's ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart,
this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of
God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our
Lord, that disposes us to go as He went and as He would have gone,
if His Eternal Wisdom had deemed it advisable to work for the con-
version of poor nations. He sent the Apostles to do that; he sends us,
like them, to bring fire everywhere. Ignem veni mittere in terram, et
quid volo nisi ut accendatur;9 to bring this divine fire, this fire of
love and of fear of God everywhere, throughout the world: to Bar-
bary, to the Indies, to Japan. That's what's meant by Sanguis
martyrum, semen christianorum. They tormented the Christians
there, they pursued them everywhere; with what rage they put them
to death in a cruel manner! But, in the end, by the mercy of God,
things turned around, the cruel King died, and the one who suc-
ceeded him put no one to death; on the contrary, he allowed the Por-
tuguese to trade, and priests to go there, and people felt completely
safe living in that place without any danger, by the grace of God.

"Ah, Messieurs! Let's all ask God fervently for this spirit for the
whole Company, a spirit that will take us everywhere, with the re-
sult that, when someone sees one or two Missioners, they can say,
'Those are apostolic persons ready to go to the four corners of the
world carrying the word of God.' Let's ask God to grant us a heart
like that; there are some who have it, by the grace of God, and all are
servants of God, but to go there and not to be deterred! O Sauveur!
That's really something! We must have a heart like that, everyone
having the same heart, detached from all things, so that we may
have perfect trust in the mercy of God, without wondering, or wor-
rying, or losing courage. 'Will I have this item in that country? How
will I get it?' O Sauveur! God will never fail us! Ah, Messieurs! O
Dieu! When we hear talk of the glorious death of those who are

9I have come to light a fire on the earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited! Cf. Lk 12:49.
(NAB)
there, who wouldn’t want to be in their place? Who wouldn’t want
to die like them, to be assured of an eternal reward! O Sauveur! Is
there anything more desirable! So then, let’s not be bound to this or
that; let’s be courageous! Let’s go wherever God may call us, He
will be our provider, let’s not fear anything. Or sus, blessed be God!
Let’s all pray for that intention.

“They’ve written me from Genoa that they need our help and are
asking for our prayers; we’re obligated to do this; we had to send
and return all our priests who have passed through there and have
been welcomed in a way . . . God knows. Good M. Blatiron can’t
do enough for them; he writes me nothing about it, but I was well
aware that he had really been a help to them.”

136. - METHOD TO BE FOLLOWED IN PREACHING

August 22, 1655

“Messieurs, this will be a continuation of the topic already be-
gun, namely, on the method of preaching. From what I’ve heard,
you’ve made a great deal of progress, by the grace of God. I think it
will be well for us to do here what we did previously for the same
topic: the Bishop of Boulogne,1 the Bishop of Alet,2 M. Ricard, and
all of us were there; even a few priests from Paris came. And, very
simply, we would practice just as we’re doing now. We’d choose a
topic, and each would give the motives he had on it; then we’d
move on to acts and from there to the means. That’s what we did,
and each man very simply gave his modest opinion. Sometimes we
composed a sermon on the spot, the Bishop of Boulogne on one
side, the Bishop of Alet on the other, and M. Portail as well, for he
knows that [method]; I’m the only one who has never learned any-

Conference 136. - Manuscript of Conferences. This conference was given after Vespers on
August 22, 1655, at a special meeting held on Sunday in Saint-Lazare Hall.
1François Perrochel.
2Nicolas Pavillon.
thing worthwhile. We'd see how to proceed to treat the subject well, how to be very convincing—always plainly, with simplicity; and that's what we'd do.

"The Oratorian Fathers have the custom among themselves of practicing preaching in that way—four of them each day. Isn't that true, M. Alméras, you who've been in Rome where that's done?"

"Yes, Monsieur," said M. Alméras, "four of them preach for half an hour each."

"You're saying that four of them get in the pulpit and preach, each for half an hour on four different subjects; isn't that the case, M. Martin?"

"Yes, Monsieur," said M. Martin, "I agree."

"So four of them preach; each has half an hour for various topics; one on the Gospel, another on some Mystery, another on the life of a saint, and the other on some virtue, just like that, in a low pulpit. There's also a high pulpit, where sermons are preached; ordinarily the Capucins and some Order—I forget which one—preach in the high pulpit in the church of the Oratorian Fathers; but the latter preach only from that little low pulpit."

"Monsieur," said M. Alméras, "that pulpit isn't so low; it has seven or eight steps, almost like the one in the new building."

"Eh bien! So they preach only in that pulpit, in a simple manner, in familiar language and not otherwise, very informally, for two hours a day, each taking half an hour. And that's the most popular devotion in Rome. Everyone goes there. The greatest piety is at the Oratorian Fathers, where these little sermons are given simply and familiarly and not otherwise; and if someone preaches in another way, he's informed of this and corrected, so as to keep the method of blessed Philip their father. 3 They're corrected when they fail to do this, and by this means they're kept in check."

"Monsieur," said M. Alméras, "may I say something I find very edifying and useful in this regard?"

"Yes, Monsieur, go ahead. You've seen all that, Monsieur, so please tell us."

3Saint Philip Neri (1515-95), Founder of the Oratory in Rome, was canonized in 1622.
“Monsieur,” said M. Alméras, “one time—I think it was under blessed Philip Neri; it seems to me he was still alive—there was a man who gave a beautiful sermon that didn’t go beyond his half hour, but the style was a little more lofty than usual; something made him get carried away. Nevertheless, everyone admired it, and his preaching was even helpful. It was helpful but a little more elevated than usual. Afterward the Superior said to him, ‘You’ve really preached very well to us; I thought what you said was beautiful; please preach it to us once again; it’s very beautiful.’ So, he made him preach on the same topic the next day and for eight or ten days following that, with the result that everyone said, ‘That’s the priest of the one sermon, the one-sermon Father.’ ”

“Very good, very good,” said M. Vincent, “that teaches us clearly how those priests value simplicity and should stir us up to do the same in order to keep our method simple—not like I preach: crying out loud, clapping my hands, leaning halfway out of the pulpit. Those Fathers preach with so much restraint that they wouldn’t dare do that and would be severely reprimanded for it. Nevertheless, all Rome goes there, and they have all the devotion. It’s because that’s the best way to proceed, quite simply and informally, without getting carried away like me, wretched man.

“A second example, which shows us how careful we must be to maintain our method, is that of the Huguenots: the other was that of a saint, and this one is that of the Huguenots. So, Calvin invented his own method of preaching: take a book, as Our Lord did, read it, and explain it in the literal and spiritual sense; then draw some moral teachings from it. That’s Calvin’s method, which the Huguenots have been using in their sermons ever since; and, even today, every three months the Huguenots give conferences . . . No, that’s not the word . . . (someone was suggesting consistory), not a consistory either. Ah! Here it is: symposiums. At their symposiums, then, where several ministers meet every three months, they discuss the way to preach, and those who aren’t very familiar with it learn it. The others preach, and sitting here (pointing to his right) or there (pointing to the other side) beside the pulpit, they note whether the person preaches well according to their style, and they correct one
another; those who don’t know this method have nothing to do. They still report on it at the consistory.

“Eh, Messieurs! If human prudence—what am I saying?—if the inventiveness of the devil and heresy act with so much precaution in order to keep themselves in check, what means should we not use to preserve our holy method, since they, through purely human motives, work so hard for a vain, useless thing! O Sauveur! I think it will be a good idea, then, as we’ve already done in the past, to take a topic, and each one will state his reason briefly. This would have to be written down. Brother, don’t you have a writing case over there? . . . Go get some paper; you’ll find some in our room. . . . That door is locked; go to the other side.

“What topic shall we choose? Let’s take humility for today; each individual will first mention his reasons in a few words, without elaborating; a sentence will do, give a reason briefly.

“M. Alméras, what reason can you give to incline us to humility?”

After M. Alméras put forth a reason to incite us to humility, M. Vincent asked the senior priests, who were next in line, for another reason, then everyone else, in the order in which they were seated. Each one gave a reason, or said he had only ones that had already been mentioned, and did so in very few words.

After the senior priests had suggested reasons, he moved on to acts of humility, having given its definition beforehand.

While they were suggesting acts, he said, “You must always go into detail; you’ve seen that; and that’s the result, getting down to particulars, giving the circumstances, the place and the time when this or that act has to be practiced.”

When M. Alméras said something to him, he replied, “Yes, Monsieur, that’s where we fail the most in our conferences, when people speak well in a general way but stop there; that’s not enough; as far as possible, particular acts must be specified and indicated. At those conferences where they work wonders, there are some who have this gift from God of getting down to particulars when they speak; all eyes are on them, and that, giving details in such or such a circumstance, is what’s the most beneficial and has great results. If,
after that, however, someone happens to express some beautiful thoughts, bringing forth strong reasons and quoting many things from the Fathers and the Councils, all that is fine, but it wipes out all the good that the other, by going into detail, had impressed on souls. It’s like when you’ve written something down and someone comes by with a sponge and erases everything; there’s no trace of it; everything is wiped out. In the same way the mind loses the good sentiments it had, and the holy thoughts vanish. This lofty discourse replaces them with others, which wipe out the first ones. You must, Messieurs, you must always get down to particulars, explaining the acts clearly in detail; that’s where excellent results are usually found. The mind suggests one act to itself in a certain circumstance at the time, and another in another circumstance; always specifically, as far as possible.”

Next, we went on to the means of acquiring humility, and after many had been suggested, he said toward the end, “I thank God for the graces He has given you and for the many good and beautiful things you’ve just said. We’ll see if it will be necessary to continue with this. Blessed be God!”

137. - REPETITION OF PRAYER

August 24, 1655

M. Vincent strongly recommended to our prayers four Negro boys, whom M. de Flacourt, a citizen of this city of Paris, just ar-

Conference 137. - The first part of this instruction, as far as “When a coadjutor Brother accused himself,” is taken from Repetitions of Prayer. MS. f° 30; the second part is from Recueil de diverses exhortations, p. 107.

1Subheading: News of four Malagasy boys brought to Saint-Lazare by M. de Flacourt; reprimand to a coadjutor Brother.

2Etienne de Flacourt, born in Orléans in 1607, had many difficulties governing the colony of Madagascar in the name of the Company of the Indies (1648-55), due especially to the colonists who tried several times to kill him. After his return to France, he worked in the administration of the Company. Besides a history of Madagascar, he also wrote a Dictionnaire de la langue de Madagascar, avec un petit recueil de noms et dictions propres des choses qui sont d’une même espèce [Paris: G. Josse, 1658], which he dedicated to Saint Vincent.