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Vincent de Paul and the Episcopate of France

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Historians of Saint Vincent de Paul, both past and present, have described how Anne of Austria, the queen regent of France, appointed the founder of the Congregation of the Mission to the Council of Conscience and thus put him in a position to have an influence on the naming of bishops. Without making any claim to utilizing new material, much less exhausting the subject, I would like to clarify the matter somewhat. In this regard Pierre Coste has written:

Thanks to Saint Vincent, many dioceses were governed by pastors animated with an apostolic zeal that formed a striking contrast with the worldliness of their seniors in the episcopacy. Let it suffice to name Lescot, of Chartres; Perrochel, of Boulogne; Caulet, of Pamiers; Habert, of Vabres; Bassompierre, of Oloron and then of Saintes; Liverdi, of Tréguier; Sevin, of Sarlat and then of Cahors; Bosquet, of Lodève and then of Montpellier, and Brandom, of Périgueux.

This assertion for the most part is justified. Unfortunately it lacks any reference or source and was apparently inspired by some older biographies. It seems a bit rash to attribute the promotion of Doctor Jacques Lescot, Cardinal Richelieu’s confessor, to the influence of Monsieur Vincent. In addition, the contrast between the apostolic zeal of the protégés of Vincent de Paul and the worldliness of their predecessors is quite typical of a hagiographic style intent on exalting its hero by
making him stand out against a bleak background. Admittedly, on this point Coste did not need to give any reference. An entire historical tradition, not totally extinct even today, regularly paints the episcopate of pre-revolutionary France in the darkest colors. More recent works are beginning to improve this image. Nevertheless, more research and clarification are needed on this point. Therefore, after a few remarks on the episcopate and episcopal nominations at the beginning of the seventeenth century, we shall seek to understand the place that Monsieur Vincent himself occupied in the affairs of church and state and the role he was able to play in them. Then we will identify some of the bishops who were nominated through his intervention, or at least with his agreement.

I. The Episcopate in the Time of Monsieur Vincent

The story of the bishops of pre-revolutionary France is a familiar one: bishops as civil servants, appointed by the king, bound to the government from which they obtained their miter and to which they looked for advancement and preferment. It would take too long to cite all the history books in which this assertion is made. It is true that after 1516, title 3 of the Concordat of Bologna gave to the king of France the right to submit to the pope the names of those whom he wanted to have appointed to the consistorial benefices, that is, to bishoprics and abbeys. If the candidate presented was qualified, the pope was bound to grant the bulls of canonical investiture. There is no denying that under the Valois kings this procedure was the source of many abuses. Bishoprics and abbeys endowed with rich revenues were used to reward individuals or families for services rendered to the state. The following, however, should also be noted.

1) It was not the Concordat of Bologna but the piety of the faithful that during the course of centuries endowed the episcopal sees or abbeys with real estate or seigneurial and ecclesiastical rights, especially tithes, which made these rich benefices tempting objects for greedy families or individuals.

2) It is therefore an error to believe that the bull of Leo X which granted to Francis I and his successors the right of nomination to the episcopate removed these bishoprics from the power of the church and put them in the hands of the laity. On the one hand, the older system established by the Pragmatic Sanction, that is, election of bishops by cathedral chapters, left the door open to influences by both the court
and the local feudal system. The concordat had the advantage of determining clearly who was responsible for making the choice.

(3) It is also erroneous to believe that the church lost all control over the choice of candidates. The bulls of canonical investiture were granted only after an inquiry and a report presented in the consistory by the cardinal protector of the nation, demonstrating that the candidate possessed the requisite qualities, the minimum age of twenty-seven, academic degrees, etc. There were occasions when the pope refused to grant bulls to candidates of the king of France. This is seen in the fact that the papal nuncio in Poland tried to persuade King Stefan Batory to give up a presentation by pointing out to him the example of the king of France, who withdrew some nominations after remonstrance by the pope. It was one of the functions of the nuncio to watch over these nominations, as we shall see in some cases in which Monsieur Vincent was involved.

(4) No matter how great may have been the carelessness of the Valois kings in the presentation of certain candidates and the abuses of confidence and the simony denounced by the reforming prelates, it must be noted that the assemblies of the clergy at the end of the sixteenth century, composed of those prelates nominated by the king, were the most persistent in protesting against the royal nominations, even resorting to the threat that the king would die childless if he continued to interfere in appointments to benefices. It was only in 1615 that the ecclesiastical chamber of the Estates General gave up campaigning for a return to election by chapters in favor of entreating the king to make good nominations. To this end, it suggested to Louis XIII that he “choose six ecclesiastics and two members of his council to establish a council which will have the power and authority of Your Majesty to examine the qualities and abilities of those who will hereafter be presented to him to be nominated for bishoprics.” Twenty-eight years later, the queen regent, Anne of Austria, would grant the ecclesiastical chamber’s petition of 1615 and establish the Council of Conscience, to which she would call Vincent de Paul. During the interval, there was no lack of advisers to help the king in the choice of bishops—Cardinals de

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la Rochefoucauld and de Gondi, both members of his councils with the title of ministers of state—before Cardinal Richelieu brought the direction of these matters under his control. To form an idea of the quality of these choices, it will suffice to look at the information about candidates for the episcopate that the nuncios gave in their correspondence a few years before Vincent was made a part of the Council of Conscience.

On 1 July 1616 the nuncio Alberto Bolognetti described the nominations of Abras de Raconis, Alain de Solminihac, and Antoine Godeau, "all persons held in high regard for their great goodness, zeal, and worth," to the vacant sees of Lavaur, Cahors, and Grasse.\(^6\) We will see that one of these prelates, Solminihac, bishop of Cahors, kept up a regular correspondence with Vincent de Paul with regard to the churches to be provided for and the prelates to be chosen.

Meanwhile, on 14 October 1636, three months after his first report, Bolognetti wrote again about the candidate whom the king had nominated to the see of Lavaur. Abras de Raconis was born of non-Catholic parents and needed a dispensation, because of which Rome asked for further information. The nuncio responded that Raconis was a person of great piety, learning, and worth, as is evident from the works he has published, and his ardent and continuous preaching, and the general esteem of persons of quality, to which must be added an exemplary life. He is filled with zeal for the Catholic religion and is a relentless adversary of heretics. Besides, he is, to general approval, the director of a congregation founded for the conversion of non-Catholics. Thanks to them, many have actually been converted.\(^7\)

On 19 May 1637 Bolognetti wrote to Cardinal Antonio Barberini, "to the church of Bayonne, which recently became vacant on the death of the bishop, His Majesty last week appointed Monsieur M. Fouquet, formerly councillor in the Parlement of Paris, and regarded as a person of great goodness and virtue [persona stimata di molta bontà e virtù].\(^8\) The following month the nuncio called Nicolas Pavillon, the nominee to the see of Alet, "a person esteemed for piety, exemplary zeal, and great virtue.\(^9\) In September the abbot of Saint Mars, chamberlain to Cardinal Richelieu, was promised the see Auxerre in place of Dominique Ségquier, who was transferred to Meaux. The abbot of Saint Mars was generally

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\(^6\) BV, Barberini Latini, 8129, f. 67.
\(^7\) Ibid., f. 140.
\(^8\) Ibid., f. 58.
\(^9\) Ibid., f. 43.
regarded as "a person of great merit." It should not be presumed that these were stereotyped formulas. On 31 March 1637 Bolognetti made a simple announcement of the promotion of Monsieur Cupif, "archdeacon and official of Cornouaille," to Saint Pol de-Léon. On 1 December he made an equally simple statement that the king had appointed to Le Mans "Monsieur de la Ferté, his chaplain, who was recently here [in Rome] with the cardinal of Lyons." There were also dark spots in the picture. The nuncio was not unaware of them, neither was Richelieu nor the king himself. On 29 December 1637 a coded dispatch from Bolognetti informed the secretary of state about them:

Representation was again made to the king that there were some bishops who were not leading a life appropriate to their station. His Majesty ordered a general investigation of this matter to be carried out in secret, and Cardinal Richelieu said that three or four of that kind had been found out, and that he thought of dealing with it by means of coadjutor bishops. His Majesty, seeing that the archbishop of Rheims and the bishop of Metz were prolonging their stay in this city without intending to receive holy orders, informed them that it should be done as soon as possible, and they should return to their sees or else other pastors would be provided for those churches.

In addition, an incident two year later attested to the vigilance over episcopal appointments exercised by the Roman curia. On 26 July 1639 the Consistorial Congregation refused to grant bulls to Hugues de Labatut. He had been appointed bishop of Comminges by Louis XIII but was refused his bulls because the archbishop of Narbonne, rather than the nuncio, had undertaken the process of inquiry. In view of the strained relations between the French court and Rome, the pope finally accepted the dossier prepared in Narbonne, but the right of the nuncio was reaffirmed against the sentences of the local civil court. The nuncio, Rinucio Scotti, received the witnesses who came to testify on behalf of the other prelates nominated by Louis XIII. It is worth noting that in this affair the qualifications of the candidate were never at any time contested by Rome.

Contemporaries claimed that Richelieu was already beginning to take advice from Monsieur Vincent in the choice of bishops, and it is

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8BV, Barberini Latini, 8132, f. 123.
9BV, Barberini Latini, 8131, f. 27.
10Ibid., f. 98.
11BV, Barberini Latini, 8132, f. 153v.
12Blet, "Le concordat," 272-75.
certain that several members of the Tuesday Conferences were appointed at that time. In sum, if after the death of Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII and then Anne of Austria turned to Vincent de Paul to choose bishops to present to the pope, this was to maintain, or perhaps, to better the level of the episcopate, but not to remedy a desperate situation.

II. Vincent de Paul and the Council of Conscience

Coste tells us that Vincent de Paul was a member of the Council of Conscience from 1643 to 1652. Original documents on this matter are sparse, however, and it is good to begin by checking the testimony of contemporaries found in these documents and also to try to see what lies behind the name Council of Conscience.

In the beginning Louis XIII, deprived of the services of Cardinal Richelieu four months before, asked Monsieur Vincent to give him his opinion concerning possible candidates for the episcopate. Vincent de Paul himself informs us of this explicitly in the letter of 6 April 1643 to Bernard Codoing, superior of the house of the Mission in Rome. "His Majesty had his confessor ask me to send him a list of those who seemed to me to be worthy of this dignity."15

Towards the end of April Louis XIII, who felt death approaching, wanted to be assisted by the Saint Vincent in his last moments and so had him summoned to Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Vincent was actually at the king’s side when he expired early in the afternoon of 14 May 1643. Here again we have the documented testimony of Monsieur Vincent himself in a letter to Codoing of 15 May.

Yesterday it pleased God to call our good king to himself, the same day on which he had begun his reign thirty-three years ago. Her Majesty wanted me to assist him at his death together with the bishops of Lisieux and Meaux, his principal chaplain, and the Reverend Father Dinet, his confessor. As long as I have been on earth, I have never seen anyone die more like a Christian. Never have I seen more raising of the heart to God, more tranquility, more awareness of the smallest thing which seemed to be a sin, more goodness or more judgment in a person of his rank. The day before yesterday, when the doctors saw him drowsy and with his eyes turning, they feared he was dying and told his confessor, who awakened him at once and told him that the hour had come when he must commend his soul to God. At the same time this spirit, so filled with God’s, tenderly embraced the good priest for a long time, thanked him for the good news he had given him, and immediately afterwards, lifting his eyes and his

15Ibid., 387-88
arms to heaven, he said the *Te Deum laudamus* and finished it with so much fervor that the mere recollection moves me now as I am speaking to you.\(^n\)

After the king’s death, the queen regent, Anne of Austria, to whom Vincent de Paul brought the consolations that a priest and a saint can bring in such a circumstance, decided to establish a council for ecclesiastical affairs. This is not the place to explain the role that a king played in the life of the French church. One of his most important prerogatives was, in virtue of the Concordat of 1516 (known as the Concordat of Bologna), the appointment to consistorial benefices, that is, abbeys and bishoprics. However, many other affairs that more or less directly touched on religion depended upon the king, for example, the execution of the Edict of Nantes granting freedom of religion to Protestants.

\(^n\)Ibid., 393.
The council that Anne of Austria envisioned was to help the government to decide these questions. Coste specifies that the members of the council would have been Cardinal Jules Mazarin, Chancellor Pierre Séguier, the two bishops of Beauvais and Lisieux, and the penitencier of Paris, Jacques Charon, together with Monsieur Vincent. Madame de Motteville goes so far as to affirm that Monsieur Vincent was the head of the council. Such an affirmation would have to be corroborated by documentary evidence. The only such document, a letter of the nuncio who summarizes Monsieur Vincent’s participation in the council, does not say that much. The nuncio, Cardinal Girolamo Grimaldi, does not seem to have mentioned this appointment explicitly and he refers to the council and its members only in connection with a particular matter, which was specifically entrusted to this council. He wrote on 12 June 1643:

I spoke to the queen of the detriments that the Holy See has received in past years with regard to the ecclesiastical benefices of Lorraine. When I entreated Her Majesty to see that the Apostolic See was restored to its just rights, I received very favorable answers and her agreement, with the result that the matter was examined by the congregation of ecclesiastical benefices, or “of conscience,” composed of Cardinal Mazarin, the bishops of Lisieux and of Beauvais, and of Father Vincent, general of the Missions.

One of Vincent’s own letters refers to this duty, which he does not explicitly name, but which is evidently his role in the royal council. It is dated 18 June. “I have never been more worthy of sympathy than I am now nor have I ever had more need of your prayers than at present in the new employment I have. I hope it will not be for a long time.” In fact, it lasted for ten years.

Undoubtedly the organization of which the general of the missionaries was a member should not be drawn with strokes that are too precise. We have just seen the nuncio speaking about the congregation of ecclesiastical benefices or “of conscience.” In 1647 the bishop of Cahors would write “Council of Conscience.” But the Vincent’s biographer, Pierre Collet, speaking of the “ecclesiastical council,” could

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17 Ibid., 406.
18 Ibid.
19 BV, Barberini Latini, 8217, f. 122.
20 CED, 2:406.
21 CED, 3:228-29
have been inspired by Vincent himself who wrote on 2 June 1645 to the Count of Brienne in the name of “the Council of Ecclesiastical Affairs,” or more simply to the bishop of Périgueux, on 1 April 1651, in the name of the “ecclesiastical council.”

Be that as it may, it is clear that the superior of the Congregation of the Mission found himself raised by the will of the queen regent to a position of authority. But it must not be thought that all ecclesiastical affairs passed through his hands, not even all those that dealt with ecclesiastical promotions. The nuncio Grimaldi, who held office from 1641 to 1644, hardly ever mentioned having recourse to Monsieur Vincent for questions of this kind. For example, at the end of September 1643 he pointed out to the secretary of state that Doctor Lescot, nominated by Louis XIII to the bishopric of Chartres and promoted by the pope in the consistory of 22 June 1643, was facing the opposition of the duke of Orléans, who wanted the see of Chartres reserved for his protégé, the Abbé de la Rivière. In order to mollify the duke, Mazarin asked Lescot not to be consecrated, but the latter was determined to obey the canons, which prescribed that the bishop be consecrated immediately after receiving his bulls. Grimaldi had discussed this with Mazarin without much success. Finally, it was the general of the Oratory, the duke’s confessor, who convinced his penitent to withdraw his claim, so that Lescot could be ordained without opposition. Vincent’s name was not mentioned in the entire affair in the nuncio’s correspondence. The following month, Grimaldi heard that the bishop of Tréguier wanted to resign his bishopric in favor of a certain Constantin, who a few years before had published some suspect propositions on the authority of the church and the pope. Grimaldi wrote again:

I spoke about it to the queen and Cardinal Mazarin, pointing out to them that France had no lack of subjects without reproach who could be raised to the episcopate and that one could only provoke scandal by letting it be said that Her Majesty was appointing a person suspect in the area of doctrine. Her Majesty appreciated the advice. On that basis I want to think that Constantin will remain totally excluded from his claims, in spite of the great maneuvers by persons of authority in his favor.

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23CED, 2:527.  
24CED, 4:166.  
26Ibid., f. 139.
It was then directly with the queen and her prime minister that the nuncio intervened, and successfully, since a friend of Monsieur Vincent was appointed to Tréguier. Nevertheless, Vincent's name did not appear in the documents.

Again, it was to Mazarin that Grimaldi turned in order to express his concerns about the nephew of the archbishop of Sens, appointed by the king as his uncle's coadjutor and already known for his Jansenist sympathies. The matter, however, had already been settled by the royal nomination. Mazarin admitted that he also was disturbed by the tendencies of the young Gondrin (the name of the person in question) and he declared to the nuncio that he would be happy if the pope delayed sending the bulls in order to give him time to find a solution. A discreet intervention by Monsieur Vincent is certainly not to be ruled out, but we do not have any evidence of it.

In contrast, the role of Monsieur Vincent was finally mentioned by Grimaldi in a similar matter, and the nuncio's report leads us to believe that the initiative for intervention belonged again to the superior of the Mission. The patent for the abbey of Saint Cyran, left vacant by the death of the celebrated abbé, had been given to his nephew, Martin de Barcos. The nephew was as responsible as his uncle for the diffusion of Jansenist doctrines. Grimaldi wrote:

Strangers to sound doctrine and under the appearance of an austere devotion, they have deceived many. Permit me to give this advice to Your Eminence, because if you really want his bulls to be refused, or that their execution may be delayed, I have been assured by Father Vincent, who has great influence with the queen in matters of consequence, that this would not displease Her Majesty. Although she granted the patent in an unguarded moment at the insistence of persons of high rank, she still has not made up her mind about coming out in favor of an opposite opinion today.

Every indication is that Vincent went to see the nuncio to suggest the refusal of the bulls after having informed the queen of the heterodoxy of Barcos and having come to an agreement with her about speaking of it to the nuncio.

But it was only on the eve of his return to Rome, 1 April 1644, that Grimaldi declared that it was he himself who had sought the help of Monsieur Vincent. The episcopal see of Toul had been vacant a long

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27 BV, Barberini Latini, 8242, f. 104.
28 Ibid., f. 78.
time because of difficulties between the pope and the king of France over the right of nomination and the person to be nominated.

Your Eminence should also be aware that I did not fail to ask for a response concerning the subject proposed by Your Eminence for the bishopric of Toul, to the point of having made the queen, Monsieur Vincent, and the other members hesitate about it. I stated that I was clearing my conscience of the prejudices that could result for the church and for the salvation of souls for the many years of delay that this bishopric remains without a pastor.

In spite of everything, confessed Grimaldi, he had obtained nothing.29 This time it was Monsieur Vincent, not Mazarin, who was mentioned after the queen. No doubt it was easier to ascribe scruples to Monsieur Vincent than to the cardinal minister. Perhaps, also, Grimaldi’s failure lets us see the limits of the influence of the general of the Mission.

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29BV, Barberini Latini, 8243, f. 114v.
Regarding a tax on buildings for which one of his religious had asked him to intercede with the queen regent, Vincent responded on the following 20 November that “I would gain nothing by speaking to the queen about what you have told me concerning the outrage that was committed in the matter of the buildings. The affair was settled by the late king [Louis XIII], and those who have the management of these affairs will undo whatever I could say. Nevertheless, I will say something.” Although he foresaw failure, Vincent had misgivings about remaining silent. It is not surprising that from that year, 1644, rumors were spread of his disgrace and dismissal from the council.

Nevertheless, in July 1645 the bishop of Alet, Nicolas Pavillon, eager to complete his plans for the reform of the church, wrote to Vincent, “because Divine Providence has called you for its greater honor and glory to the care of the most important ecclesiastical affairs of this kingdom, and has inspired you for a long time with such great zeal for procuring in all cases the reform of the good order and discipline of the church, I have presumed to send you a brief report.” The bishop of Alet was appealing to Vincent de Paul as to a person invested with an official duty in church and state. There is no need to interpret this employment as merely an administrative and bureaucratic one. His function was to advise the queen and his privilege was to have habitual access to her. That is why his field of action had no strict limits, as the various names he used for the council of which he was a member suggest. His work was far from being limited to the choice of bishops and abbots. That is why we see the apostolic nuncio, Niccolò di Bagno, discussing with him various matters concerning the interests of the Holy See. Thus Bagno wrote on 21 June 1651:

Monsieur Vincent de Paul told me that having had occasion to speak to the queen about peace between the crowns, and of the bad behavior of the ambassador in Rome, and of the jubilee of the holy year, Her Majesty responded that it was certain the Spaniards did not want peace and that it was not the proper time to ask His Holiness because his spirit was very much opposed [alienato] to the service of the king and to the welfare of this kingdom.

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9CED, 2:493
10Ibid., 500.
11Ibid., 536-37.
12AV, Nunziatura di Francia, 103, f. 165v. [The reference is to the war between France and Spain, begun by Cardinal Richelieu as part of the Thirty Years War and continued by both countries after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The pope, Innocent X, was pro-Spanish in sympathies. Ed.]
To this the nuncio replied that the Pope Innocent X had considerable affection for France, but that his intentions were always interpreted in a bad light and that the bad relations were “by act of Cardinal Mazarin.”

As the secretariat of state in Rome continued to inform the nuncio of the bad manners of the ambassador and of his attendants, Bagno replied that he passed on all information orally or in writing “by Goulas, the secretary, to the Duke of Orléans; by Montreville, to the Prince of Condi; and by Monsieur Vincent de Paul to the Queen,” and he himself spoke to the Countess of Brienne. But in reply, he was told that the information the court received from its agents did not correspond to his. And in the same letter, a little further on, Bagno repeated that he had again transmitted the information received from Rome “to the countess of Brienne and Monsieur Vincent de Paul,” but in fact, without results.

Two weeks later, the nuncio described another meeting with Vincent de Paul. This time it was the superior of the Mission who had discussed matters in Rome with the count of Brienne, but he had received responses as unsatisfactory as the preceding ones.

There is no indication that the nuncio informed the secretariat of state of Vincent’s departure from the Council of Conscience. On the face of it, it seems significant that his name is no longer found in the list of intermediaries to whom the nuncio had recourse in an affair even more thorny than the incidents at Rome between pontifical spies and the personnel of the French ambassador. The nuncio, Archbishop Neri Corsini, had been named to replace Bagno at the French court. Scarceley had he arrived in Marseille, when he was notified that he could not continue his journey. Bagno tried to send his protests to the queen. He had spoken, he wrote 20 December 1652, “to the secretary of state, to many prelates and ministers and particularly to the lords of Guise, of Lesdiguière, to the Duke of Angoulême, to the archbishop of Paris, to Cardinal de Retz, to the archbishop of Bordeaux, and to others of the parlement, to other courtiers and friends of the queen ... but in vain.” And this time he made no mention of the superior of the Congregation of the Mission.

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34 Ibid., 166.
35 Ibid., f. 192r and v.
36 Ibid., f. 215.
37 Ibid., 105, f. 269.
Only three months before, Alain de Solminihac had already expressed his regret upon learning that Monsieur Vincent had left the Council of Conscience. “I really believe that you are not losing anything personally by being freed of the embarrassment that you were in. But the church is losing very much from it. So it would be desirable if you always were in that employment.”

Though we have no documentary evidence of it, his departure was probably occasioned by his involvement in the area of general politics. It seems that he was involved in the negotiations between the court and the princes during the Fronde in June-July 1652. A letter from him to Mazarin at that time is a clear indication. “I told His Royal Highness [the duke of Orléans] that if the king was reestablished in his authority and a decree of justification were granted, that Your Eminence would give the satisfaction that is desired.”

At about the same time, he wrote to the queen to congratulate her on the generous measures she had taken on behalf of the Parisians (who were still in revolt) by letting wheat enter the city. On 16 August he appealed to the pope to help restore unity to the royal family. And on 11 September, drawing on his knowledge of the Parisians, he had no hesitation about writing Mazarin to suggest the immediate return of the king to Paris, with a general amnesty to enhance the return. There was a hint that Mazarin should not accompany him for the time being. It was enough that the king be reinstated in his capital, but once his authority was reaffirmed, he would have his minister return whenever he wished. To judge by subsequent events, this suggestion, coming as it did after many others, did not please the cardinal minister. Vincent’s advice, however, was followed either because the young sovereign and his mother had been convinced by the superior of the Mission or because Mazarin had reached the same conclusions. Louis XIV returned to Paris on 21 October, and Mazarin stayed away for a time. However, Vincent de Paul himself had left the court and the council a month before, since on 2 October the bishop of Cahors had written him expressing the regret that his departure caused him.

If the place that he held in the council permitted Vincent to offer advice to the powerful cardinal, so much the more did he feel himself...
in a position to offer it to other prelates in the kingdom. In 1651 a bishop revealed to him his intention of coming to court because he had been despoiled of the revenues of his abbey by the war. Vincent gently dissuaded him from this course and attempted to persuade the bishop to remain in his diocese. He explained that another prelate, who had lost still more than he, had come to court and had gained nothing by it. In contrast, the bishop of Sarlat, by remaining at home, had made his city return to obedience. “It is something which is now very much to be desired and which will be very favorably noted.”

To another prelate, who had a lawsuit pending before the council, he declared that it would be better to conclude his dispute by a compromise. He explained to the bishop that he had a reputation for “going to law too easily,” which did not incline the judges in his favor. Vincent went on to say, “As for me, I admire Our Lord Jesus Christ who disapproved of going to trial and yet willed to be involved in one and lost.” Undoubtedly the bishop thought that he was upholding the cause of Jesus Christ, but the fact remained “that this unfavorable opinion of the council could hinder you in the present instance.” That was why the wisest thing was to search for ways to compromise.

That advice, given for a particular case, did not prevent Monsieur Vincent from using his influence at court and in the council to intervene in favor of prelates who were defending at law the rights necessary for the exercise of their ministries. The bishop of Chalons, Félix Vialart, could write him on 26 July 1644: “I am very much obliged to you for the offer you made to my mother some time ago to get me a decree from the council for the amalgamation of parishes. I accept the offer, if you please, and will consider it a great favor.”

The correspondence received or sent by Vincent de Paul shows us the diversity of affairs which the Council of Conscience was able to handle and how Monsieur Vincent’s authority went beyond the question of appointments to French bishoprics. Still, around that problem revolved the greater part of the business with which the superior general had to busy himself as a member of the council.

Saint Vincent’s biographers have pointed out two matters of general interest concerning the discipline of the French church to which

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44Ibid., 334-35.
46Ibid., 4:88 [sic for 468].
47See CED, 2: 462, 463, 512, 516, 533.
Vincent would have given special care: that of René de Rieux, bishop of Saint-Pol-de-Léon, and the erection of the diocese of La Rochelle. 48

Rene de Rieux, bishop of Saint-Pol-de-Léon since 1619, had been deposed in 1635 by four bishops, apostolic commissaries appointed by Pope Urban VIII at the request of Louis XIII to judge the prelates implicated in the revolt of Languedoc. Rieux was found guilty of having helped more or less directly the flight of queen Marie de Médicis out of the kingdom. He protested against the severity of the sentence, but in vain, because the commissaries had the power to pronounce a final sentence without appeal. Consequently in January 1640, Robert Cupif was lawfully installed in the diocese of Saint-Pol-de-Léon. But after the deaths of Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII, and Urban VIII, the General Assembly of the Clergy of 1645 obtained from Queen Anne of Austria and Pope Innocent X a review of the case and the rehabilitation of Rieux. Cupif then obtained a decree from the council to defer the execution of the sentence which restored Rieux to his church. To end this matter peacefully, Monsieur Vincent advised the queen to appoint Cupif to the see of Dol, which was done by a letter of 24 November 1648. Thus, when René de Rieux died at Paris on 8 March 1651, he was again juridically in possession of his bishopric of Saint-Pol-de-Léon. 49

At the same time, Monsieur Vincent was engrossed in another question, which was also bringing bishops and dioceses into litigation. Father Coste writes that “to him was chiefly due the transference of the episcopal see of Maillezais to La Rochelle ... On his advice, the Queen gave the archbishopric of Bordeaux to the Bishop of Maillezais, the bishopric of La Rochelle to the Bishop of Saintes, the bishopric of Saintes to the Bishop of Oloron.” 50 It was a question that had been put in abeyance in the preceding reign. The day after the capture of La Rochelle, Louis XIII decided to have the see of Maillezais transferred to Fontenay-le-Comte. Pope Urban VIII had the bulls issued and the king delivered his letters patent, but these documents were not registered by the parlement. 51 The matter was taken up again during the regency, and Monsieur Vincent was inevitably involved in it. A new request was addressed to the pope, Innocent X, and he gave his consent. His bulls of

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49 Ibid., 430.
50 Ibid., 432 [English edition, 2:235-36.]
51 *Recueil des actes*, 2: col. 31-32. [The port city of La Rochelle was captured from the Huguenots on 28 October 1628 as part of Richelieu’s campaign to suppress political dissent in France. Laws and state papers had to be registered by the Parlement of Paris, a law court, in order to take legal effect. Ed.]
4 May 1648 decreed the transfer of the bishopric of Maillezais to La Rochelle, with the formation of a new diocese, certain parts of which were to be taken away from the neighboring diocese of Saintes. 52

Henri de Béthune, who occupied the see of Maillezais, was appointed to the see of Bordeaux. For the new archbishop, the elevation offered nothing but advantages, and it was agreed that his successor at Maillezais would leave him a pension of 2,000 livres from the latter see. By way of compensation, Jacques Raoul, the bishop-elect (though only provisionally) of Maillezais, hoped to obtain an abbey. It was about these negotiations that Saint Vincent wrote to Mazarin on 20 August 1646.

This is to introduce the bishop of Saintes [Raoul] who is leaving to find Your Eminence. He will confirm what I have had the honor of writing to Your Eminence concerning Bordeaux and Maillezais for La Rochelle and will tell you how the partisans of the bishop of Maillezais [Béthune] accept this agreement and thank Your Eminence for it. And as the said bishop of maillezais wishes that Your Eminence would be pleased to have him hope for some abbey with an income to compensate for the decrease of revenues which he suffers in this transfer, nevertheless he submits to Your Eminence’s will. He has done very well at Maillezais and gives promise of doing still better at Bordeaux. 53

Monsieur Vincent knew, then, the prelates he recommended to the cardinal minister. His relations were particularly close with Jacques Raoul de la Guibourgère, appointed to La Rochelle, as is borne out by his previous correspondence with the prelate, who had employed the priests of the Mission in his diocese of Saintes. 54

Mazarin responded to a letter of 20 August a few days later and informed Monsieur Vincent that the queen approved all he had done in that matter. The cardinal minister’s response made very clear the role that Monsieur Vincent played in the preliminary arrangements in the erection of the bishopric of La Rochelle and the appointment of Raoul to the see.

Monsieur, I gave the queen an account of what you have arranged with the bishop of Maillezais. She approves it entirely and wants everything to be carried out to the last detail. For that purpose I am sending you the patent of nomination she has issued for the said bishop of Maillezais to the archbishopric of Bordeaux. There is no doubt that for his part he will

52Ibid., 22-31.
53CED, 3:15-16.
54Ibid., 2:261, 267, 397, 506.
be very happy to put his resignation into your hands. As for the 2,000 livres of income and the 400 in benefices on which you have agreed, Her Majesty has commanded me to assure you of it on her behalf in order that nothing will delay the conclusion of this business.\textsuperscript{55}

On 21 November 1646, the queen had the appointment of Henri de Béthune to the see of Bordeaux dispatched and the latter received his canonical appointment in the consistory of 18 May 1648, two weeks after a consistorial decree transferred the see of Maillezais to La Rochelle and confirmed Jacques Raoul in that see.

Though promoted to the see of La Rochelle on 4 May 1648, Raoul did not go to his diocese until the end of the year. The beginnings were not easy, since they were complicated by economic difficulties and the struggles of the Fronde.\textsuperscript{56} “And it is for this that I thank God as well as for all the other good that you do both inside and outside your city, by which the people are upheld in their duty towards God, the church, and their rules. Even the heretics who see it also see the excellence of our holy religion, the importance and the grace of the bishop’s office, and what it can do when it is religiously administered, as it is by your sacred person.”\textsuperscript{57}

The solution of these questions, as has been seen, involved the appointment and transfer of several bishops to various episcopal sees. It is certain that these nominations constituted Monsieur Vincent’s principal function as royal councillor for ecclesiastical affairs. Unfortunately, most of this activity has eluded our researches.

An otherwise ordinary document gives an example of Saint Vincent’s concern for appointing good bishops in France. It is his letter of 24 February 1645 to Charles de Montchal, the archbishop of Toulouse. The issue was that of filling the see of Vabres, vacant since the previous November because of the death of the bishop, François de la Valette. His brother, Jean de la Valette, abbot of Beaulieu, made “earnest petitions to have the bishopric,” and varying accounts were received concerning him. It was Monsieur Vincent who spoke to the archbishop so as to have trustworthy information concerning the candidate.

In the name of God, Monseigneur, please tell me who he is, if he is competent and pious, and, finally, if he has the qualities appropriate to this dignity, and especially if he is a priest ... I will wait in making a

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., 3:56.


\textsuperscript{57}CED, 4:429.
decision about what you will be kind enough to write about him. I presume the boldness to entreat you, Monseigneur, to send me what you know as soon as possible and to assure you that no one will learn anything about it from me.58

Was the information of Montchal unfavorable or did the abbot of Beaulieu withdraw his request? In any case, the successor of François de la Valette to the bishopric of Vabres was not his brother, the abbot of Beaulieu, but Isaac Habert, nominated by the king on 30 April 1645 and promoted in the consistory of 18 September in that same year.59

Unfortunately, documents this informative are rare. On the other hand, a certain number of letters received by Monsieur Vincent clarify how his contemporaries viewed the situation of the general of the Mission and the influence that underlay his work in the Council of Conscience as well as his zeal for the quality of recruits for the episcopate.

On 3 May 1643, before the appointment of Monsieur Vincent to the Council of Conscience, but after Louis XIII had asked him to furnish a list of candidates, Alain de Solminihac, the bishop of Cahors, told Saint Vincent of the situation of the diocese of Périgueux, which was nearby and which “was in desperate straits.” Solminihac had already recommended to Richelieu a qualified candidate in the person of Monsieur Brandom, and the secretary of state, François Sublet, Seigneur de Noyers, had given reason to hope that the cardinal minister would accede to his wishes. Solminihac asked Monsieur Vincent to intercede with Mazarin for the same purpose. “I ask you also, if you judge it expedient, to explain to Monseigneur that it is very important that it be filled by a person who has all the requisite qualities for a see of such importance. It is close to ruin.”60

At first it was Jean d’Éstrades who was appointed by the queen to the see of Périgueux. But Solminihac explained to Monsieur Vincent in a letter of 31 July 1646 that Éstrades hoped to obtain his bulls without paying any fees and he deferred requesting their issuance until there was an improvement in the relations between Pope Innocent X and the king, which was another way of saying between the pope and Cardinal Mazarin. Solminihac strongly reproached the bishop-elect for this delay and wrote that “if he delays obtaining his bulls until there is an accommodation between the pope and the king, this delay will be the

58Ibid., 2:504.
59Eubel, Hierarchia Catholica ... [No further bibliographical information given. Ed.]
60CED, 2:388-89.
cause of a multitude of sins being committed in his diocese and very many souls will be lost, something that is beyond doubt, and God will ask him to give an accounting of them.”

The bishop of Cahors asked Vincent to intervene so as to oblige Éstrades “not to lose a moment in going to his diocese which is in such desolation, both spiritual and temporal, that it cannot be imagined.” Solminihac wrote this to Vincent on 31 July 1646. An entire year passed without bringing any betterment to the diocese of Périgueux. On 3 March 1647 Solminihac again entreated Monsieur Vincent “to have pity on the dioceses of Montauban and Sarlat and on mine, which suffers from their disorder.”

On 20 August 1647 the bishop of Cahors explained to Monsieur Vincent that he had again pressed Éstrades to obtain his bulls and take possession of his see. But Éstrades was negotiating with the bishop of Condom in order to obtain the succession to that see. It was better for Vincent to have the bishop of Condom’s resignation accepted so that “that devastated diocese of Périgueux may be promptly filled by a person who had the qualities needed to govern it.” It was necessary, first of all, to be on the alert to keep out the bishop of Condom’s nephew, who had designs on Périgueux when Monsieur Vincent himself had judged him unworthy of the bishopric of Bayonne.

In the following November, Solminihac insisted that Monsieur Vincent “ought to remind Her Majesty of what she often assured me, that she would nominate an apostolic man as bishop of Périgueux, which is entirely abandoned to pillage. Souls are damned by the thousands et non est qui recogiter [and there is no one who takes notice].” However, the bishop of Cahors did not limit his anxieties to the bishopric of Périgueux. He rejoiced on learning that Monsieur Sevin was appointed to the bishopric of Sarlat and that the letters of the king were going to be delivered on the twentieth of the month. Finally for the bishopric of Consérans, “When you see the queen I beg you to tell Her Majesty that the bishopric of Consérans, which is at present vacant, is in a state of extreme desolation.”

The question of the bishopric of Sarlat was effectively settled as Solminihac expected. He wrote to Monsieur Vincent on 4 December, “I
thank you with all my heart for all the trouble you have taken to give us
Monsieur Sevin as bishop of Sarlat." In the following April, the
solicitude of the bishop of Cahors turned towards the diocese of Rodez
"almost as ruined as that of Périgueux." He wrote to Vincent on this
subject, "I beseech you in the name of God to make every possible effort
that this diocese be provided with a pastor such as the state to which it
is reduced requires." Not only should an apostolic person be placed
there, but a prelate "endowed with great strength of spirit and a great
heart." In the end the prayers of Alain de Solminihac in favor of Périgueux
were answered, and on 22 July 1648 a letter of gratitude left Cahors. The
bishop sent Vincent "a thousand thanks for all the trouble you took to
give us Monsieur Brandom for Périgueux." We have already traced the interest of the bishop of Cahors and at
the same time the cares of Monsieur Vincent for the neighboring
dioceses. In 1650 Solminihac was thinking about Tulle, where the
bishop had just died, and he recommended to Vincent for this vacant
see a priest of his diocese "because I don't see anyone at all in Guyenne
who can fill this bishopric better than he." The correspondence of Monsieur Vincent with Solminihac does not
tell us about the procedures employed by Vincent to advance those
bishops whom one or the other judged worthy, but at least it attests to
Vincent's authority in this area. If he was bending every effort to
procure good bishops for the church of France, he was naturally doing
the best he could to turn away the candidates who seemed to him to be
unworthy, or at least undesirable. His, however, was not the only vote
in the council, and in the final analysis the nominations depended on
the queen. In a note of February 1646, Mazarin warned Vincent of her
intention to grant the bishopric of Bayeux to the son of the first president
of the Parlement of Paris, Mathieu Mole, in accord with a request that
this magistrate had made. The cardinal affirmed that the candidate had
all the requisite qualities, but he must not have been completely
convinced since he invited Monsieur Vincent to see the future bishop
and give him "the instructions necessary to acquit himself well of this
office." Historians of Monsieur Vincent say that he went to see the first

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1. Ibid., 255-56.
2. Ibid., 239-95. [sic for 293-95]
3. Ibid., 344.
4. Ibid., 4:25.
5. Ibid., 2:563-64.
president, whom he counted among his friends, to persuade him to give up his request but he could obtain nothing. It was in spite of Vincent de Paul that Edouard Molé was elevated to the see of Bayeux on 29 November 1648. But at the end of three years, in April 1652, death came to carry off the young prelate.

Vincent had more success in the diocese of Condom. The court was thinking of granting this see to Charles Louis de Lorraine, abbot of Chailli. Vincent wrote to Hugues de Lionne, one of Mazarin’s close collaborators, in order to present objections to him. On 10 October 1647 the cardinal minister responded to Vincent that the actions for which he reproached the candidate of the court “had never existed.” He continued, “I entreat you for your part to lose no time in making the inquiries that you may think necessary for your peace of mind in order that you may be fully informed and write me that you have learned, because Her Majesty desires for several important reasons that I speak to you at our first meeting in order to put an end to this affair without further delay.”

The cardinal’s imperious tone does not seem to have bothered Vincent. In any case, it did not deter him from what he thought was his duty, and he must have given the cardinal some clarifications different enough from those which the cardinal was expecting. The bishopric of Condom went to Éstrades who resigned that of Périgueux. At that time, however, there was a question of naming to Périgueux a nephew of the bishop who had resigned his see at Condom. In a letter of 20 August Solminihac informed Vincent of this in order to ask him to oppose it with his power. Vincent intervened successfully in the way Solminihac hoped for, as appears in a letter the bishop wrote to Vincent: “Monsieur d’Éstrades, nominated to the bishopric of Condom, wrote me recently that you had strongly opposed in the council that the abbé, of whom I had written you on his advice, should be appointed bishop of Périgueux. I cannot imagine how it is possible to think of giving bishoprics to persons of that sort, especially a bishopric as important as that of Périgueux.”

On the other hand, the provision of the bishopric of Le Mans was a failure for Vincent de Paul. Although Le Mans was not so close to Cahors, Solminihac did not fail to be interested in it. He wrote to Vincent

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70Ibid., 3:248.
71See above.
72CED, 3:228.
73Ibid., 256.
on 28 July 1648. “In the name of God do everything in your power and
influence to stop Monsieur de Lavardin from being named to the
bishopric of Le Mans for reasons that the bishop of Bazas will tell
you.” Emmanuel Philibert de Beaumanoir de Lavardin was, neverthe-
less, raised to the bishopric of Le Mans on 1 March 1649. Saint Vincent’s
biographers presume that their hero actually opposed this nomination
when they recount the embarrassing situation he was in when he
passed through Le Mans. Vincent arrived in Lavardin’s episcopal
city in 1649. “Vincent had not helped in his nomination; he knew it and
complained about it often and with great feeling.” The superior of the
Mission made the best of it with his usual humility. He sent two priests
of the seminary to request the prelate’s permission to stay a few days in
the seminary. To this the prelate responded graciously that Vincent
could stay as long as he wished.

Collet writes that at this date the bishop of Le Mans had not yet
received his bulls and should not then have been in the diocese. This
suggests that Lavardin did not concern himself with the fine points of
juridical formalities which were supposed to accompany his taking
possession. In October 1649 Vincent wrote to remind him that he had
not yet had his oath of fidelity registered in the chambre des comptes.
Consequently, the see remained “vacant en régale” and so the king had
the right to make appointments to benefices that did not involve the
care of souls. Vincent did not explain that in detail but contented
himself with pointing out its consequences, that is, that some shrewd
persons had already spoken to him about securing benefices in Le
Mans. Vincent had refused, but he explained it would be difficult to
continue doing so, and the candidates could obtain by other means
what he was refusing them. The simplest way would then be for the
bishop to hasten to fulfill the normal formalities. In that way the king’s
right would be ended and the bishop would enjoy all his rights.

This is the only allusion that I have found in the correspondence on the
question of the régale, which was going to provoke the famous dispute
between Rome and France during the pontificate of Innocent XI. Yet the

74Ibid., 351.
75Collet, Saint Vincent de Paul, 1:473.
76Ibid., 474.
77CEd, 3:491. [Régale was the king’s right to dispose of the revenues and benefices of vacant
bishoprics. It was the cause of a celebrated dispute between Louis XIV and Pope Innocent XI when the
former attempted to extend it to previously exempt dioceses in 1673. Ed.]
78Ibid.
word itself was not used, and Vincent’s attitude was very cautious. In Le Mans, the right of the régale was incontestable, as in the bishoprics north of the Loire, and Vincent de Paul was careful not to bring them into the question. The issue he implicitly raised was that of the duration of the right of régale over the vacant sees. The customs of the seventeenth century extended this right of the king up to the time that the new bishop registered his oath of fidelity in the chamber des comptes, then later to the actual canonical possession of the see. It appears from his letter to Lavardin that Vincent considered this extension to be an abuse, but he was careful not to start a quarrel over principles. If the bishop-elect would have his oath registered promptly, there would be no question of his right over the benefices of the diocese. That is precisely what the bishop of Grenoble would counsel Bishop Caulet of Pamiers twenty-five years later. It is true that in the dioceses of the south it was a question of a right newly introduced by a royal declaration, whose legitimacy Bishops Nicolas Pavillon of Alet and François Étienne Caulet of Pamiers contested.
III. The Bishops of Monsieur Vincent

These two bishops, Pavillon and Cauiet, who after 1675 would be the protagonists in the quarrel over the régale, were not unknown to Vincent de Paul. Both had been members of the Tuesday Conferences. It was claimed that they had been promoted on his recommendation, and they enjoyed a good relationship with him for a long time.

There are no documents that prove Saint Vincent’s involvement in the nomination of Pavillon on the see of Alet. On the other hand, Vincent’s appointment to the Council of Conscience was, as we have seen, greeted with satisfaction by the bishop of Alet. Though his relations with the superior of the Mission were not so close as those of Solminihac, he continued writing to him with confidence. In a letter of 16 November 1644, Pavillon informed Monsieur Vincent in a friendly manner of what was happening in his diocese. “In order to have you share, amid your great and important occupations, in our little news, I shall tell you that we are continuing our ecclesiastical assemblies. I have an enrollment of nearly thirty priests.”

The following year, if the dating is correct, Pavillon recommended to the good offices of Vincent his own metropolitan, Claude de Rébé, archbishop of Narbonne, and the difficulties he had with the duchess of Guise. Such a recommendation, which seems to reverse the hierarchical order, speaks at the same time of the familiar relationships between Pavillon and Vincent and the influence that the latter had because of his participation of the Council of Conscience.

If the Bishop of Alet believed in Vincent’s esteem of him, he was not mistaken. In January 1648 Vincent wrote him, “I learn more and more, Monsigneur, of the blessings that God gives your apostolic guidance, which spreads such a sweet fragrance everywhere that my puny heart cannot contain the joy it feels.” And in a letter of 20 August 1650, the superior of the Mission renewed in a particularly heartfelt way the expression of his esteem for the Bishop of Alet. “Humbly prostrate in spirit at your feet, I ask your holy blessing and beg from God the grace that he will keep you for an entire century.”

It must be admitted that twenty-five years later, the nuncio’s office in France would use rather different language in speaking of Pavillon. We read as follows in the notes of the nunciature, “We have been
informed of the desperate state of health of the bishop of Alet, for whom the prayers of all good people ask for a happy passage to a better life for the peace the church."⁸³ By that time Vincent had been dead for fifteen years. Had he still been in this world, he would have shared the nuncio’s point of view but would have expressed it in a less brutal manner. Pavillon had enrolled himself under the banner of the disciples of Saint Augustine, that is, the Jansenists. Monsieur Vincent was resolutely opposed to Jansenism, to the point of taking a most active part in the petition for the condemnation of the five propositions. After that, the rupture between the bishop of Alet and the general of the Mission seems to have been complete.⁸⁴

In contrast, the relations between Vincent and François Étienne Caulet, the protagonist in the quarrel over the régale and the resistance to Jansenism, continued until the end to be marked by mutual esteem. At Vincent’s death, on 27 September 1660, Caulet wrote: “Lucerna extincta est in Israel [a lamp has gone out in Israel]. God alone knows what a loss this is to the church and the Congregation.”⁸⁵

Caulet was one of the bishops in whose promotion we discern the intervention of Saint Vincent de Paul. His nomination dates from the first days of Vincent’s presence on the Council of Conscience. On the death of Henri de Sponde, bishop of Pamiers, 10 March 1643, the court named Jacques de Montrouge, the queen’s almoner, to succeed him, and letters of nomination were quickly dispatched to Rome. Mazarin wanted, it seems, to remove from court a partisan of the bishop of Beauvais, Augustin Potier, whose influence over the queen he feared. But before the bulls were issued, another candidacy intervened, strongly supported by Vincent de Paul, that of the abbot of Foix, François Étienne Caulet.⁸⁶ On 10 June 1644 Montrouge resigned the bishopric of Pamiers in favor of Caulet. One detail seems to point to the intervention of Saint Vincent. The act of resignation was signed on Friday, 10 June 1644, “at Saint Lazare situated at the Faubourg Saint Denis.”⁸⁷ The letter of nomination over the signature of the young king and Michel Le Tellier, the secretary of state, is dated 14 June. Dom Grégoire Tarrisse, the superior of Saint Maur, who testified in his favor at the canonical

⁸³AV, Nunziatura di Franzia, 153, f. 700.
⁸⁴Luigi Mezzadri, Fra Giansenisti e antigiansenisti: Vincent de Paul e la Congregazione della Mission (1624-1737), (Florence, 1977), 111.
⁸⁵J. M. Vidal, François Étienne de Caulet évêque de Pamiers (1610-1680) (Paris, 1939), 357.
⁸⁶Ibid., 56-57.
⁸⁷AV, Processus Consistorialis, 44, f. 152.
Francis Étienne de Caulet, bishop of Pamiers

inquiry, had wanted to overcome Caulet’s resistance. Caulet was elevated during the consistory of 16 January 1645 and consecrated in the church of Saint Sulpice on the following 5 March by the bishop of Senlis, assisted by the bishop of Toulon and the coadjutor of Montauban, in the presence of the nuncio Niccolò di Bagno, Robert Cupif, at that time bishop of Saint-Pol-de-Léon, Henri de Béthune, at that time bishop of Maillezais, and Pierre de Broc, bishop of Auxerre.88 Did Vincent regret his intervention in favor of Caulet? The latter’s reforming zeal could not be denied, but Caulet fell under the influence of Pavilion of Alet and the Jansenists. When Vincent urged him to join the bishops who sought the condemnation of Antoine Arnauld’s work, On Frequent Communion, he responded with praise for the book.89 A little later, Vincent led the bishops in an active campaign to have the five propositions of Cornelius Jansen’s Augustinus condemned in Rome. A letter was prepared with the agreement of the superior of the Mission and the text submitted for the signature of the bishops. Solminihac, Sevin, and Brandom signed

88Vidal, Caulet, 60-61.
89Ibid., 345.
immediately, but Caulet abstained. “As for the bishop of Pamiers,” wrote Solminihac, “he is totally governed by the bishop of Alet. If you think it opportune to write him about it, I do not believe that either one will refuse to sign it.” Solminihac like Vincent was wrong, since the two prelates answered with a refusal. Vincent made a new attempt in a long letter urging recourse to Rome but obtained nothing. Nevertheless, all was not over between Vincent de Paul and Caulet. When the bishop came to Paris in 1656 and then in 1657, he was received at Saint Lazare where Vincent invited him to preach. Jansenism, however, was the issue of the hour because at that very moment it was occupying the General Assembly of the Clergy of 1655-57. Caulet, however, at that time was in the city which was Monsieur Vincent’s sphere of influence. On 17 March 1657 he rejoined the Assembly of the Clergy that accepted the constitution of Alexander VII explicitly condemning the book of the bishop of Ypres.

Thus Caulet, the bishop of Pamiers, retained the esteem of Vincent de Paul who called him “one of the best bishops I have ever known.” He placed his religious at the bishop’s disposition. Father Edme Jolly, superior of the house of the Mission in Rome, was commissioned by Vincent to deliver a letter to the Holy Father that Caulet had entrusted to him. In 1658 and 1659 Jolly sent several Roman documents to the bishop. The last trace of relations between Vincent and Caulet occurred when the superior of the missionaries had the superior of the house contact the French consul in Tripoli about a priest of the bishop’s diocese who was being held a slave in that country. In short, their relations remained close, and there is no reason to think that Vincent foresaw the extreme positions that the bishop of Pamiers would one day take in the Jansenist affair and in the dispute over the régale.

Without doubt he did not foresee, either, the equivocating attitude of another bishop, a former member of the Tuesday Conferences, Félix Vialart, bishop of Chalons after 1640. Vialart was the son of Madame Hersent, one of Saint Vincent’s most generous collaborators, and we have seen the bishop refer to a promise made in his favor to his mother by the general of the Mission. Félix Vialart proved himself a prelate devoted to the ideal of the Council of Trent by establishing a seminary

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*Ibid., 204-10.
**Vidal, Caulet, 356.
*Ibid., 357.
and organizing missions in his diocese. Nevertheless, his attitude in the Clementine Peace was ambiguous.

In contrast, François Bosquet, bishop of Lodève and later of Montpellier, did not show any regard for the partisans of Port Royal. A former member of parlement who had entered the priesthood, he maneuvered the succession of Henri Sponde to the see of Pamiers. In that instance, Monsieur Vincent was in favor of Caulet. In the following year, however, Pavillon wrote to Vincent to inform him of the resignation of the bishop of Lodève "in favor of Monsieur Bosquet, councillor of state and minister of justice in that province ... I thought that I ought to tell you about it, believing that you would be glad that his good will is directed toward a person of merit and competence, as you know." And he requested Vincent to do for him "all the good services that are within your power." On 28 September 1648 Bosquet became bishop of Lodève, while waiting to move on a little later to Montpellier. The recommendation that Pavillon had given in his favor did not prevent his soon taking an active part in the anti-Jansenist battle. It was he who carried to Pope Innocent X the request that he declare himself openly on the "question of fact" and who brought back the brief of 29 September 1654 which settled the question.

Another bishop, who like Bosquet came from the legal profession and was warmly recommended to Monsieur Vincent by Alain de Solminihac, was Philibert Brandom. He had been admitted as councilor to the Parlement of Paris in 1622 and had married a niece of Chancellor Seguier. After his wife's death, he became a priest on the advice of Charles de Condren and accepted the bishopric of Périgueux, to which he was raised on 28 September 1648. Brandom retained the confidence of Monsieur Vincent. On 1 April 1651 he wrote Vincent by "order of lords of the Ecclesiastical Council," to ask him for the information concerning the condition of the abbey of Chartres and on the qualities of a candidate to the office of abbot. At the same time Vincent informed Brandom that he was recalling his missionaries from his diocese as the bishop had wished, but he declared himself ready to send

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94 Ibid., 2:361, note 6.
95 [This term refers to the conciliatory policy of Pope Clement IX towards French bishops who refused to subscribe to an anti-Jansenist formula. Ed.]
96 Ibid., 554-55.
97 Blet, Le clergé de France et la monarchie. Étude sur les assemblées générales du clergé de 1615 à 1666. (Rome, 1959), 2:187. [In response to a papal condemnation of five propositions taken from Jansen's Augustinus, the Jansenists had responded with a distinction that the condemned propositions were indeed heretical but in "fact" were not to be found in the Augustinus.]
them back there at the first sign from Brandom.\textsuperscript{98} At Brandom’s death in Paris, 11 July 1652, Vincent wrote to the bishop’s nephew, “I hope ... to ask you the favor of showing me the same benevolence with which this saintly prelate honored me.”\textsuperscript{99}

Another member of the Tuesday Conferences whose nomination to the episcopate followed closely on the accession of Vincent to the Council of Conscience was François Perrochel, bishop of Boulogne. In the absence of any trace of intervention in his nomination by the superior of the Mission, we have the deposition which Vincent made in his favor before the Nuncio Grimaldi. The king’s letter nominating Perrochel to Boulogne is dated 9 June 1643. On the preceding 4 July, after the canonical inquiry concerning the quality, life, and morals of the candidate, the apostolic nuncio received the depositions of François Fourquet, bishop of Bayonne, Félix Vialart, bishop of Chalons, and Vincent de Paul. The nuncio had Vincent’s statement recorded in the following terms

\begin{quote}

The Very Reverend Father Vincent de Paul, of the diocese of Dax, Bachelor of the school of Theology of [the university of] Toulouse, sixty-three years of age, General of the Congregation of the Mission, resident of Paris in the faubourg Saint Denis at the Monastery of Saint Lazare, a sworn witness, in the process of inquiry which is to be carried out as indicated above, to which he has sworn an oath and touched [the gospel] answered as follows to the corresponding questions of the said Illustrious and Reverend Lord, the Apostolic Nuncio:

To the first [question]. He answered that he knew the candidate for promotion twelve years as an associate in mission work, and that he had with him neither consanguinity nor affinity, neither a great intimacy, nor jealousy, nor hatred.

To the second. He answered that he heard that the candidate was born in Paris.

To the third. He answered that he knew that he was born of a lawful marriage, of honorable Catholic parents whom he had known for many years.

To the fourth. He answered that he thought that the candidate was about thirty-eight years old.

To the fifth. He answered that he knew for sure that the candidate had been a priest for ten years and that since that time he had devoted himself with great success to the work of the missions.

To the sixth. He answered that the candidate was very experienced in the exercise of his duties and in the exercise of the orders he had received. Likewise he saw him as very assiduous in receiving the sacraments, pious, devout, religious, and truly brimming with charity towards his neighbor.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{98}CED, 4:166-67, 168.

\textsuperscript{99}Ibid., 440.
To the seventh. He answered that he had always lived as a Catholic and that there was no doubt at all concerning his constancy in the purity of his faith.

To the eighth. He responded that the same candidate led an innocent life, was endowed with good morals, and that likewise enjoyed an excellent reputation and behavior. And that he knew him, as in the preceding answers, by his relations with him.

To the ninth. He answered that he had remarked on various occasions that the candidate was a grave, prudent and very remarkable man in the management of affairs.

To the tenth. He answered that he knew that the candidate was a bachelor of theology of the school of the Sorbonne for fifteen years and that he was absolutely persuaded that he excelled in the knowledge required of a bishop to teach others, because he had very often heard him dispute learnedly and preach very eloquently.

To the eleventh. He answered that he did not believe that he had had charge of souls, except for some sort of care for the religious in his abbey of Saint Crespin-le-Grand, whom he had brought back to the primitive discipline of the rule which the said candidate had previously found completely lost in this monastery.

To the twelfth. He answered that he had never had any knowledge that the candidate had given any scandal whatsoever, and that he was not prevented by any defect of body or of mind or by any other canonical impediment from being able to be raised to a cathedral church.

To the thirteenth. He answered that he considered him qualified for the good government of a cathedral church, and especially of the one to which he was to be raised, and he judged him very worthy to be raised to that one, and he affirmed that this would be useful and extremely profitable for that church. He added the reason for this: that he knows him to be educated, expert, just and endowed with numerous virtues.

There follows the autograph signature, *Vincentius a Paulo*.

Promoted to the bishopric of Boulogne in the consistory of 6 February 1645, François Perrochel governed his diocese until 1677. He died in 1684. Vincent, who ranked Nicolas Pavillon very high among the prelates of the kingdom, wrote to Perrochel himself, “When they speak of good bishops, they are accustomed to name the bishops of Boulogne and Alet.”

Another bishop in whose favor Monsieur Vincent also testified before the apostolic nuncio was Nicolas Sevin. The latter had not been a member of the Tuesday Conferences, and it seems that it was thanks to the recommendation which Alain de Solminihac made to Vincent that he was nominated by the king on 30 September 1647. The deposition that Vincent made on 26 November 1647 before the Nuncio Bagno
was also less personal than the one he had given in favor of Perrochel.
To many of the questions, Vincent answered by referring to hearsay.
The deposition is related in these terms:

Very Illustrious and Very Reverend Monsieur Vincent de Paul, Super-
ior General of the Congregation of the Mission, sixty-seven years of age,
witness:

To the first point. He answered that he had known the candidate for
more than three years, that he was not related to him by any consanguin-
ity, affinity, or too great intimacy and that he had neither hatred nor
jealousy against him.

To the second. He said that he believed him to be a native of Le Mans.

To the third. He answered that he did not know his parents, but as far
as he was concerned, he was a Catholic for as long as he has known him.

To the fourth. He answered that he believed that he was in approxi-
mately the thirty-fifth year of his age.

To the fifth. He answered that he had been a priest for as long as he has
known him.

To the sixth. He answered that he knew that he celebrated mass every
day with the greatest devotion and piety.

To the seventh. He answered that he believed that he had always lived
as a Catholic and that he had remained in the purity of his faith.

To the eighth and ninth. He answered that he believed that he led a life
of innocence, of upright morals, of excellent behavior, and of a good
reputation. At the same time, he was prudent and experienced in human
affairs.

To the tenth. He answered that a degree was conferred on him in
theology and that he could very easily instruct and teach others nearly
every Sunday in the largest churches of Paris.

To the eleventh. He said that he never as yet had charge of souls nor
assumed the government of a church.

To the twelfth and thirteenth. He said that he had never given any
scandal, and that no canonical impediment obstructed his promotion,
and that is why he judged him qualified for the government of a church,
and that he would be useful and profitable to the church of Sarlat.

The witness said that he knew all this because he had very often heard
him preach, celebrate mass, visit the prisons and hospitals, hear confes-
sions, settle quarrels and lawsuits, and practice all sorts of good works,
in testimony of which he has signed his testimony. Vincentius a Paulo.102

Giving a deposition with him were a priest, a canon of Paris, the
intendant of Aquitaine, and a lawyer of parlement.

Nicolas Sevin was raised to the bishopric of Sarlat in the consistory
of May 1646. Alain de Solminihac, however, did not content himself
with having him nominated to a neighboring diocese. On 2 July 1652 he
wrote to Vincent to explain his desire to have Sevin as his coadjutor and

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102 AV, Processus Consistorialis, 50, f. 394r-v.
eventually as his successor at Cahors. The explanations that he gives us paint a portrait of a model bishop according to Solminihac as well as according to Vincent. It is interesting to compare it with Vincent’s two depositions in favor of the candidates he judged qualified for the episcopate.

I stopped at Monseigneur, the bishop of Sarlat, for the following reasons: because he is a priest who lives religiously, gives good example, is very detached, of great piety, of solid virtues, is very learned, preaches well, very zealous, of good spirit, very good judgment, sound health, a strong body, and is painstaking, hard-working and vigilant, is very experienced in the management of a diocese, universally approved, of great reputation in this province, in his rules for the management of his diocese and seminaries, is neither too old, nor too young. 103

Such were the reasons for which Solminihac was writing the queen to ask for her Nicholas Sevin as his coadjutor in Cahors. The bishop of Cahors again had to wait to see his wish realized. Sevin was nominated coadjutor of Cahors by the king in May 1656 and received his bulls in the consistory of 24 September 1657. When Alain de Solminihac died, Nicolas Sevin succeeded him in his see as in “his maxims.”

These lines addressed to Monsieur Vincent by Solminihac expressed the ideal that the bishop of Cahors and the superior of the Mission shared. This communion of thought and of action helps to delineate precisely the nature of Vincent de Paul’s action in his time. The amateur historian is greatly tempted to contrast the founder of the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission, so concerned with relieving the corporal and spiritual misery of the peasantry, the victims of the ravages of foreign wars and the revolt of the princes, with the great ecclesiastical lords who by royal nomination occupied the episcopal sees of the kingdom. In reality, Vincent’s thought and action are very much a part of the structure of his time. He certainly did not seek the employment that he occupied for nearly ten years at the court of Anne of Austria, and scarcely had he arrived there than he longed for the moment when he would be delivered from it. But he knew how much the burden which this position imposed on him could profit the souls of both the nobility and the peasants, thanks to the choice of good pastors, if he assisted the queen in the religious affairs that the constitution of the kingdom placed in his hands. As a result he did not flee from his

post any more than he worked to keep it. He submitted to the will of heaven, expressed by the choice of the queen and the advice of the bishops. One last quotation will help in understanding the thought of Vincent about the society of his time.

The bishop of Saint Malo, Achille de Harlay, had obtained the approval of the king to unite the abbey of Saint Méen, of which he was abbot, to the seminary directed by the priests of the Mission. The Benedictines of Saint Maur obtained from the parlement of Rennes a decree which claimed to retain Saint Malo as their own, and they took possession of it. Supported by a decree of the grand council, the bishop of Saint Malo had the monks ejected from the seminary by military force. This was followed by new legal processes in the parlement of Rennes. The superior of the Mission at Saint Méen thought only of yielding to the tempest. Vincent de Paul ordered him to resist and to defy the henchmen of the parlement of Rennes. The intrusion of the Maurists at Saint Malo, explained Saint Vincent, was totally illegal.

The religious living in the Abbey of Saint Méen negotiated with the bishop of Saint Malo (and the bishop of Saint Malo, on whom their right depends both as abbot and as bishop, is opposed to their intrusion. In qua ergo potestate? [By what authority, therefore?]). Yes, but the parlement supported them and introduced them into the abbey. That is true, but that sovereign senate does not have the power to introduce a private citizen into nor to maintain him in a possession that does not belong to him by law. Besides, the king, in whom resides the sovereign power over that of parlements and that of passing judgment on them all, gives us authorization. How can you know the will of God in temporal matters better than by the will of the princes and in spiritual matters than by that of our lords, the bishops, each in his own diocese.104

None of the bishops, whose coat of arms often added to the episcopal miter the coronet of a duke, count, or baron, could have spoken better on the matter.

In summary, Saint Vincent de Paul did not in any way live outside of his time and his country. Quite the contrary. By remaining profoundly a part of the spiritual world of his epoch and by acting within the framework and using the social, political, and ecclesiastical structures of seventeenth century France, he completed a work which four centuries after his birth still responds to the calls of our time.