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Whom to Trust?
The Establishment of the Vincentians in Genoa, 1645–1660

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BIO

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Introduction

In 1659 when Cardinal Stefano Durazzo, the archbishop of Genoa, asked the Vincentians in the city to hold their spiritual exercises in two maisons des filles, Vincent de Paul instructed that they tell him their assessment of his request. The task of preaching to girls was not completely in line with the Congregation’s règle et pratique, especially as the Vincentians devoted themselves primarily to the instruction of male clergy. Vincent added, “If, after that [clarification], he wants you to disregard them [our Rule and Practice], you will have to do so.”¹ In a comment that was later erased, he wrote, “because we would rather follow his order than our determination.”²

Vincent de Paul clearly sought to avoid losing Durazzo’s confidence in not heeding his request. At the same time, the superior general preferred to follow the Vincentians’ usual methods of working. This dilemma, though, illustrates a struggle that always arose in establishing the Congregation of the Mission, or any congregation, in a new area. The superior general felt that it was the Vincentians’ authentic mission, and their way of life, that would win the trust of those who could offer the needed support. Still, the confidence of certain people, in this case the city’s archbishop, was so important that some concessions had to be made that might slightly alter the Vincentians’ original mission. With every foundation, the missionaries also had to find people they could rely on. By the time that the aforementioned request was made in 1659, the Vincentians’ trust in their Genoese archbishop had become such that they usually followed his orders, even though some went beyond their normal practices.

Vincent’s reaction to this episode suggests that the Vincentians were conscious that trust from many sides was needed for a new establishment to become successful. The bishop of a given area should approve of their presence, trusting that it would benefit his policies; rich laypeople and local clergy were to provide financial help and political support, trusting that it would be used wisely; and diocesan priests should be cooperative, trusting the missionaries to preach in their rural parishes.³ At the same time, the Vincentians had to find people to rely on. Vincent himself placed great importance on a strong financial base before he would let his missionaries establish themselves in a new area.⁴ Trust in this new

² Ibid.
⁴ John E. Rybolt, C.M., “Saint Vincent de Paul and Money,” Vincentian Heritage 26:1 (1 October 2005), 90. See: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol26/iss1/7/
congregation thus had to be complemented by trust from its members to guarantee a lasting foundation. Conversely, when it became clear over time that a bishop was not honoring his commitments toward a Vincentian establishment, Vincent would recall his missionaries.\textsuperscript{5} Trust was necessary for the successful settlement of a congregation in a new city; those involved were well aware of that and so carefully steered the relationships with those whose help they needed.

More than 150 letters between Vincent de Paul and his missionaries in Genoa have been preserved documenting the first years of the Vincentian establishment (1645–1660), and they reveal an awareness of the importance of trust for a new foundation. A large portion of the extant correspondence is written by Vincent himself who, as leader of the rapidly expanding organization, had to govern and support his followers. His letters aimed to advise them and instill a sense of collegiality and discipline, a spirit of initiative and confidence, as Alison Forrestal argues, but also, I would add, they emphasize the urgency of winning trustworthy support.\textsuperscript{6}

Genoa’s religious landscape
The Congregation of the Mission was one among many new orders and congregations that came to Genoa in the post-Tridentine period. In sixteenth-century Genoa, church and state had been strongly interwoven. Religion and religious ceremonies framed both private and

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 92.

\textsuperscript{6} Alison Forrestal, Ph.D., “Vincent de Paul as Mentor,” Vincentian Heritage 27:2 (2008), 7. See: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vjh/vol27/iss2/1/
public life, and this intertwining of the secular and the worldly gave rise to several abuses. Political interests influenced the choice of new archbishops (some of whom were at the same time doge of the city), of vicars, canons, and the whole ecclesiastical elite, as well as of those on the margins between worldly and secular: the administrators of hospitals, confraternities, and charity institutions. At the same time, Genoa had been a center of new religious initiatives run by laypeople, the best example being the Congregation of the Divine Love. Because religious and secular interests were inseparable, and because many desirable reforms originated from lay initiatives instead of ecclesiastical, the attempts at centralization by the Genoese archbishops encountered opposition from many parties. The established religious orders were among the first to obstruct the increased concentration of power, as they were used to being exempt from episcopal authority and were to obey primarily the hierarchy of their own order. The new religious orders and other reform initiatives, the lay confraternities for example, were not different in this respect: all wanted to remain autonomous and wished to prevent episcopal authority in Genoa from growing.

New religious orders were pivotal players in the Tridentine reform efforts throughout Europe. Their work among the people outside the convent walls made them indispensable for any Church initiative. Early modern Genoa is a good example of this. The Jesuits arrived in the port city in 1554 and focused mostly on educating the elite. Another new order, the Theatines, came to the city in 1572 and served the rich and elite while also carrying out their original mission to the poor. The Somaschi, who arrived in 1575, specialized in helping orphans and the children of the poor. The Camilliani opened a house in 1594 and focused mostly on serving the sick in Genoa’s hospitals. In this manner, many new convents—later including the Barnabiti and Scolopi—were added to the already established monasteries. Yet, it was not easy for a new order to enter the city. Housing for new groups was scarce, concurrence was high, and the sociopolitical structure was full of contrasts between old and new nobility, as well as common people and the social elite. Each of these new orders therefore had to bring a spiritual service that was not yet provided. The Theatines, for example, entered only after several earlier attempts. They finally managed to obtain the church of S. Maria Maddalena with the support of the archbishop, Cipriano Pallavicini, some noblemen, and Filippo Neri, who declined to send his own Oratorians to the city.

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8 Ibid., 266–301.
The distrust of the Genoese toward new orders was not at all unusual. Despite their essential role in the Counter-Reformation effort, people in the crowded cities of Catholic Europe were not eager to accommodate the many new religious initiatives or to provide them with space and income. The historian Marie Juliette Marinus details that around 1600 in Antwerp, the *invasion conventuelle* was met with suspicion by both common people and rival congregations. Support came from certain nobles or notables who often had some specific interest in a certain order (family ties or otherwise), whereas the secular and ecclesiastical elite were divided. In order to enter the city, a new congregation had to meet certain requirements. The bishop, the city’s collegiate, and the magistrate all had to give their consent. They could also stipulate restrictions on multiple issues: for example, the amount of alms that could be asked from the people, the services that the congregation should offer, and the distances they should keep from already existing ecclesiastical institutions, primarily the parishes. Thus, new religious orders needed to be willing to adapt, and to show that they would be offering something new and indispensable to a city.

The new religious orders in Genoa indeed provided for the spiritual and material needs of the city, preaching, confessing, and helping the poor and sick. They were an indispensable instrument for the reform the archbishops desired. These orders provided education and spiritual care, allowed devotional and charitable groups to convene in their churches, and published catechisms as well as educational books. Successive Genoese archbishops had to consider this, although these orders were not under their control. Since an archbishop

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could not count on the complete obedience of these orders—even new reforming ones—
trust in, and from, them was essential to successful reform policy.

The Congregation of the Mission prospered in the Genoese diocese thanks to Cardinal
Durazzo’s support, because he favored the French spiritual revival. The nation’s *école
française* was directed toward the goals of education and inner change rather than the
southern European fervency of motivating people through fear of the horrors of hell. This
appealed to the Genoese archbishop. From the start, the Congregation focused its work on
the two pillars of Vincent de Paul’s mission: preaching to the rural poor and improving the
clergy’s education. Durazzo admired the Vincentians for their work in areas that mirrored
his own reform efforts, particularly the education of the diocesan clergy. (Regular clergy
usually received education from within their own orders.) This emphasis on education
was necessary because of an urgent problem in the Genoese Church: the poor instruction
of clerics, especially the secular clergy, both in the city and countryside. Preaching and
education of the clergy were at the heart of the reforms dictated by the Council of Trent.
Yet it took decades before they were applied to every diocese. In Genoa, Antonmaria Sauli
(archbishop from 1586–1591) had accepted financial help from the Republic in order to
found a seminary. This resulted in a difficult situation in which secular authorities wanted
to have a large say over who entered the seminary. Durazzo’s determination to put an end
to the situation met with opposition from the political elite, and also from great numbers of
the clergy who had been asked to pay a special tax for the seminary. Ultimately, from 1649
onward, the Genoese Vincentians held monthly retreats, spiritual exercises, and conferences
for seminarians and ordained priests in the *Casa della Missione*. Here they worked to better
educate the Genoese clergy.

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12 Costanza Longo, “Alcuni Aspetti Della Riforma Cattolica Nella Repubblica Di Genova Nella Prima Metà Del Secolo
XVII,” in *Genova, La Liguria E L’Oltremare Tra Medioevo Ed Età Moderna. Studi E Ricerche D’archivio* (Genoa,
1979), 3:120. For a portrait of Cardinal Durazzo, see Luigi Alfonso, “Aspetti della personalità del card. Stefano Durazzo,
13 Louis Châtellier, *La religion des pauvres: les missions rurales en Europe et la formation du catholicisme moderne,
14 Alison Forrestal, Ph.D., “Irish Entrants to the Congregation of the Mission, 1625–60: Prosopography and Sources,”
15 Luigi Nuovo, *La Predicazione missionaria Vincenziana tra ‘600 e ‘700: al di qua dei monti dal 1655 al 1800* (Roma:
C.L.V. Edizioni Vincenziane, 1987), 64.
16 Luigi Nuovo, “La Chiesa genovese nelle ‘relationes ad limina’ del cardinale Stefano Durazzo,” in *Le relations ad
limina dell’arcivescovo di Genova Stefano Durazzo* (1635–1664), ed. by Giovanni Battista Varnier and Luigi Nuovo
The Vincentians’ primary aim of conducting missions among the rural poor also responded to a great need not yet sufficiently met. From the early seventeenth century onward, efforts had been made by the city elite. They were supported by the Senate and Genoese archbishop Cardinal Orazio Spinola (1600–1616). Spinola personally contributed to set up a foundation to improve the material and spiritual state of churches in the countryside. This organization would eventually become one of the *Magistrati* of the Republic, uniting a charitable aim with the political calculation of “taming” the lands of the *Serenissimo Dominio*.\(^{19}\) By the mid-seventeenth century, the organization had been split in two, the *Opera Laica* run by the Republic, and the *Opera Mista*, controlled largely by the archbishop, each with the same aim.\(^{20}\) From the time of their settlement in Genoa onward, Jesuits also preached many missions in the Ligurian villages and mountains, often at the invitation of the bishop of a neighboring town.\(^{21}\) When inviting the Vincentians, the archbishop was likely looking for a relatively independent group that would obey his orders regarding the important but poorly supported missions to the countryside.

Thus, it was the Vincentians’ promise in two underdeveloped areas of the Counter-Reformation effort—education of the secular clergy and missions among the rural poor—which enabled them to enter a city already inhabited by many other religious groups. These efforts formed two sides of the same coin: that is, to make sure that believers knew the most important tenets of their religion and thereby be saved.\(^{22}\)

Surprisingly, the Genoese establishment of the Vincentians has not received much scholarly attention.\(^{23}\) This may be due to a lack of related local archival sources; the archive of the Vincentians’ house was lost during the revolutionary period. At Cardinal Durazzo’s

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21 See, for example, *Storia del Collegio di Genova, dai suoi principi nel 1553 fino al 1772 scritta in gran parte dal P. Nicolò Gentile e dal 1689 continuata da vari. Con aggiunta di altre memorie diverse*, 9r, 13v, 14v, 15v, 16r, 18r, 19v. Archivium Historicum Societatis Jesu (hereafter ARSI), MED 80.


invitation, the Congregation of the Mission first arrived in the Ligurian capital in 1645. As with several other Vincentian foundations, the establishment was the result of combined efforts. With the financial help of the cardinal and two of his primary collaborators, Baliano Raggio and Giovanni Cristoforo Monsia, the Vincentians settled at the *Casa della Missione* in Fassolo, where they continue to live to this day.\(^{24}\) Their influence, however, spread beyond the walls of Genoa. The missionaries defied the inhospitable mountains of the inlands to reach the villages of the Genoese countryside. They also crossed the Ligurian Sea to Corsica to preach in places with, according to one missionary, “almost no other vestiges of the faith [...] other than the fact that they said to have been baptized.”\(^ {25}\) Not long after their settlement in Genoa, the city became the starting point for a new establishment in nearby Turin.\(^ {26}\)

We should examine the first fifteen years of the Congregation in Genoa to analyze the different stages of trust that the Vincentians displayed, and received, in this new environment. The tactics and pragmatism they used to gain trust from different sides, particularly from the highest prelate in the area, Cardinal Durazzo, were founded upon Vincent de Paul’s acute understanding of human psychology. His rational approach determined what was feasible in planning the Congregation’s expansion.\(^ {27}\)


\(^{27}\) Cf. Forrestal, “Vincent de Paul as Mentor,” 7–8; For an example of Vincent’s pragmatism regarding new foundations, see: Román, “The Foundations,” 140–41.
1) How to Win Trust?

Preliminary trust

The Congregation of the Mission first came to Italy to be near the heart of the Church. Being close to the Roman court made it easier to negotiate papal recognition of the Congregation and its organization, and support for its missionary work. Vincent de Paul even considered transferring the motherhouse there, but he gave up the idea because the French court and the Gallican episcopacy opposed Rome’s centralization efforts. Nevertheless, the Vincentian way of working—the simple and effective missions among the rural poor in the Papal States and the retreats attended by clergy—became popular among the cardinals of the Roman curia, several of whom called upon the Congregation to preach in their own dioceses.

This also took place in the Genoese Republic, where the second house of the Vincentians on the peninsula was founded. At the invitation of Cardinal Durazzo in August 1645, Vincent considered sending his brothers to the Republic. According to Durazzo’s letter, the cardinal asked Bernard Codoing, a member of the Congregation who was passing through the diocese on his way from Rome back to Paris, to assist him. Apparently, Durazzo’s high expectations were met. Durazzo informed Vincent that he had consented to Codoing’s departure for Paris only because other priests were being sent “to continue what he [Codoing] has so happily begun.” Here we see the beginnings of a relationship built on trust. Trust indeed can be defined as an expectation, based on experience, that people will be both able and willing to do what you ask of them. Because of this first positive experience, the Genoese cardinal developed the expectation that the Vincentians could serve his reform efforts.

The cardinal’s positive expectations—his trust in the Vincentians’ talents—set the pace for the foundation of a new house. That part was not unusual. Often bishops were the principal “founders,” or financial sponsors, of new Vincentian establishments. What differed was Durazzo’s intuition that the Vincentians’ presence would benefit his diocese, even though Genoa was already full of other religious. This expectation of usefulness might be further explained by the fact that, because the Vincentians were new to Italy, no record of failures or disobedience could discredit their reliability. (The same could not be said

28 Mezzadri and Román, The Vincentians, 243.
30 According to Vincent de Paul’s early biographer Abelly, this was because he heard about the work of the Vincentians in Savoy and Rome. Abelly, Venerable Servant, 1:233.
of many older orders.) At the same time, they had not yet been able to build a strong and widespread reputation that would favor their entrance into the city. Cardinal Durazzo thus provided the necessary preliminary trust to set up a house in this new region. He was a genuine reformer who, in the footsteps of his predecessors, tried to implement the reforms of Trent in his diocese while encountering fierce opposition from both the government and his own subordinates.\footnote{Alfonso, “Aspetti della personalità,” 478–502.} Inviting these new, zealous Frenchmen helped him to have better control over their intended endeavors. Since the Vincentians were not yet entwined in the complicated structures of benefactors and loyalties to social and political elite, they were more readily available to him than the older, well-established orders.

Vincent understood that Durazzo’s confidence was a crucial step forward in the settlement process. Indeed, the geographic distribution of the Congregation in its early development largely followed the pastoral and financial interests of Vincent’s most important friends, whether clerics or laypeople. The founder certainly came to count Durazzo among these friends.\footnote{Román, “The Foundations,” 147.} He repeatedly emphasized that his Congregation should not go anywhere without explicit invitation. “Not hurrying ahead of providence,” was one of Vincent’s core principles.\footnote{Ibid., 138. See also: Nuovo, La Predicazione, 62. In Turin, an ecclesiastic asked the Congregation if they could open a house, but Vincent only wanted to go where requested, and thus he did not do anything.} Being invited meant that someone trusted the missionaries’ skills to serve a given environment and its interests and, more importantly, that the benefactor was prepared to endow the foundation financially. Moreover, it was Vincent’s firm spiritual conviction that others’ ideas or plans should be followed more readily because they may have been given by God. An invitation to settle in a new city, in his eyes, could be a sign from above. Vincent felt so strongly about the importance of invitations ‘from outside’ that when the bishop of Bergamo asked for missionaries, he wrote that if the prelate continued his request, he would be demonstrating the importance of the appeal and that the Vincentians should try to go.\footnote{Letter 2411, “To Edme Jolly, Superior, in Rome,” 12 October 1657, CCD, 6:541.}

Essential as he found initiatives ‘from outside,’ Vincent did not want to relinquish control over the foundation of a new house. A second maxim regarding the expansion of the Congregation was that only financially stable foundations should be accepted.\footnote{Román, “The Foundations,” 139–40.} Moreover, Vincent wanted to be sure that the foundation contract, a necessary step in establishing a new house,\footnote{Ibid., 153.} had to suit the Congregation’s habits and priorities as well as its financial needs. He hesitated at the contract in Genoa drawn up on the orders of Durazzo. In August
1646, Vincent noted there were “conditions in this project that could change the order of the Company and could perhaps upset it in that place,” and that he had some “little thoughts on these difficulties.” More than a year later, the issues were settled to Vincent’s liking. He signed the contract after Durazzo, together with Raggio and Monsia, obliged to offer 74 *luoghi dei Monti non vacabili di Roma* in total for the establishment of a house. This financial support enabled the Vincentians to work according to their rule, with no need to ask for, nor accept, any kind of recompense for their preaching. In exchange for this support, Vincent had to promise to comply with the cardinal’s wishes in providing missionaries to undertake works in the city and surroundings of Genoa. They were also to offer spiritual exercises for the Genoese clergy in their house at Durazzo’s request. Furthermore, the contract obliged the superior general to staff the house with at least four priests who were to the cardinal’s liking. These agreements, however, bear witness to Vincent’s pragmatism in relying on the Genoese archbishop, as all the requirements of the contract were in line with the Congregation’s objectives. Vincent only approved of an agreement that would not threaten their *règle et pratique*. Although necessary, the foundational contract was not entirely sufficient for determining the success of a new house. The preliminary trust of the benefactors would need to be cultivated and consolidated over the years.

Safeguarding the authentic mission

Trust is the expectation based on experience that people are willing and able to do what you ask of them. For trust to grow, one must cultivate the initial practices that created it. This is what Vincent de Paul asked his missionaries to do in Genoa: to favor their own habits, rules, and priorities over blind obedience to the prelate.

Upon their arrival, some years before the actual foundation, missionaries immediately started to travel the mountainous Ligurian countryside in order to preach in the villages. Responding to Durazzo’s many requests, they risked succumbing to fatigue under the huge workload and little rest. “I [...] have high hopes,” Vincent wrote during those first months, “that your workload will be a little lighter, especially if Monsieur Blatiron explains to the Cardinal-Archbishop the danger to which he exposes you by obliging you to work so continually.” According to Vincent, the heavy amount of work was not only detrimental to their health, it also made them “act contrary to the usual custom of the Company.” Indeed, he watched over both the physical well-being of his confrères and their faithfulness to their rules and practices. His appreciation for the cardinal’s zeal did not imply unquestioned obedience. Quite the contrary, the cardinal was to be convinced of the Vincentians’ own way of working: “I ask Monsieur Blatiron to make him [Durazzo] understand this clearly, once and for all, because I hope he will take it into consideration.” As a result, the prelate changed his mind and gave the priests some respite between rural missions.

The same defense of their own pratique occurred in negotiations with the Marquis of Pianezza, who asked for the establishment of a house in Turin some years after the Congregation had settled in Genoa. Rumors were that this noble envisioned a house of six missionaries at the Church of the Holy Sacrament who would offer their services to the city but not the surrounding countryside. Vincent therefore ordered Blatiron, the superior of the Vincentians in Genoa, to travel to Turin and ask the surgeon of the marquis, Pietro Touvenot, a friend of the Congregation, to pay Pianezza a visit. Vincent instructed Blatiron, “Explain to him also the end of our Institute and that we cannot take foundations except on condition of giving missions in the country and, if the opportunity presents itself, of conducting ordination [retreat]s.”

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
Changing the aims of the missionaries would not only be detrimental to Vincent’s own objectives, but it would even betray “God’s plan for us.” This God-given mission was guarded vigilantly, not merely because divine plans ought to be followed, but also to preserve the authenticity of the Congregation. This genuineness was important as it was what appealed to most of the political and ecclesiastical elite of the Savoyard State.

Besides clarifying their mission to possible benefactors, another way to safeguard authenticity and preserve the aims of the Congregation was to place internal obedience above all else. In 1647, Vincent recommended that the superior in Genoa tell the cardinal: “The prelates are our masters for all our external works, and we are obliged to obey them, as the servants of the Gospel obeyed their master. [...] If we fail to do so, they have the right to punish us. [...] But the spiritual and internal direction belongs to the Superior General.” Apparently, Cardinal Durazzo, in Vincent’s eyes, had interfered too much in the internal affairs of the Congregation. Although he did not doubt Durazzo’s zeal and reform-mindedness, the success of the Congregation lay not in strict obedience to the cardinal, but in internal cohesion. Vincent wrote they should not “think they are engaged in this holy work simply to please the Cardinal.” He also disagreed with Durazzo about who was eligible to enter the Congregation. It was the founder’s firmest conviction that the Vincentians stick to their own pratique of allowing only those “who have given themselves to Our Lord in these duties, and not local priests who have other aspirations.”

Yet obedience within the Congregation was not a mere act of will; it flowed from mutual trust between superiors and subordinates. Vincent saw this mutual trust as essential to be certain that all members would be mentored well. Indeed, he recommended that the Genoese superior use douceur et support in order to sway the heart of one of his disobedient confrères: “If you win his [heart], he will give you great satisfaction.” Furthermore, he encouraged all Vincentians to trust and obey their superiors, as it was something that pleased...
God. He wrote, “Since Our Lord approves of the trust you have in your Superior as the representative of His Divine Person, He will inspire him to say whatever is most appropriate for you.”

Obtaining trust was a means to achieve obedience, and without mutual trust, the missions were destined to fail. When a trust relationship seemed impossible because of an insurmountable disagreement, Vincent ordered that the people involved be separated. This was the case in 1659 with Jacques Pesnelle and Jérôme Lejuge, the latter of whom, because of mutual disagreements, was sent from the house in Rome and cordially received in Genoa.

Preserving the characteristic features of the Congregation by giving primacy to internal obedience (won with mildness) over adhering to voices from outside, whether from Church prelates or from secular authorities, was not an end in itself. It was, among other things, a means to elicit and cultivate trust from these very same people. This is not contradictory if one considers the Vincentians’ confidence in what had been responsible for their initial successes; namely, their way of life, work, and the missions that they saw as willed by God. Vincent guarded over the missionary élan of his congregation because he saw it as divinely ordained, but also because it worked and was successful in winning trust.

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56 To treat everyone with respect was, however, not only a tactic but also a principle of conduct: Vincent wanted to see good in all human beings. Forrestal, “Principles and Practice of Government,” 65.
**Demarcating trust**

In order to maintain and increase trust in the Vincentian missionaries, the carefully guarded, trustworthy, and consistent *règle et pratique* was to be associated wholly with the Congregation itself. Successes, as they were, would be ascribed exclusively to its merits. From the 1650s onward, word of the Congregation’s effective works in Rome, Genoa, and Turin spread throughout the country. Several cardinals, prelates, and wealthy laypeople asked for their help as the Vincentians’ *bonne odeur* diffused. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Vincentians had founded houses in Naples, Perugia, Reggio Emilia, Pavia, Marcerata, Bastia, and Ferrara. The key was attraction. Their work attracted the attention of influential people, and invitations soon followed to offer the same services elsewhere. The Congregation’s growth was based on trust that stemmed from the personal experience of their merits.

As the Vincentians established a good name in Genoa and the peninsula, it was imperative that their work be distinguishable from other initiatives. For example, in 1653 a group of Genoese clergy decided to dedicate their lives to preaching missions in the city similar to those preached by the Vincentians in the countryside. Étienne Blatiron personally lobbied the cardinal to have the name they had chosen, *I missionarii*, changed “to prevent the confusion of identical names and to forestall the inconveniences arising from having a large number with the same title.” Yet it is entirely possible that, at least in the beginning, there was strong cooperation between the Vincentians and *missionarii urbani*, as they came to be known. The *missionarii urbani* were placed under Saint Charles Borromeo’s patronage and fashioned after the Borromean model. As far as we know, they are one of the few concrete replications of this Counter-Reformation example in Genoa. The problem was not that the Vincentians had no trust in this new group, or that the contrast between an Italian Borromean method and French *pratique* was insurmountable—Vincent simply wished to protect the reputation of his own community from the actions of outsiders, over whom he had no say.

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61 From a letter of Étienne Blatiron, it seems that the Vincentians have preached the spiritual exercises to this group: “This evening we are expecting six or seven priests, who are supposed to be coming to begin retreat. They are planning to start a mission in town, as we do in the country. I ask your charity to recommend the matter to God.” Letter 1618, “Étienne Blatiron to Saint Vincent,” [between 1645 and 1657], *Ibid.*, 4:565.

At the same time, those who did belong to the *petite compagnie* were responsible for its good name and were expected not only to obey their superiors but also to conform to the rule of the Congregation. Commenting on one of the Genoese *confrères* who suggested the idea of following a retreat held by Discalced Carmelites, Vincent wrote to Blatiron:

You did very well to dissuade him from it. Please hold firm, not only in that but in all matters that are not in line with our customs, to prevent anything from being done contrary to them. If someone pressures you too much, as M ... is doing, ask him to be patient and tell him that, since you cannot give him the permission he is asking, you will write to the General of the Company about it, and then actually do so. In that way, while the person is waiting for the reply, time passes and often the temptation disappears.\(^\text{63}\)

Vincent also promised to write those brothers who tended toward following their own ideas, asking them to “stop being singular and to conform to common practices.”\(^\text{64}\) If they continued their disobedience, they would not be allowed to return to the house: “for one man we will lose to maintain good order for the honor of God, His Providence will give us two more.”\(^\text{65}\) Those who desired to join the Congregation were asked to conform completely to its rules and practices, and to demonstrate obedience. For Vincent, this obedience was entirely possible if one trusted in divine providence.\(^\text{66}\)

Trust in God’s plan, or *indifférence*, was something which the founder called his followers to cultivate and which nurtured internal conformity.\(^\text{67}\) This indifference would enable Vincentians to obey whatever commands came from their superiors (as representatives of God’s will), and to accept success and failure as part of a divine plan.\(^\text{68}\) In a conference on obedience, Vincent told his followers: “Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us obedience by word and example. He wished to be submissive to the Most Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, and other people in positions of authority, whether good or disagreeable. For this reason we should be completely obedient to every one of our Superiors, seeing the Lord in them and them in the Lord.”\(^\text{69}\)

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 4:103–04.
Consequently, attempts to walk different paths were met with strictness. 

Attractive to human psychology, Vincent believed that change only caused disorder. According to him, while people thought that changing their circumstances would make them happier, it never did. Changes of vocation, in his view, only caused regret. The superior’s reaction to the desire of a lay brother in Genoa to rise to priesthood, causing agitation among the other confrères, was consistent with this belief. Some Vincentian brothers did become priests of the Congregation, but this passage was to originate from indifference and not from dissatisfaction with one’s original vocation. When another of the brothers left the Congregation in Genoa in order to become a priest, Vincent remarked that he was very sorry to lose this “poor brother,” especially because God “grants grace for one state of life that He refuses in another. A Brother who would have the Spirit of God residing in his state would undoubtedly lose it if he left it. God is not fickle; He wills that each person should remain in the state in which He has placed him.”

Trust in divine providence came before obedience in Vincent’s view. Indifference originated from a trust that God made his will known through all circumstances, including the orders of superiors, and this was what formed obedience in his missionaries.

Apart from being convinced that this was how God wanted people to live their vocation, Vincent also thought that internal cohesion and order was so important that it was better that disobedient people left the Congregation altogether rather than damage its reputation. Strictness was needed in handling willful brothers that would “put some fear in the others so they will not get carried away by such liberties.”

The task to educate those confrères who had “a tendency to be independent” belonged to the local superior and visitor, who should act like fathers: with authority, but also with a willingness to convince them to change their minds. Persuasion was preferable to giving orders, but the latter at times were required.

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72 Blatiron had already complained that there were several uncooperative brothers in Genoa that tended to dress in the priestly black instead of the grey habits they should be wearing. Letter 1403, “To Étienne Blatiron, Superior, in Genoa,” 8 September 1651, CCD, 4:255.


76 Forrestal, Ibid., 13. For a good example of Vincent de Paul trying to convince one of the confrères in Genoa to stick to his vocation, see: Letter 1537, “To a Coadjutor Brother,” CCD, 4:440–43.
Moreover, to avoid seeing the Congregation’s reputation damaged, Vincent would call misbehaving brothers back to Paris, as happened with Jacques Beaure. This brother was meant to go to Genoa in 1658, but he was ordered to return to Paris on the advice of the superior in Turin. This was because, as Vincent wrote, “all that is needed to ruin the reputation of the Company and hinder the good results it can produce there is a Missionary who takes the liberty he does.”

When certain actions threatened the good reputation of the Vincentians, damage was to be contained as much as possible. Yet Vincent advocated that reputation should never be the goal of a given action. As a means to broaden opportunities for the Congregation it was important, but all activities were to be motivated purely by a desire to contribute to the glory of God. When a missionary in Genoa pretended to be a doctor [of theology?], Vincent decided that he should be replaced, and, more importantly, that the superior in Genoa should pay Cardinal Durazzo a visit to explain to him that this priest would not remain in the Congregation of the Mission. The message was that deceit was not in line with the Vincentians’ way of life. Building and protecting their good reputation was not the final aim; it was a means by which to foster the success of the Congregation and thus serve its ultimate purpose. The underlying reality was that the reputation built by a whole congregation could be ruined by individual members who did not act according to its rule. That trust, won with great effort, could vanish in a split second.

Just as people who refused to conform were expected to leave the Congregation, so too outsiders were not allowed to stay within the community unless they committed themselves and joined the Congregation. The danger was that the line between outsiders and insiders would become blurred. This became an issue in Genoa when a member of the important Spinola family wished to live with the Vincentians without joining them (possibly because of advanced age). Paris ordered that he should be told doucement what his options were: either join the Congregation, or remain outside and receive all possible “service and consolation” without living among them. The superior’s careful protection of the borders between the Congregation and its pratique on the one hand, and the outside world on the other, was driven by an awareness of the fragility of their hard-won reputation. Clearly demarcating the borders of the petite compagnie, and demanding strict internal obedience and conformity to the rules, was a way of building a good reputation, eliciting confidence and consolidating trust.


79 The rule was simply “not to receive anyone into our houses to live there and do as he pleases.” Letter 2681, “To Jacques Pesnelle, Superior, in Genoa,” 15 October 1658, CCD, 7:306.
Avoiding distrust, managing expectations

Trust will increase when expectations are met. In order to uphold trust, expectation should never reach beyond what somebody is able and willing to do. The Vincentians seem to have understood this well. Their general line of conduct was to keep a low profile. Humility was not only a core Christian virtue that Vincent held dear, but also a pragmatic strategy to avoid misunderstandings and to earn goodwill; in other words, to stimulate trust. Indeed, Vincent insisted that the promises they made, such as the foundation contracts of new establishments, should be adhered to always.

Vincent’s desire to be discreet was seen in a curious situation where the Congregation risked not meeting its promises. In 1658 Jacques Pesnelle, superior of the Genoese house, promised Cardinal Durazzo that the cardinal’s nephew could stay at Saint-Lazare (the Vincentian motherhouse in Paris) while on a diplomatic mission to the court of France. The rules of the Congregation did not allow laypeople to reside in their houses. More importantly, Vincent stressed, they were unable to receive this important guest at Saint-Lazare because all suitable rooms were occupied. “That is why,” Vincent replied to Pesnelle, “it is advisable for you to make known to His Eminence as soon as possible our good will and powerlessness; do so gently and tactfully so that this change in your word does not take him by surprise.”

Wishing to keep Durazzo’s trust, of which this request was certainly a sign, a

80 Forrestal, “Vincent de Paul as Mentor,” 10.
diplomatic explanation would need to cover the fact that the Vincentians were neither able nor willing to fulfill Pesnelle’s promise. The solution was to tell Durazzo that his nephew could come, if he only had one servant, and that he would be given a small room. Pesnelle was to make clear that it would be an honor for the Congregation to receive the diplomat, as it was a great opportunity to confirm the respect and obedience they owed to Durazzo, Vincent adding that the cardinal was “above any Rule.”

The wish to maintain discretion is demonstrated again in preparations for the foundation of a new house in Turin in 1655. In order to impress the elite of Turin, Jean Martin, a member of the Genoese house who was to become the superior, had asked Durazzo for a recommendation. This troubled Vincent greatly because he wanted his missionaries to “dwell low and unknown, and not to give importance to appearance and esteem.” He added:

Having a good reputation can be harmful to them not only because it is liable to disappear, but also because, if it puts the success of their work at six degrees, people will expect them to reach twelve and, seeing that the results do not correspond to the expectation, will no longer have a high opinion of them. God allows this to happen, especially when this reputation is sought after; for whoever exalts himself shall be humbled.

Warning that humility was “the gate” to this new mission, Vincent offered practical advice that the first two missionaries in Turin should start with small missions instead of big pretentious ones. Another expectation the Vincentians wished to avoid was that of having to open their books. “This [...] must be avoided more than anything else in the world as a most troublesome form of constraint,” Vincent wrote when he heard of Durazzo’s request that missionaries render their accounts to him. The founder’s primary reason was that tracking all expenses, especially when travelling, was too troublesome. He feared missionaries would have to invent parts of their accounts, “as some Companies do,” and thereby run the risk of lying.

83 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 5:485–86.
86 Letter 1977, “To Étienne Blatiron, Superior, in Genoa,” 17 December 1655, Ibid., 5:493. In the same letter, Vincent continued, “It is with this same thought in mind that I have asked him to give a small mission—just he and M. Ennery—to prevent him from giving one that may make a good impression.” For another reference to beginning this mission in a small, humble manner, see letter 1972, “To Jean Martin, in Turin,” 10 December 1655, Ibid., 5:485.
88 Ibid.
Even though Durazzo and others had generously paid for the construction of a residence for the brothers, Vincent thought it unwise and unnecessary to give them concrete promises in return. As in Paris, where Archbishop Jean-François de Gondi eventually gave the house of Saint-Lazare to the Vincentians without demanding any accountability in return, so too in Genoa the benefactors were expected to give freely. Otherwise, the Vincentians were not to accept their offer. In this, Vincent consciously broke with the habit of *les anciens religieux*, as he himself wrote. It was customary for religious orders to provide benefactors, whether it be city authorities, church authorities or others, with insight to their expenses in exchange for material support. However, Vincent felt that financial assistance should be given with trust and acceptance of the missionaries’ word, without concrete promises from the Vincentians. By keeping expectations low, mistrust could be avoided. Demanding that all help be given freely without the prospect of control ensured this. Whatever successes sprang from the trust given would only enhance the good reputation of the Congregation, and no temporary setbacks would weaken it decisively.

To preserve trust, one should sometimes be willing to act according to what is expected. Vincent de Paul did. He repeatedly asked his followers to thank the benefactors of the Congregation on his behalf, and to emphasize his obedience to them. Taking the lead himself, he wrote a virtually sycophantic letter to a key benefactor of the Congregation in Genoa, the noble-born priest Cristoforo Monsia:

\[\text{The Marquis Emanuele Brignole-Sale.}\
\text{Seventeenth-century painting by Giovanni Bernardo Carbone.}\
\text{Collection of the Albergo dei Poveri, Genoa, Italy}\]
Your Lordship’s exceeding kindheartedness toward the members of our Congregation living in Genoa makes it a duty for me to express my deepest gratitude to you.[...]

And since there is no way I can thank you for your charity, I earnestly ask the greatest and most high God to supply for my weakness. 93

Monsia eventually bequeathed his rich estate to the Vincentians, including the family chapel, leaving his family none too pleased.94

The Vincentians used a similar approach with the Marquis Emanuele Brignole-Sale, a very wealthy Genoese nobleman and faithful friend of the cardinal.95 He annually donated a large sum of money to the Vincentians in Genoa, contributed to their house in Rome, and asked them to preach in his lands. The answer to these favors was gratitude and prayers, but no concrete offers.96 This comportment is in line with the strategy to keep expectations low in order not to lose trust. Since the Vincentians had to give primacy to Durazzo’s orders and were unsure that he would allow them to preach a mission on Brignole’s lands, no promises were to be made without the archbishop’s express permission.

When possible, however, the Vincentians did try to accommodate the wishes of possible benefactors. This is clear, for example, in their approach to education in Genoa. On being asked whether the Genoese Vincentians should teach theology using the traditional, Scholastic approach, Vincent advised them to investigate “the thinking there about this method of teaching, whether it is in use among the Jesuits and other religious and secular houses, and if many students attend.”97 It was important that this initiative attract enough students. Vincent later advised his confrères to abandon the plan. He had learned that the Genoese Jesuits did not teach Scholasticism, which made it unlikely many students would be able to study it.98

Similarly, students’ holidays were to be compared with the other schools in Genoa. Vincent had previous bad experiences in allowing students too much spare time, and he

94 Alfonso, “La fondazione,” 150.
95 Ibid., 136.
observed that pupils misbehaved during the holidays. The situation in Genoa, however, could be different. According to him, the superior should adjust their program based on how the Jesuits, Theatines, and Oratorians dealt with this matter. The Vincentian approach to these issues shows that while certain principles and practices were non-negotiable, others could be changed to meet local needs and make use of resources.

Early on in Genoa, several wealthy Genoese had already displayed their trust in the new Vincentian community. The missionaries cherished these favors and tried to accommodate the wishes of their most important benefactors. At the request of the Messieurs de Gênes, Blatiron was sent back to Genoa after a period of absence. In Turin, Vincent also tried to ensure that the new house would be sufficiently staffed, both to help the superior, Jean Martin, and please Martin’s benefactors.

The establishment of the Vincentians in Genoa required support from many sides to be successful. In showing gratitude for help given, presenting themselves as obedient to all reasonable requests, and avoiding unfulfillable concrete promises, the Vincentians gained trust from those people whose support they required. Whenever possible, the Vincentians met the wishes of their benefactors with the goal of gaining as much support as possible.

2) An Example of Cultivating Trust: The Congregation’s Successes on Genoese Lands

Because the Vincentians, consciously or not, used the aforementioned strategies to elicit trust, the confidence that Cardinal Durazzo had shown from the beginning started to bear fruit. The Congregation’s popularity is hard to measure, especially because the sources at our disposal are mostly letters composed by the missionaries and their superior general. Still, we find clear signs of their growing prestige if we consider the successes of the Vincentian missions among the rural poor. The rural missions were essential both for Vincentian spirituality and for popularity. As Louis Châtellier has demonstrated, missions to the countryside were one of the most vital features of early modern Catholicism, more so because of the Church’s great difficulty staffing the countryside with competent priests.

Yet from the early sixteenth century, the newly-established order of the Capuchins returned to the ideals of Saint Francis by being completely devoted to preaching. This was followed a half century later by the Jesuits, who travelled across Europe to conduct missions in areas

100 Forrestal, “Principles and Practice of Government,” 63.
that promised to be most fruitful, including Protestant lands.  

Many older orders and new congregations joined this missionary movement. At its height during the second half of the seventeenth century, the Vincentians began their first missions to the Genoese countryside.

These missions among the rural population were also valued by the political, secular elite, who saw in them the promise of greater administrative control over a region and peace among the populace. The people in the country, however, were not passive recipients. Indeed, where successful, rural missions were a specifically chosen form that allowed people to live their religion. Noting Bohemia, Howard Louthan writes that Catholic identity, particularly in the Czech countryside, was formed by what Andrew Pettegree calls a “culture of persuasion” with rural missions as its backbone. Although fighting Protestantism played a role in reconverting rural populations, persuasion via the missions was also essential and implied conscious decision-making. The aim of these missions was to convert souls by winning the trust of the people. Missionaries “adapted their message and ministry to local culture and traditions [...] and] were critical of those misguided ‘religious zealots’ whose rigorist approach risked alienating those who were likely to convert if more sensitive and compassionate means were used.”

Vincent de Paul and others were aware that by providing a good example and meeting the needs of the people, thus gaining their trust, the clergy, the bishop, the parish priest, and the local missionary could persuade those they were trying to convert.

The Post-Tridentine Church, then, underwent a shift as it began to adapt itself to local circumstances and sensibilities, and placed greater focus on missions and education. It tried to win people over through persuasion or by gaining their trust.

While the Vincentians won the trust of the ecclesiastical and political elite in Genoa and Corsica by carrying out a job they saw as beneficial, they also won the trust of the lower classes through their work with them. The rural missions transformed the culture of the European countryside. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century missionaries began to understand that profound change came about slowly, and that, to see it happen, it was not enough to tell people how to live or what to do. This awareness changed the approach of religion. It was not something to be spread by fear or coercion, but rather through trust and education. From the beginning, in contrast to other rural missions, the Vincentian method

105 Ibid., 118.
used a similar perspective. It was one of believing in modest, simple preaching, with a focus on confession and catechesis, instead of relying upon the large penitential processions, theatrical productions, and grand sermons the Jesuits and Capuchins favored.

The missions in the villages of the Ligurian coast seemed to yield the devotional response the Vincentians hoped for.\textsuperscript{110} Often, the people, though very poor, responded favorably to the suggestion of founding a Confraternity of Charity. This was a common practice at the end of each mission, done to solidify the changes made in a given community.\textsuperscript{111} In Bogliasco, a town of less than a thousand inhabitants some 10 km from Genoa, Étienne Blatiron established the \textit{Compagnia femminile della carità} in 1654. The original statutes tell us such a group should consist of thirty-three women who, under the supervision of the parish priest and two male \textit{protettori}, were to provide for “both the spiritual and the corporal needs of the poor and sick of the parish.”\textsuperscript{112} Similar confraternities were instituted throughout the diocese, “at the orders of the Eminent and Reverent Cardinal Stefano Durazzo, Archbishop of Genova.”\textsuperscript{113} Their long-term success was not a given. Vincentian fathers first had to earn trust among a local population suspicious at the arrival of foreign

\textsuperscript{110} See, for example, Letter 943, “To Jean Martin, in Genoa,” 3 May 1647, CCD, 3:190.


\textsuperscript{113} “D’ordine dell’Emin’mo et Rev’mo Stefano Card’le Durazzo Arcivescovo di Genova.” See: \textit{Ibid}. 
missionaries.\footnote{Longo, “L'impegno Missionario,” 196.} Also, confraternities were not necessarily permanent. With time, some became watered down, and the Vincentians would find that little had really changed when they returned to a place. The work of the rural missions was for the long haul.

In the eyes of the Vincentian missionaries there were many triumphs, however. In 1647, Étienne Blatiron wrote to Paris, “Seven bandits were converted, and a Turk working for a gentleman asked for Baptism.”\footnote{Letter 1003, “Étienne Blatiron, Superior in Genoa, to Saint Vincent,” 16 December 1647, \textit{CCD}, 3:258.} Another success was reported after an earlier mission during which animosities were solved “which had caused twenty-four or twenty-five murders. Most of those involved, having obtained in writing the pardon of those offended, were able to secure a favorable verdict from the prince and have since returned to full favor in the town.”\footnote{Abelly, \textit{Venerable Servant}, 2:66.} Nobility from Genoa even attended a mission in the nearby countryside in 1647, “at which they were most edified.” Moreover, attendance was not confined to the secular elite. Several ecclesiastics from the Ligurian countryside demonstrated their faith in the Vincentians by responding to their call to attend retreats, making the effort to travel to the capital.\footnote{The same was true for the Corsican clergy. Cf.: Longo, “L'impegno Missionario,” 229.}

How, though, did the Vincentians gain the trust of an audience that was certainly not passive? First, when on mission, the Vincentians never accepted alms from the locals. Indeed, at the start of each mission they would tell people they did not seek their money but their souls: “\textit{non vestra sed vos.”}\footnote{“Non sono le vostre ricchezze che noi cerchiamo, ma le vostre anime, non vestra sed vos.” \textit{Ibid.}} As they also explicitly informed the public: “We live at our expense and are not responsible for anyone; not only don’t we ask for anything, but our rule is not to accept any gifts you would like to give us on your own.”\footnote{“Così è bene ed anche necessario dirvi che noi viviamo a spese nostre, e che non siamo di carico a nessuno, non solo non domandiamo nulla, ma per di più ci facciamo una legge di rifiutare i doni che vorreste farci di vostra iniziativa.” J.J. Jeanmaire, \textit{Sermons de Saint vincent de Paul, de ses coopérateurs et successeurs immédiats pour les missions des campagnes}, vol. 1 (Paris, 1859), 24; as cited in: Nuovo, \textit{La Predicazione}, 37.} Not allowing themselves to live off a particular benefactor guaranteed they would not be influenced by anyone.\footnote{As Nuovo assumes in: \textit{Ibid.}, 38.} At the same time, the Vincentians’ modest lifestyle was a way to gain trust similar to the pastoral approach of Bishop Étienne Le Camus. Keith Luria describes how Le Camus, a reform-minded bishop of Grenoble in the second half of the seventeenth century, would impress villagers and assumedly obtain their trust. On visitations to rural parishes, his self-mortifying behavior was apparent, and he would accept no privileged treatment from the rich, instead giving alms to the poor.\footnote{Keith P. Luria, \textit{Territories of Grace: Cultural Change in the Seventeenth-Century Diocese of Grenoble} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 63.} Generosity and austerity were virtues that spoke to the rural poor, winning trust and opening them to the message of the mission.
Second, the Vincentians tried to adapt their missions to the needs and expectations of villagers. At the beginning of each, they would tell people a variation of the following:

You must know, that we have come to this beautiful country of yours for no other purpose than to procure your beautiful souls, and to place them in the Heart of our most loving Lord, from whom perhaps they have long departed. And since your welfare and its rewards are our own, we have decided to distribute our Holy Mission’s benefits such that it eases your needs. Our work will take less time than you think possible, so little, almost nothing, that we will all be able to make the most of this mission sent by God to you.\(^{122}\)

Thus, they made their goals clear, adapting to the necessities of the rural populace, and using this as a way to earn their trust.

Last, the Vincentians relied upon the content of their preaching, and the method of its delivery, to elicit trust from their audience. From the opening sermon, villagers would feel that they were being taken seriously and that they were esteemed, as the missionaries presented their discourse as a special grace from God:

Sent as sacred ministers of the Great and most loveable God and approved by the Holy Church, we come to you, dearest, to exhort you from the start with lively sentiments of heart to make good use of the present Mission, that God [...] has destined for your great spiritual profit. He has looked upon you with such benign, such distinct, such favorable gazes, that, leaving behind many other peoples that with urgent need sigh for such favor from heaven, and He has deigned you all such a big gift [...].\(^ {123}\)

\(^{122}\) “Dilettissimi dovete sapere, che noi non per altro fine siamo venuti cosi da lontano in questo vostro caro paese che per procurare la salute delle vostre belle anime, e tutte riporle nel Cuore di questo amabilissimo Signore, da Cui forse da tanto tempo si sono partite. E siccome ci stà à Cuore ogni vostro interesse, e vantaggio, come se fosse nostro proprio, abbiamo pensato di distribuire le fonzioni della Santa missione in maniera tale che vi tolgano dalle vostre facende e lavori necessarii meno di tempo che sia possibile e tanto poco, che è quasi niente, e questo acciò, che tutti possiate approfittarvi di questa missione che iddio ha mandato tutta per voi.” See: Giovanni Francesco Mazzuchi, Prediche di Missione dedicate alla Gran Madre di Dio Maria Santissima in Genova nella Stamperia della penna MDCLXXV, 24v. Archivio Storico della Congregazione della Missione a Genova (ASCMG).

\(^{123}\) “Sacri Ministri del Grande amorosissimo Iddio spediti, é da S. Chiesa approvati, a voi ne veniamo dilettiss’mi ad esortarvi sulle prime con i più vivi sentimenti del cuore a far buon uso della presente Missione, che Iddio [...] destinata ha a gran vostro spirituale profitto. Vi ha egli rimirato con sguardi si begnigni, si distinti, si parziali, che lasciando addietro tant’altri popoli, che con calde pressantissime istanze un si segna alto favore del Cielo sospirano, e un si gran dono degnatosi [...].” Ibid., 1r.
Vincent de Paul wanted his missionaries to use a simple language with concrete, familiar examples, and a natural voice. He also advised them not to speak too long, and to avoid harshness “even against great sinners, using compassion rather than passion, abstaining from shouting too loudly and for too long, but listening to oneself and observing movement for the epilogue [conserving one’s strength for the ending] and even there one should be moderate.”

Nobody was to feel offended or personally accused, since this would forfeit his or her trust and possible conversion. The Vincentians’ attitude of gratuity, their well-chosen words, and their willingness to adapt to an audience’s needs were all designed to win trust and convey the message.

The missions to the Ligurian countryside were so successful that in 1652 the Senate sent the Vincentians to the island of Corsica, which at that time was under Genoese rule. Secular authorities largely paid for these missions and directed that Vincentians travel to the most problematic and criminal areas. The Republic hoped that such missionary activities would somehow “civilize” the Corsican people, and result in greater obedience to their central authority. This policy of combining charitable piety with political interests (to keep people obedient and maintain the status quo) was deployed by the Genoese Senate in offering assistance to the inhabitants of Genoa as well as the people of the desolated mountain villages of the inlands. The Opera delle chiese rurali, for example, was financed entirely by private citizens with the support of the government. The initial missions to Corsica served their purpose so well that several years later the Vincentians were called again to preach on the island. In cooperation with the state, the Vincentians eventually founded a house in the town of Bastia in 1678.

In an extensive report detailing the fourth mission on the island, Étienne Blatiron recounted how missionaries went to the valley of Niolo, an area that could only be reached by traversing the highest mountains in Corsica. In this gathering place of “bandits and ruffians of the island,” many people were ignorant of the most basic tenets of the Christian faith. For instance, asking a resident “which of the three divine persons became man was

124 “Usando piuttosto compassione che passione, astenendosi dal gridar troppo forte e per troppo tempo, ma ascoltando se stesso osservando I movemento per l’epilogo [conservando le forze per il finale] e ivi pure devono essere moderati.” Mezzadri, “Il metodo missionario vincenziano,” 81.
like speaking Arabic to them.” A particular vice among the people of Niolo was that of concubinage and incest. According to the Vincentians, 120 people lived together outside marriage, of whom 80 were in incestuous relationships (keep in mind that many relations seventeenth-century clerics would define as incestuous would not be defined as such today). This included several clerics “who foment[ed] these disturbances by their bad example and who commit[ted] incest and sacrilege with their nieces and relatives.” If we believe the report, the Vincentians managed, with much patience, to induce contrition from many of these excommunicated people. They promised to live separately, and for this, they were publicly absolved from their sins.

Yet the greatest achievement of the Corsican mission lay elsewhere. In the Niolo valley, according to Blatiron, vendettas were so common that children learned of them before they could walk. This was not a typically Corsican problem. On the contrary, reconciliation among the rural population constituted one of the primary tasks of missionaries across Europe. Many of these people came armed to church, and getting them to settle their differences with their enemies was a formidable challenge. According to Blatiron, toward the end of the mission all of their preaching seemed to have made no impression. However, after a Franciscan condemned the stubbornness of the people, one priest, whose nephew had been killed, stepped forward. He prostrated himself on the ground and called out the murderer of his nephew, who was also present, and embraced him. Many followed his example, and “for an hour and a half nothing was to be seen but reconciliations and embraces,” bringing huge relief for the missionaries. One such mission, though, was not enough to definitively change the people’s overall mentality. When the Jesuit Giovanni Battista Cancelotti came to Niolo in the early eighteenth century, he still encountered the same culture of vengeance. Yet, even in forging temporary reconciliations among enemies, the Vincentians must have won some level of trust from the local people.

131 “Éclésiastiques qui fomentaient ces désordres par leurs mauvais exemples et qui commettaient des incestes et des sacrileges avec leurs nieces et parentes.” Ibid.
133 “Un cure, de qui le neveu avait été tué, et le meurtrier était présent à cette predication, vient se prosterner en terre et demande à baiser le crucifix et en meme temps dit à haute voix: ‘Qu’un tel (c’était le meurtrier de son neveu) s’approche et que je l’embrasse.” Ibid.
134 “Pendant l’espace d’une heure et demie on ne vit autre chose que reconciliations et embrasements.” Ibid.
The Vincentian mission to Corsica not only secured the hearts of the rural population, and inspired changes,\textsuperscript{136} it also gained recognition from a number of the clergy and local elite. Many of them accompanied the missionaries to their ships, sent by the Senate in order to pick them up, greeting them with celebratory gunshots.\textsuperscript{137} The support of local clergy and authorities was essential in Vincent’s eyes.\textsuperscript{138} In Corsica, the mission only began after the Vincentians visited with local authorities and gave them letters of recommendation.\textsuperscript{139} The value of the missions was also reflected by ever more frequent requests that they be extended.\textsuperscript{140} Indeed, several signori, among them Emmanuele and Carlo Brignole, Agapito Battista Centurione, Giacomo and Giuseppe Durazzo, Ambrogio Carmagnola, the principe Giustiniani, Cardinal Durazzo, and the Senate, all contributed financially to Vincentian work in Corsica.\textsuperscript{141} Of course, the Vincentians were not the only ones operational in Corsica. Jesuits had been preaching missions from the time of Landini. They founded a college in Bastia in 1602 and later did so in other Corsican villages.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{136} Putting an end to a culture of vengeance and incestuous relationships had already been a priority at the time of Silvestro Landini. Relatione d’alcuni particolari della uita et attioni del P. Siluestro Landino della Compagnia di Giesu in Corsica, 13r. ARSI, MED 98.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{138} Jesuit instructional tracts for missionaries also advised to always contact local clergy first before starting a mission. Jennifer D. Selwyn, \textit{A Paradise Inhabited by Devils: The Jesuits’ Civilizing Mission in Early Modern Naples} (Aldershot; Burlinton, Vt.; Roma: Ashgate, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2004), 161.

\textsuperscript{139} Longo, “L’impegno Missionario,” 224.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 228.

\textsuperscript{141} Stella, \textit{La Congregazione della Missione in Italia.}, 41.

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Annali del Collegio della Bastia}, 20r. ARSI, MED 98. In 1634, they also took over a college that was founded to provide education for clerics, especially priests who would go to Corsica. Giuliano Raffo, ed., \textit{I Gesuiti a Genova Nei Secoli XVII E XVIII. Storia Della Casa Professa Di Genova Della Compagnia Di Gesù Dall’anno 1603 Al 1773}, vol. 1 (Genoa, n.d.), 159.
Rural missions played an important role in gaining the Congregation of the Mission trust from multiple levels of society. The highest Church authority, Durazzo, was pleased to bring about much needed religious reform to the remotest parts of his diocese. Likewise, secular authorities were eager to see concrete societal change in hard-to-control rural areas, and local clergy were relieved to receive help in their difficult task of ministering (even if temporarily). Vincentian missionaries spoke to their citizens, they were heard, and the influence they provided was valued.

3) Whom to Trust? How Trust Leads to Obedience
It is very apparent that the Vincentians in Genoa generally attempted to elicit and maintain trust without forfeiting their original mission. They also tried to capture the hearts of people, no matter their place in the social hierarchy, by carrying out missions to the rural populace. However, to fully grasp the importance of trust in the establishment of a new house, it is necessary to understand its role in relation to obedience. This was a core value in Vincentian spirituality, and Vincent himself considered it a key to happiness.\footnote{Conference 88, “Obedience,” 2 December 1657, \textit{CCD}, 10:313.} The Vincentians’ relationship with Cardinal Durazzo, the highest prelate in the region, clearly demonstrates how trust interacted with obedience. From the first, obedience to the archbishop was a virtue that was professed continuously and persuasively. Indeed, according to the Congregation’s own rule, Vincentians were to “humbly and consistently obey the most reverend Bishops of the dioceses where the Congregation has houses.”\footnote{Conference 222, “Obedience,” [19 December 1659], \textit{Ibid.}, 12:346.} However, this rule was not practiced without reserve. There was a need to win trust, but there was also a need to find out whom to trust, and thus whom to obey. It took time for the Vincentians to grow in confidence that Cardinal Durazzo’s policies and orders were in their favor. This gradual development eventually diminished their reservations when it came to complete obedience.

The archbishop’s material support further strengthened the Vincentians’ trust in him. The many tasks that he gave the Congregation were not without recompense. Drawing on his own network, Durazzo found people willing to help the Congregation financially. He set the pace himself by donating large sums, first for the establishment in Genoa, and later for a house in Rome (which he arranged himself in 1659, and toward which he contributed the most generous donation).\footnote{\textit{Annali Della Missione. S. Vincenzo De’ Paoli}. Raccolta Trimestrale (Piacenza: Collegio Alberoni, 1925), 8.} He even managed to convince “some Cardinals among his friends” to contribute financially to the Roman foundation.\footnote{Letter 2806, “To Edme Jolly, Superior, in Rome,” 4 April 1659, \textit{CCD}, 7:500. Mezzadri and Román, \textit{The Vincentians}, 246.} Unsurprisingly, Durazzo was a central figure of Vincentian gratitude: “Prostrate in spirit at the sacred feet of Your
Eminence,” Vincent wrote in 1651, “I most humbly ask your pardon for my delay in renewing the expression of my deepest gratitude for the great benefits you continually shower upon your Missionaries.”147 Vincent also repeatedly prompted his followers to offer the same. Especially toward the end of his life, he reminded them to act according to the will of God in “renewing often to him [the prelate] our most humble thanks.”148

The Vincentians’ confidence in Durazzo also grew as he continued to express affection for and affinity with their spirituality. Blatiron’s admiration for the archbishop greatly increased when Durazzo attended the spiritual exercises of the missionaries, completely adapting to their practices and wishing to be treated like the others despite his status and older age (fifty-six).149 These behaviors elicited trust. Expressing his gratitude, Vincent wrote to Durazzo that “never has a Prelate made us more aware of the supreme charity of God than by your charity.”150 Moreover, Durazzo honored the Vincentians with frequent visits to their house in Rome, which also greatly enhanced their trust in him. Vincent even mused that they were “the object of all his acts of kindness,” and that assisting them “seem[ed] to be his only interest.”151

As a result, Vincent began to describe Durazzo as a saint in letters to his followers. In recounting Durazzo’s assistance lobbying the Roman court for approval of indulgences and the Congregation’s vows,152 Vincent wrote that he was touched and that he prayed to “Our Lord to preserve and sanctify more and more that great, holy Prelate!”153 The saintliness of the cardinal was a recurring theme in correspondence between Genoa and Paris. Blatiron even delighted his superior general with a portrait of the Genoese prelate in hopes that the image of this saintly collaborator would comfort him.154

Near the end of his life, Vincent’s esteem for Durazzo grew to such an extent that he identified obedience to Durazzo with obedience to God in his writings: “We should receive the instructions of Cardinal Durazzo as orders from heaven and do, without hesitation, whatever he commands. The benevolence with which he honors the Company is a great blessing for it, by which God makes us frequently call to mind the effects of His adorable

154 Ibid.
goodness.” Vincent also alluded that trust in God and trust in His servant Durazzo were the same thing. He wrote that all would turn out well if the missionaries followed what Christ prophesized, reiterated by “His saintly Cardinal of Genoa,” namely that one must strive for the glory of God.

This reverence for and trust in Cardinal Durazzo contrasts with Vincent’s cautious attitude at the beginning of the Vincentian establishment in Genoa. As discussed previously, the superior general was suspicious that any meddling by the cardinal might alter the Vincentians’ règle et pratique. It took several years’ worth of accumulated experience before he began to instruct his followers to broadly obey Durazzo. As his trust strengthened with time, Vincent displayed unhesitant obedience. For example, when Blatiron hinted at sending several missionaries from Genoa to staff the new house in Turin in 1656, the cardinal changed the topic in response—which was enough for Vincent to conclude that the idea did not please him, and therefore it should be dismissed. Vincent’s obedient attitude is even more apparent in his reaction that same year to a decision made at the suggestion of the cardinal, specifically to appoint a procurator to handle the Vincentians’ temporal affairs in Genoa. “I approve this all the more,” he wrote, because the decision was taken “on the advice of the oracle, the Cardinal, whose inspirations and sentiments come from God and always tend toward Him.”

On other occasions, certain initiatives seemed agreeable to Vincent simply because they were backed by the cardinal. When, again in 1656, the Vincentians were offered a house by a “venerable priest,” Vincent desired to know Durazzo’s thoughts because, in his view, Durazzo would advise “according to the lights of this same Spirit and the Christian maxims by which we must be guided.” His conviction grew with time: the aims, the policies, and the interests of the cardinal were aligned with those of the Congregation. This convergence also explains why what began as formal obedience ultimately became genuine, complete trust. Consider their dilemma in deciding whether to assist those Genoese stricken during plague epidemics in 1657 and 1658. To render aid was to accept that death would certainly

follow. The Vincentians relied completely on the judgment of the cardinal in this matter. He decided to keep them to assist him should he fall ill or die.\textsuperscript{161} Nevertheless, seven of the nine Vincentians died, and one of the four brothers, including the superior Blatiron.\textsuperscript{162}

Trust was developed over the years because the Vincentians saw that Durazzo’s interests were similar to theirs, as demonstrated in his material support and spiritual affinity. In time, it gave substance to what might otherwise have seemed a somewhat hollow declaration of obedience. Complete obedience and gratitude were indeed the fruit of this growing trust. It is not surprising that Durazzo was finally honored with the erection of his bust in the Vincentian buildings in Fassolo. The inscription lauded this prelate, who “\textit{totam Congregationem perpetua charitate delixerit.”}\textsuperscript{163}

\textbf{Conclusion}

When a religious order arrived in a new region, it normally faced a dilemma. Should it attempt to obtain the trust of the local people by pleasing certain groups, answering to their needs irrespective of the order’s original mission? Or, should it stick to its own ethos and attempt to gather trust by strictly adhering to the order’s authentic directives? A middle path, obviously, was to be preferred. When the Vincentians came to Genoa, they needed to

\textsuperscript{161} See, for example, letters 2111, 2121, 2130, 2188, and 2467 in \textit{CCD}.

\textsuperscript{162} Stella, \textit{La Congregazione della Missione in Italia}, 33.

\textsuperscript{163} The entire text reads: “Stephano Cardinali Duratio Archiepiscopo vigilantissimo quod Domum hanc aedificaverit Romanam auxerit Bastiensem promoverit totam Congregationem perpetua charitate delixerit anno 1657.” Musso, \textit{Il Cardinale Stefano Durazzo}, 160.
provide the Republic with something that was lacking in order to gain enough support to enter the city. The missionaries’ preferred method came in sticking with Vincent’s original mission: education of the secular clergy and missions to the countryside. And, indeed, these were activities Cardinal Durazzo envisioned for the Vincentians in his diocese. Such initial trust was essential for an order that did not have a bad history in the area, but also could not rely upon a long, trustworthy history. Durazzo’s invitation was therefore readily accepted, but with the conditions that financial stability would be guaranteed and that missionaries would be allowed to maintain common practices. For Vincent de Paul, such an invitation was not only a pragmatic condition but also a spiritual one. The circumstance of an invitation was a sign from God.

This initial trust, however, was only the beginning. By choosing to adhere to the rule of internal obedience above all else, including the desire to please important benefactors like Durazzo, the Vincentian’s authentic mission could be preserved. Thus, the Vincentian pratique was preferred as a means to win trust rather than by simply obliging their benefactors. Such confidence in the mission is understandable, considering it had earned the Congregation initial trust. Once this trust was attained, the Vincentians protected their good reputation. This was accomplished by ensuring that they were distinguishable from other congregations, that internal and external boundaries were clear, and that conformity was observed. Conformity was the fruit of obedience, which, according to Vincent, was born from an attitude of indifference. Indifference, in turn, originated from a complete trust in God. Vincentians who did not conform were sent back to Paris, or even dismissed from the company when obstinately disobedient. Finally, damage to the Vincentian’s reputation was ultimately limited by avoiding unrealistic expectations of their mission.

These strategies appear to have worked if we consider the successes of the rural missions and the trust that the missionaries managed to gain in accounting for the specific needs of the people. Since this approach worked among the Genoese populace, it also met with the approval of secular and religious elite.

Yet the Vincentians themselves also needed to determine whom they could trust. This is made clear from their relationship with the highest prelate in the region, Cardinal Durazzo. From the beginning, Vincentians in Genoa displayed obedience to the archbishop. However, this verbal obedience only became total over time. The rule of the Congregation demanded such obedience to church authorities, but trust in Durazzo had to grow. Only in experiencing that Durazzo’s interests truly corresponded with theirs did genuine trust arrive. For a new congregation to flourish, trust in this group from multiple levels of society was as important as trust from the order itself in those who would support it.
Portrait of Vincent de Paul wearing a stole.
Original is in the Vincentian house, Genoa, Italy; Foundation Brignole-Sale.
Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online
http://stvincentimages.cstcis.cti.depaul.edu:8181/default.aspx
Portrait etching of Cardinal Stefano Durazzo (1594-1667).

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The Vincentian house in Fassolo, Italy, pictured circa 1880.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online
http://stvincentimages.cstcis.cti.depaul.edu:8181/
A view of Genoa from the sea.
Copperplate engraving by Matthäus Merian (1593-1650), ca. 1650.
Public Domain
Framed portrait of Vincent de Paul owned by the diocese of Ferrara, Italy.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online
http://stvincentimages.estcis.cti.depaul.edu:8181/
Portrait of Jean Martin, C.M., founder of the house in Turin.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online
http://stvincentimages.cstcis.cti.depaul.edu:8181/
The Marquis Emanuele Brignole-Sale.
Seventeenth-century painting by Giovanni Bernardo Carbone.
Collection of the Albergo dei Poveri, Genoa, Italy
“Il Cardinale Stefano Durazzo, Arcivescovo di Genova.”
Seventeenth-century portrait by Giovanni Bernardo Carbone.
Collection of the Musei di Strada Nuova: Palazzo Bianco, Genoa, Italy
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Vincent de Paul sending his missionaries, priests kneeling behind him.

Stained-glass window by Laurent and Gsel, Paris, no date.  
Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online  
http://stvincentimages.estcis.cti.depaul.edu:8181/
The high altar and funerary monument of Cardinal Stefano Durazzo.
Church of Santa Maria in Monterone, Rome, Italy.
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