Fall 1991

From Life to the Rules

John E. Rybolt C.M., Ph.D.

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol12/iss2/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Vincentian Journals and Publications at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vincentian Heritage Journal by an authorized editor of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact wsulliv6@depaul.edu, c.mcclure@depaul.edu.
From Life to the Rules: 
The Genesis of the Rules 
of the Daughters of Charity

BY 
JOHN E. RYBOLT, C.M.

Introduction

Even before her eventful meeting with Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, widow le Gras, composed a rule for her life in the world.¹

Upon awakening may my first thought be of God. May I make acts of adoration, thanksgiving, and abandonment of my will to His most holy will. Reflecting on my lowliness and powerlessness, I shall invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit in which I shall have great confidence for the accomplishment of His will in me, which shall be the sole desire of my heart. ... Immediately after rising, I shall meditate for an hour or at least three quarters of an hour on a subject taken either from the Gospels or the Epistles. ...²

This rule bears on the subject of this presentation, since it shows Louise’s particular concern for formulating a rule of life for herself. Rules for life, of course, did not begin with her. One has to think only of the rules for the pre-Christian Essene community at Qumran, or the earliest Christian monastic rules in Egypt to find examples. Louise may

¹References to the writings of Louise de Marillac are taken from Sainte Louise de Marillac. Ecrits spirituels (Tours, 1983), (hereinafter cited as Ecrits), and Elisabeth Charpy, ed., La Compagnie des Filles de la Charité aux origines. Documents (Tours, 1989), (hereinafter cited as Documents). Unless noted otherwise, English renderings of the letters are from Sister Helen Marie Law, trans., Letters of St. Louise de Marillac (Emmitsburg, Md., 1972), (hereinafter cited as Letters); translations of the Penseés are from Sister Louise Sullivan, trans., Spiritual Writings of Saint Louise de Marillac (Albany, N.Y., 1984). All other translations are the author's, unless noted otherwise. This paper is a slightly revised version of a contribution presented at the 1990 Vincentian Month in Paris, and printed in Vincentiana 34 (1990): 735-63.

²“Rule of Life in the World,” Spiritual Writings, A1, 4.
have borrowed her rule from such a source as that proposed by Saint Francis de Sales in his "Little Rule for the Use of Time," a rule evidently designed for those living in the world.³

The purpose of this presentation is to examine the development of the rules of the Daughters of Charity. Beginning with Saint Louise in her widowhood, this paper will trace the more formal growth of the complex of regulations which have governed the Company of the Daughters of Charity since its beginning. Part of the expected outcome of this paper is a presentation and examination of material recently published and hence not widely known. This in turn will be examined for the leading themes, such as theological justifications and motivations, expressed in these rules. As a result, the reader will, it is hoped, come away with a more precise sense of the genesis of the rules: why they say what they say.⁴

The Confraternities of Charity

How fortunate it is that we have the original rules for the first Charity, founded in 1617 by Saint Vincent at Châtillon-les-Dombes. These rules, discovered in the municipal archives of Châtillon only in 1839, give us a good introduction to the main traits which would mark the development of the Daughters of Charity. The history of the foundation of the Charity is well enough known to allow us to pass over it. Yet the underlying background and motivations should not be overlooked.

First, the text specifically mentions that the Charity will take its name from that of the hospital of Charity in Rome, and that the persons who make it up will be called servantes des pauvres, ou de la Charité (servants of the poor, or, of the Charity.)⁵

Second, the care of the poor is central, as the first sentence of the introduction to the document makes clear: “Since charity toward the

³"Petit Reglement de L'employ du temps et des exercises de la journee," in Oeuvres Complettes de Saint Francois de Sales, 6th ed. (Paris, 1879); 3:219-20; a close examination of her rule and those proposed by Francis de Sales would be worth the effort.


neighbor is an infallible mark of the true children of God, and since one of its main acts is to visit and care for the sick poor.”

Third, the spiritual development of the members also forms part of the rule, the “Common Rules” for the members.6 These involve the following: confession, communion for the intention of loving the sick poor and caring for them, prayer for the Confraternity itself, and mutual love and care for the members, especially at the time of their deaths. In addition, each one is to have a specific set of spiritual exercises, similar, again, to that proposed by Saint Francis de Sales: a detailed morning prayer, mass, spiritual reading of Introduction to the Devout Life, practice of the virtues of humility, simplicity, and charity, and evening prayer with an examination of conscience.

This rule served as the model for the many other confraternities, of both men and women, founded in the next few years. The rule was not copied word for word, but was judiciously adapted to local circumstances, and kept its fundamental and distinctive directions: care for the sick poor and personal spiritual development. Throughout, the rules specified action done together, particularly through meetings.7

With the episcopal and royal approvals given to the Congregation of the Mission came also faculties granted by the archbishop of Paris. In a document dated 10 April 1628, Vincent received the faculty, among others, “of erecting the confraternity of Charity in those places where it appears useful, and of visiting it after its erection.”8

Two Preliminary Drafts

Beginning in 1629, Vincent asked Louise to help him care for the Confraternities of Charity, which by then had become too many for him to handle by himself.9 At the same time the arrival of Marguerite Naseau, a simple country girl, and then the arrival of others like her, changed Louise’s life forever. These girls lived simply in the parishes and worked with the Charities established there. The members of the

---


7The rules for the charity at Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet are in Coste CED 13:527; also in Documents, 31-34.

8“... facultatem ... erigendi confraternitatem Charitatis in quibus locis utile videbitur, et erectas visitandi ...” Coste CED, document #66, 13:217.

9For examples of his instructions, see Vincent de Paul to Louise de Marillac, May 1630, letter 48 (for Villepreux), Coste, CED, 1:84, and same to same, April 1631, letter 64, Coste, CED, 1:104.
parish confraternities, called Sisters, were aided by these young women, called *filles* or “servants” of the Charity. This is Vincent’s own description of their work:

But since these ladies, who make up this confraternity, are for the most part of a [social] condition which does not permit them to do the most humble and poorest service which should be done in the exercise of this confraternity ... they have taken some good country girls to whom God gave the desire of helping the poor sick, and they do all these little services. They have been prepared for this by a virtuous widow named Mademoiselle le Gras.\(^\text{10}\)

Seeing the need to regulate their lives and to help them in their commitment to the work of the Charity, Louise drafted a special rule: “Draft Rule, to unite the girls or servants of the poor with the Sisters of the Confraternities of Charity in the villages.”\(^\text{11}\) The date of this rule does not appear in the manuscript itself, but it is early. This brief regulation, with a few small additions by Vincent, stressed the same issues as the rule for Châtillon:

While doing this [honoring our Lord, etc.], they shall work at their own perfection, for the salvation of their families, and for the corporal and spiritual assistance of the sick poor of this city and of the country, whom they shall serve themselves in their parishes and for whom they shall procure the able assistance of the Ladies of Charity in the villages.

This rule also foreshadows other points which will become part of the greater development of the rules: the appointment of officers, the supervisory role of the Congregation of the Mission, the importance of the rules of the motherhouse to be observed wherever else the *filles* lived, teaching, catechizing, and other services done without remuneration. The rule does not, however, provide for strong links among the *filles* dispersed in various parishes. The date of 29 November 1633 marks the foundation of the first house of the Company, in the rue des fossés Saint Victor. On that day, Louise received into her home the earliest postulants and undertook their training. Consistent with her previous experience, she developed a brief order of the day for them. It

---

\(^{10}\)Vincent de Paul to Jean-François de Gondi, archbishop of Paris, August or September 1645, letter 773, Coste, *CED*, 2:549.

\(^{11}\)The text of the rule is found in Pensées, A54, 723. Its chronological relationship to A55, 722, dated 1633, is also unclear.
specified a schedule which gave equal attention to prayer and to the care of the sick poor. Louise’s personal commitment is evident in the final paragraph:

They shall be disposed to receive Holy Communion on some feasts and Sundays. However, they shall remember not to ask this permission of their confessor without informing me. I shall use this occasion to remind them of some faults which should not be found in persons who communicate frequently.¹²

This rule became the subject of the first recorded conference, the “third and final conference,” according to the note in Louise’s handwriting. This conference was given 31 July 1634, and at its conclusion, Vincent asked the sisters to practice the rules which he had ordered them to follow, and he appointed the superiors of the charities. At this point, the rules still were not set down in writing.¹³

The Rule of 1640

The title, “Rule of 1640,” is that given by Pierre Coste to the rules commented on by Vincent in his conferences to the Daughters beginning in 1640. These are not new rules, but were those already in practice, as revised by Louise and Vincent. His first recorded conference to them dates from 1634, and six years were to pass before the second, 5 July 1640. In the third conference, two weeks later, 19 July 1640, Monsieur Vincent begins to explain the text of two articles of the rule.

By permission of Providence, the very first words of your rule run as follows: “The Company of the Daughters of Charity is established to love God, to serve and honour Our Lord, their Patron, and the Blessed Virgin.” And how will you honour Him? Your rules tell you, for it goes on to inform you of God’s design in establishing your Company “to serve the sick poor corporally, by supplying them with all they need, and spiritually, by taking care that they live and die holily.” ... The second point tells you to love one another like sisters whom Jesus Christ has bound together


¹³In letter 223, May 1636, Vincent wrote to Louise and spoke of other rules. These are evidently not another version of the preliminary drafts but rather are rules for charity of the parish of Saint Laurent (Coste, CED, 1:324).
by the bond of His love. ... Your hearts must be utterly moved by love when you are told to love “like Sisters whom Jesus Christ has bound together by the bond of His love.”

A comparison of these texts with the two draft rules mentioned above, with the Primitive Statutes, is given in Appendix I. This comparison shows that each version, although similar in many respects, marks developments in the rule. Unfortunately, a complete “Rule of 1640” is not available apart from the citations in the conferences before the date of the primitive statutes. The most important of these is the conference of 14 June 1643. In it Vincent explains that the rule contains two major sections. The first, in fifteen articles, describes the horarium; and the second, in seventeen articles, has more specific recommendations on virtues and means of living out well the life of a Daughter of Charity.

Louise herself began to refer to matters of rule in her correspondence, even though these are not specifically mentioned by Vincent in his conferences. For example: the virtues needed in a superior (Letter 11), a Daughter’s not needing to read since this might take away from service to the poor (Letter 34), and bodily mortifications (Letters 55, 59).

**Primitive Statutes: 1645, 1646, 1655**

As the company developed, its numbers grew. This brought home to them the need for stronger organization. In addition, for its own protection the Company would need diocesan and eventually royal approval. As a sign of this, Louise remarks in her preface to the conference of 14 June 1643 that a sister (probably a lay member of the confraternity) had asked Monsieur Vincent for a written copy of the practices he observed in the motherhouse.

Our most honored Father had not yet been able to make up his mind to have a written rule and, from this fact, we have reason to believe that

---


15Coste, CED, 9:115.

16Letter 11: to Sisters Barbe Angiboust and Louise Ganset, 26 October 1639, *Ecrits*, 20; Letter 34: to Abbé de Vaux, 21 December 1640, *Ecrits*, 44; Letter 55: to same, 3 January 1642, *Ecrits*, 65; Letter 59: to same, July 1641, *Ecrits*, 55. The contract for sending the sisters to the hospital at Angers also refers to the rule: “The administrators will give them complete liberty to live according to their rule.” (Documents, #280, 1 February 1640, 265.)
Divine Providence has reserved to Itself the guidance of this work, which
It advances or retards, according to Its pleasure.17

At the end of this conference, Monsieur Vincent referred to the
point of rule requiring that the Daughters have a copy of the rules and
read them monthly. Because of Louise’s comment at the beginning of
the manuscript, it is unclear whether copies were distributed at this
point.18

This issue of not having a written rule must have become more and
more pressing, since in the letter to Archbishop de Gondi of August or
September 1645, already referred to above, Vincent included a draft of
what has come to be called the Regulation or Primitive Statutes. We are
fortunate to have these Primitive Statutes, since they continue the
developments noted as far back as the rules of the Charity in Châtillon.19
Indeed, the motivation for having the regulations in the first place is
stated in similar terms:

Châtillon: But since it is to be feared that a good work once begun will
perish in a short while if, to maintain it [the members] do not have some
spiritual union and bond among themselves ...

Primitive Statutes: But, since works which look to the service of God
ordinarily stop with those who begin them, it there is no spiritual union
among the persons who are employed in it [the work] ...

The coadjutor archbishop of Paris granted his approval 20 November
1646. The text of the rules given in his reply differs, however, in
minor verbal details from that submitted the year before by Vincent.
This text, therefore, stands as the Primitive Statutes.20 Some months
later, 30 May 1647, Vincent, taking Moses as his model, offered the rules

---

17Coste, CED, 9:113; Leonard, Conferences, 1:102. Because of Vincent’s reference to the “king and
queen” in his request for the archbishop’s approval, we may suppose that he had begun his draft of
this document in 1643, since Louis XIII died 14 May 1643.
18Even in 1651, Louise still expressed a desire for a written “manner of life” to be read by the
sisters who were capable of doing so. Coste, CED, letter 1377, 4:221; Ecrits, 361; Letters, letter 315, 5 July
1651, 321.
19The letter to the archbishop is Coste, CED, letter 773, 2:548; Vincent’s 1645 rules accompanying
the letter are in Coste, CED, document #145, 13:551. See also, Documents, 368-71. Vincent’s and Louise’s
comments concerning the document are in letters 771-72, 2:546-48. Vincent attempted to make some
changes even after his 1645 rules had been submitted; see Vincent de Paul to Antoine Portail, letter 832,
12 August 1646, Coste, CED, 3:8.
20Coste, CED, document #146, 13:557-65. Also, Documents, 440-41. Louise had some second
thoughts about the issue of “dependence on the archbishop,” which she expressed in Louise de
Marillac to Vincent de Paul, November 1646, Ecrits, letter 130 quater, 186; Letters, letter 130d, 132.
to the sisters. In terms familiar to Vincentians from their own Common Rules, he cited Acts 1:1.\(^{21}\)

It has been our desire, my daughters, that what was said of Our Lord, “He began to do and to teach,” may be said of you. Has not all that you have just heart, my daughters, been exactly what you have hitherto been doing? Is there anything in these rules that you have not already done?\(^{22}\)

The answer to this last question was, as often with Vincent, both yes and no. Vincent had written the text himself. As he wrote: “Here, Your Excellency, is the substance of the little rule which your suppliant [Vincent de Paul] had drawn up to be kept by the girls, the servants of the poor.”\(^{23}\) On the one hand, he merely put down in writing the rule by which the girls had been living, that is, the Draft Rule composed by Louise with his help. On the other, he had put the rule in a somewhat different order and had seen to its theological and canonical precision.

The development of the rules from this point to their formal approval by the Church in 1655 is a complex story, but well related by Pierre Coste, to whom the reader is referred. The most significant issue, and the sticking-point for Louise seems to have been the question of the authority of Monsieur Vincent over the Daughters of Charity. The decree of the coadjutor archbishop of Paris, Jean-François Paul de Gondi, in 1646 granted to Vincent de Paul the “management and direction of the aforesaid society and confraternity for as long as it shall please God to preserve his life.”\(^{24}\) What would happen after Vincent’s death was left unstated. Louise set out, in April 1650, to obtain official

---

\(^{21}\)Preface to the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission: “First, I wanted to take Our Savior as a model. He put things into practice before he made them part of his teaching [in eo quod coepit prius facere quam doceret].” Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission (Philadelphia, 1989), 101-02.

\(^{22}\)Coste, CED, 9:326; Leonard, Conferences, 1:290-91. Coste wonders why Vincent delayed more than six months before presenting the rules to the Daughters, and advances two reasons: (1) Vincent may have wanted to make even more changes; or (2) bureaucratic delay in the archbishop’s office. (Coste, CED, 3:171, note 7.)

\(^{23}\)Vincent de Paul to Jean-François DeGondi, Coste, CED, letter 773, 2:552; Louise de Marillac to Antoine Portail, letter 145, (Écrits, 156; Letters, 149) acknowledges that the complete rules were not submitted to the archbishop: “M. Lambert sent us a copy of the request made to the archbishop of Paris, which includes the main items of our Rules.” Perhaps it was not judged necessary to include the minor details of rules.

\(^{24}\)Coste, CED, document #146, 13:558. The Spanish edition of Coste, CED, vol. 13, publishes for the first time a project for royal letters patent to be issued by Louis XIV. The project had been initiated after the archbishop’s approval, and follows the same general formulation: “recommending and confiding the direction and government of this society and confraternity to my beloved and esteemed Vincent de Paul, as long as God shall preserve his life ...” (Vicente de Pau, Obras Completas. Tomo X. [Salamanca, 1982]. Document #223, 708.) It is also found, in French, in Documents, 478-81.
recognition by the state, and for this purpose visited Blaise Méliand, the
Procurator General, an officer empowered to defend the interests of the
king and of the common good. She must have left with him the
important documents issued by the archbishop. Both Méliand and his
secretary died shortly after. Unable to locate the documents, his succe­
sor, Nicolas Fouquet, asked Louise for them, to bring the case to its
conclusion. As they could not be found, Vincent had recourse to the
archbishop once again—he was now called Cardinal de Retz—and the
rules were issued in a slightly different form. These are called the Rules
of 1655.

It has been suggested that Louise had something to do with the
disappearance of the original documents in order to assure that her
viewpoint would be validated, but her own words show her inno­
cence. Perhaps Louise took another tack to obtain papal approval, the
next level of official approval for the Company. There exists a docu­
ment, dated 1647, sent to Pope Innocent X by the queen-mother Anne
of Austria. She wrote a brief petition to the pope, concluding with the
main point: “The queen beseeches His Holiness to name as the per­
petual directors of this confraternity or society of servants of the poor
of the Charity, the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission
and his successors in the same office.” Whether this petition had any
effect is unknown. In addition, Louise’s role in it is conjecture, yet it
obviously reflects her interest in the relationship of the Company to the
Congregation of the Mission.

The differences between the rules of 1646 and 1655 seem simple
enough: a few words or a sentence added here or there. The most
important difference, the one sought by Louise, is as follows:

Draft, 1645, and 1646: The superior will have the complete direction of
this confraternity, with the above mentioned priest.

---

25Louise de Marillac to Vincent de Paul, April 1650, Ecrits, letter 283, 316; Letters, 289.
26This Fouquet, Vicomte de Vaux (1615-1680), later fell from grace because of his financial
mishandling and exaggerated display. He became procurator in 1650.
27The whole affair is recounted by Jean-François Paul de Gondi, Cardinal de Retz, in his response
to Vincent, 18 January 1655. Coste, CED, document #149, 13:570-71. See almost the same text in 13:581,
document #1552. Vincent writes to Nicolas Guillot, 6 June 1656, that the Daughters do not have a
“particular directory” yet. This may mean that Vincent considered that the 1646 rules were, if
anything, preliminary and tentative. Coste, CED letter 1624, 4:599.
29Coste, CED, document #147, 13:566-67. Also, Documents, 481-82.
1655: The superioress will have the complete direction of this confraternity, with the superior general, or the one who will be deputed as his substitute.

This change was significant but still insufficient since “substitute” does not clarify the issue of long-term succession. Nevertheless, the decree of 18 January 1655, which accompanied the rules, clarifies the matter:

And inasmuch as God has blessed the work undertaken by our dear and well-beloved Vincent de Paul to bring this pious design to success, we have accordingly confided and committed, and, by these presents, do confide and commit the government and direction of the above-mentioned Society and Confraternity for the course of his life, and, after him, to his successors, the General of the said Congregation of the Mission.30

Vincent was evidently pleased with the outcome of the rules, as well as with the cautious way he and the Daughters had proceeded in formulating them. He remarks in the Council meeting of 8 September 1655:

You have a great advantage over many other communities, who have written and have had their rules approved within two or three years. Afterward, experience has caused them to see that there were things in them which were either impossible, or which should never have been included, although at the time their reason caused them to judge that it should be done. Well, my sisters, you have not acted thus, by God’s mercy. It has been more than eighteen years since you began to practice what has been written. You have acted as Our Lord did, who taught by doing before he preached what he wanted done.31

Approval by civil authorities followed in 1657 and 1658. In this matter, too, Louise made recommendations to Vincent concerning certain protections for the Company.32

---

30Coste, CED, document #149, 13:572; also, Documents, #6113, 676-78. See also Pierre Coste, *Monsieur Vincent: Le grand saint du grand siècle* (Paris, 1931), 1:414; and translation by Joseph Leonard, *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul* (Westminster, Md., 1952), 1:361. The contract with the hospital at Châteaudun, 11 June 1654, is fairly clear on the point, yet lacks the precision needed: "... dependence on the Superior General of the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, who will be able, either by himself or by such other priests of the Congregation whom he will depute..." Documents, #591, 654.


32Louise de Marillac to Vincent de Paul, 22 July 1657, *Ecrits*, letter 532, 544; *Letters*, 511. It is uncertain whether these issues were ever discussed by them or by the civil authorities beyond this point. See also Documents, #649, 735-37, for Louise’s remarks on the rules then being redacted. Vincent knew at the time that the rules were still not ready to be published; see, Vincent de Paul to a priest, 26 August 1656, Coste, CED, letter 2128, 6:66.
All during this period, the letters of Louise are filled with general references to the exact observance of the rules. Yet her experience taught her, as it had Vincent, that observance of the rules was to be conditioned. "I beg God to continue to bestow His graces on you, especially love for your vocation, which you will know you have if you are faithful in observing your Rules as far as the service of the poor sick permits."33 This perspective appears often in relevant texts, such as the contract with the hospital at Châteaudun "... they will be obliged to interrupt the order of their spiritual exercises and even to leave them promptly when necessity and the service of the poor requires it; they are already obliged to this by their rules, since this is their first and principal obligation."34

Similar remarks on the rules are to be found in the few remaining conferences given to the Daughters in various houses outside of Paris by various priests: Antoine Portail at Angers, 1646; Lambert aux Couteaux at Nantes, 1648; and Thomas Berthe at Châteaudun, 1657. Reading the rule, praying over it, and conformity to it were standard features of their advice.35

**The Order of Day**

Although Monsieur Vincent remarked that the Order of Day, the Horarium, formed part of the Common Rules,36 it can be regarded as somewhat distinct from the other rules. We have the text of seven conferences on the horarium, covering twenty-seven articles. The text of only some of the horarium can be reconstructed from his remarks, since he cited only the opening words. Unfortunately, the Order of Day does not exist in any manuscript which has come to light.37

The form of the horarium is fairly standard in religious communities, and the form given by Louise to the first Daughters of Charity is just the first in a long line of development of the schedule in the Company.

---

31Louise de Marillac to Daughters at Richelieu, 1653, *Ecrits*, letter 377, 404. See also Louise de Marillac to the Daughters at Chantilly, 3 January 1657, *Ecrits*, letter 510, 536; and Louise de Marillac to Barbe Angiboust, 13 October 1657, *Ecrits*, letter 549, 571. This was, of course, Vincent's perspective in his often-repeated expression, "to leave God for God." See, for example, conference of 30 May 1647, Coste, CED, 9:319, Leonard, *Conferences*, 1:284.

32Documents, #591, 655.

33Documents, #408, 392-95; #472, 523-24; #691, 790-91.


35The Order of Day was discussed in conferences 102, 103, 105-108, 110. A brief version of the Order of Day can also be gathered from the "Project for Rules for Orphan Girls at Cahors," May 1657. (See Documents, #682, 778-80.)
Perhaps the most noteworthy difference between the first rule and that of the Common Rules is that of the hours of retiring. The first rule: 5:30 rising, 10:00 retiring; the Common Rules: 4:00 rising, 9:00 retiring.

**Particular Rules**

We know much less about the genesis of another set of rules observed in the Company, the Particular Rules. These apparently predated some of the other rules mentioned above, and have their source in particular needs. It would be appropriate at this point to offer some terms and definitions.

1. **Rule (French: règlement):** This is a general term, which can refer to a series of stipulations taken together, and may often be translated as "regulation." It may also be used in the plural, as it was for the Charity at Châtillon: "les règlements suivants." Other Confraternities of Charity had their individual rule or règlement.

2. **Rule (French: règle):** This term is more specific, but it, too can be used either in singular (for a single stipulation) either individually or collectively, or in plural (for a series of stipulations.) Very often, the règle includes the fundamental spiritual ideal of the community. Both Vincent and Louise refer generally to the règles of the Company.

3. **Common Rules (French: règles communes):** These are rules which are to be followed by all, or in common. They often have a direct spiritual import, and help to regulate community life, specifying ways of acting within the community and the virtues to be observed. They are to be distinguished from the following:

4. **Particular Rules (French: règles particulières):** These are rules for specific kinds of apostolates, such as schools, hospitals, or work with galley slaves. These were of two types: one tailored for specific places, such as Angers, and the other more general. Both of these, in turn, are to be distinguished from the following:

5. **Rules of Office:** These give rules for officers of the community and for any others holding specific duties, such as sacristans, librarians, and porters.

---

38Vincent described them as follows in the conference of 18 October 1655: "That is why the rules you have just heard are called Common Rules, because all are bound to observe them, wherever they may be, not only in Paris, but in hospitals, in country districts, in parishes, everywhere in short. ... This is done in all Companies; they have, like you, their common and special rules." Coste, CED, 10:122; Leonard, *Conferences*, 3:106.
More modern terminology has made the following distinctions:

6. Constitutions: These specify the most general organization of the Company, pertaining to its essence, mission, and general administration, such as membership, officers, elections and the like. They are of a more permanent nature than:

7. Statutes: These specify more changeable elements, and matters of lesser importance to the character and mission of the Company.

Despite their apparent clarity, these distinctions were not always observed in practice. This leads to the state of having the name “Statutes” given to what would otherwise be called rules of office, for example.

Louis Abelly, the first biographer of Saint Vincent, knew of six Particular Rules.

There are six of these particular rules, and they are all different. The first, for the sisters who help the sick in the parishes. The second, for those who run schools. The third for those who care for foundlings. The fourth, for those who help the Ladies to serve the poor of the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris. The fifth for the sisters who are the hospital for the galley slaves. The sixth for those who serve the sick in the other hospitals of the kingdom.

Abelly, who was interested in seeing to Vincent’s canonization, credits Vincent with their authorship because of their perfection, but he also acknowledges that they came to be through the help of the “very enlightened Mademoiselle le Gras, who was also devoted to the service of all sorts of poor persons.”

It seems more likely that Louise wrote them on the basis of the experience of the Daughters, and submitted them to Vincent for his approval.

Abelly’s list does not, however, correspond to those generally published for the Company. He omitted the rules for the sisters in the villages but included others. (See Appendix III for further explanations.)

Vincent’s conference of 19 July 1640 gives another listing of particular rules, one of them being already in existence:

---

39Louis Abelly, La Vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Vincent de Paul, instituteur, et premier supérieur général de la Congrégation de la Mission (Paris, 1664). Book 2, Chapter 9, 345. The role of Antoine Portail, Vincent’s first assistant, should not be overlooked. Documents, #669, 764-65, contains the text of some specific rules in Portail’s hand, probably composed by him and submitted at least to Vincent for his review and approval.
The daughters in Angers have theirs; [1] one sort is needed for those who serve the poor little children [foundlings], [2] another for those who serve the poor in the Hotel-Dieu, [3] another for those who serve the poor in the parishes, [4] another for those who serve the poor convicts, and still [5] another for those who remain at home, which you should look upon and love as your own family. And all these rules should be based upon the general rule of which I now wish to speak.40

Besides these, Louise’s spiritual writings, the Pensées, mention in whole or in part some of those given by Abelly, as well as rules for the mother house.41 More important in some way are the rules for the individual institutions, such as the early rules (1641) for the sisters at the hospital of Angers,42 the detailed rules for the sisters at Montreuil,43 and the rules for the orphan girls at Cahors.44

The most important of these particular rules, in terms of the attention given them by Saint Vincent, are those for the sisters in the parishes. He devoted four conferences to the eighteen articles of the rule, among the last he was to give to the Company. The most familiar of all is article 2, which distinguishes the Daughters of Charity who work in parishes, from nuns: “for a cell a hired room, for a chapel their parish church, for a cloister the streets of the city, for enclosure, obedience, ... for a grille, the fear of God, for a veil, holy modesty. ...”45

All these rules would benefit by analysis and comparison, both among themselves, as well as with other series of rules, such as the Common Rules of the Jesuits and of the rules of office of the Congregation of the Mission.46

---

40Coste, CED, 9:19-20; Leonard, Conferences, 1:17. This was followed by some correspondence on the subject of the various rules: Vincent de Paul to Louise de Marillac, (undated, but apparently 1640), letter 484, Coste, CED, 2:114. The numbers in square brackets have been added by the author.41Ecrits, A80, 731 (on children); A81, 802 (remarks on foundlings); A84, 743, (Hôtel-Dieu); A88, 740, (on the sick in other hospitals); A90, 737, (remarks on various subsidiary offices), A91b, 747, and A92, 796, (on the mother house).42Document #143, Coste, CED, 13:539-547. Angers was the first house founded at any distance from Paris.43Ecrits, A85, 763. See also Louise’s rules for her officers going to Nantes, letter 144, 5 July 1646, Ecrits, 151.44Documents, #682, 778-80.45Conference 111, Coste, CED 10:661; Leonard, Conferences, 4:264. This was clearly not a general observation about all the Daughters of Charity, given the elaborate living arrangements of the Mother House in Paris. Nevertheless, this paragraph found a place in the rules of Alméras to describe the Company as a whole.46English edition: Rules of the Society of Jesus. (Roehampton, 1894), containing rules for sacristan, infirmarian, porter, etc. The Vincentian rules of office exist in printed form, but date only from the 19th century. Alméras distributed rules of office in 1670, as a result of the assembly of 1668. These do not appear to exist in printed form.
Unwritten Rules

Besides the many rules mentioned above, other practices or customs, which could be called "unwritten rules," also existed. These are mentioned explicitly as existing, in article 43 of the common rules of Saint Vincent: "They will have a great appreciation for all the rules and praiseworthy customs which they have kept until now. They will consider them as the means which God grants them to advance in perfection and to come more easily to salvation."

These "praiseworthy customs" are, for example, the exact form of the habit and rosary, financial regulations and standards, dates for taking vows, examination of candidates before admission, use of a watch (see Louise's Letter 195a) or gloves (Letter 233), the expression "Most Honored Father" (Letter 120), and styles of dwellings (Letter 392). Each of these items, small as they are, shows a development from the experience of life, but with a certain motivation based on the written rules themselves. More research would be rewarded with a more accurate appreciation of the movement from life to rule.

The Rules of Alméras

As is well known, the two founders died in 1660 without having published in any definitive form the rules of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Nevertheless, we are not entirely without Vincent's and Louise's final thoughts on the rules. Vincent continued his conferences on the rules and the virtues of the Daughters until he could no longer give them. He remarked in the conference of 18 November 1657 that the rules (published in 1655) contained forty-three articles. Examination of the text of the rules on which he spoke shows first that the rules are sometimes cited only incompletely, such as article 10 (in Conference 82); second, that the texts differ in some respects from other existing versions, such as article 7 (in Conference 76); and third, that some few articles are not mentioned at all, such as articles 13 and 15. It is difficult to be certain about the reasons for these differences, since they could have come from an error made by those who transcribed them, or Vincent could have omitted them for lack of time.

A complete text of the draft rules in 43 articles remained unpublished until 1988. In that year Miguel Pérez Flores, C.M., the vicar general of the Congregation of the Mission, translated and edited them.

— Conference 87, Coste, CED, 10:363; Leonard, Conferences, 4:3.
He took them from a manuscript in the Daughter of Charity archives in Paris, written in seventeenth-century handwriting. Because of their placement in the manuscript alongside the Almeras rules and various particular rules, we may suppose that other copies of the complete text existed beyond this single one which has come down to us. His lengthy introductory essay deserves analysis, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.  

The disappearance of the rule of Vincent may not have been accidental. One suspects that it was deliberate, particularly in view of the adaptations made privately by individual sisters for their own life. An examination of letters of the period would probably shed some light on this complex subject.

Papal approval of the Company was still lacking at the deaths of the founders in 1660, and the second superior general, René Almeras, took the necessary steps to acquire it. On the occasion of the baptism of the dauphin in 1668, the recently created Cardinal Louis de Bourbon, duc de Vendôme, was made personal legate of Pope Clement IX. Besides representing the pope at the royal baptism, the cardinal undertook other obligations, among which was the recognition of the Daughters of Charity. He signed the document of approval, 8 July 1668.  

It carried with it the clear approval of the constitutions presented in 1655, with the role of the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission made firm. In addition, the sisters were recognized as forming a community or congregation, whereas formerly they had been a confraternity. Despite other difficulties of interpretation which this document caused, this decree firmly established the rules. They continued to be observed, with only slight modifications, until 1954.

The English text of the decree is found in Genesis of the Company. 1633-1968. (Emmitsburg, Md., 1968?) 36-38. For a discussion of the impact of the decree, see R. Meyer and L. Huerga. Una institución singular: el Superior General de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad (Salamanca, 1974). Chapter 11, 119-27. This excellent study has been consulted throughout the research for this paper.
The common rules of Alméras, completed in 1672, were sent by Edme Jolly, Alméras' second assistant and eventually his successor as superior general, to all the houses of the Company only in 1674, the year after his election as superior general. The version bore the phrase: “Signed: René Alméras, and sealed with his seal.” This expression reflects the work of Alméras, who organized the common rules of Saint Vincent (the forty-three articles,) rearranging them, and then verifying their contents. Many variants had crept into the manuscripts, and his review and seal guaranteed the text. Each of the sets of particular rules also bore this same guarantee.

A recent work of Luigi Mezzadri and Pérez Flores in Italian presents the Alméras rules of 1672 without the additions made to them in 1954.51 The Constitutions of 1954 reflected the various stages of revision precipitated by the publication of Code of Canon Law of 1917. It must be said, however, that the changes were few: some additions, a few omissions, a few changes, especially in Chapter 9, on the daily schedule.

**Principal Themes**

The final section of this paper sets out to gather together, somewhat haphazardly, the main themes apparent in the rules. These should offer a deeper insight into the thinking of Vincent and Louise. It must be admitted, however, that the perspective in these pages is synchronic, not diachronic, that is, the themes are taken from the texts as we have them without reference to their historical development. Deeper study would undoubtedly demonstrate how some themes were more important earlier in the development of the rules, and others later (such as uniformity.)

The method followed here is based largely on the Little Method of Saint Vincent. He followed this style in preaching missions, in giving conferences to the Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity and to others, and even in his prayer. Consequently, the first element to be examined is the nature of the issue at hand. This can be isolated through attention to theological references, such as “Our Lord acted in this way,” or “for the glory of God.” Another method is to look for biblical

---

references, whether direct or indirect. The second element consists of motives for action, whether direct or indirect. The second element consists of motives for action, whether direct ("to live as good Christians,") or indirect ("for good example.") The means to be employed are usually straightforward, but the element that gives them character are the descriptors: adjectives and adverbs.

Several representative rules or sections of rules from various periods have been analyzed according to this method, and the results are summarized below.

1. Nature: Theological statements in the rules

   The rules speak fundamentally of divine activity in itself. God permits suffering, but restores us. God is the author of all good. God sends us to particular tasks, unites us in the work, and eventually takes us in death. Throughout life, God helps us with grace, and we should rely on his providence.

   On the basis of this divine activity, the activities in our lives become clearer as to their nature. We live in God, and act according to his plan for us, accepting even suffering. In relationship to Jesus, we imitate the life of Jesus, conform ourselves to him, practice the virtues he practiced, and observe the maxims he taught. More particularly, we honor the mysteries of his life through reflection and imitation. All of this, however, is to result in charity toward the neighbor.

   One major theological theme for the two founders, neglected in modern times, was patronage. Jesus was taken as the patron of the first Confraternity of Charity. The members of the confraternities were urged to honor their principal patron, as well as other patrons: the Blessed Virgin Mary, other saints, the angels. They were also to care for the dying to have friends in the next life who would open to them the gates of heaven.

   Theologically, our relation to others is founded in our relation to God. The early Daughters were told to see Christ in others, to love and to serve him in them. Obedience of superiors, also, was to be regarded as obedience to God. A leading theme in this area was that the Daughters were always to teach others those things needed for salvation — a theme in Vincent’s life going back to his earliest awakening to the plight of the poor. When it came to a conflict between the exercises of prayer and direct service of the poor, they were to “leave God for God.”
2. Nature: Biblical citations in the rules

Perhaps surprisingly, there are few direct biblical citations in the rules examined. The members of the first confraternity at Châtillon were helped by the recollection of Jesus speaking: “Come, blessed of my Father” (Matthew 25:34.) Indirect citations abound, by contrast. The Daughters were urged to act like the women accompanying Jesus in the gospel, or to act like the first Christians in their care and support for each other. In addition, a few literary allusions are to be found. Whether these were chosen consciously or just came to the author out of their reading and meditation will probably never be known. What is important, however, is that the rules, despite their very practical and human tone, are biblically based.

3. Motives for observing the rules

The motives examined generally cluster around the following three. First, one’s own perfection. What we do is primarily to work for heaven, to save our souls by fleeing sin. Second, the Daughters were, from the beginning, to give both spiritual and physical care to the poor. They were to pray for them, interceding with God like patrons of the poor. They were to prepare them for good reception of the sacraments. At the same time, they were to offer all sorts of physical help: medicines, food, attention. The root for this was humility, after the manner of Jesus’ and Mary in their own lives. Service of the poor should cause the Daughters to share in the condition of the poor, being treated as they were. Third, the purpose for rules in the first place is to organize activity. Consequently, a great motive for obeying the rules was to guarantee efficiency and good order for the poor, so lacking in the society of their time. This would happen through mutual support of the sisters and their uniformity in their service of the poor.

4. Means to observe the rules

Lastly, the means urged on the Daughters are never half-hearted. These means are everywhere couched in superlatives or absolutes. The number of times such as terms as the following appear is almost beyond counting: totally, entirely, perfectly, especially, always, exactly, principally, extremely, carefully; also, very great, frequent, profound, perfect, constant, infinite, incessant. These terms speak of time, place, manner, and degree
of observation of the rules, and very few passages exist without these qualifying descriptors. Was this perhaps just a feature of the literary style of the seventeenth century? Here too we may respond, yes and no. Yes, since hortatory material of any kind abounds in superlatives; but no, since the two founders were expressing their deepest convictions in these rules, which would be so important for the future of the Company.

Analysis of each of the documents mentioned in this paper would undoubtedly reveal even more important insights into the spirituality and motivations of the founders.

Conclusions

One result of this discussion is the question: Who wrote the common and particular rules of the Daughters of Charity? It is clear in the first place that the common and particular rules were developed from the experience of life. Vincent and Louise purposely exercised a certain freedom from previous models to correspond to the new kind of ecclesial life they were giving to the Church. In the second place, both Vincent and Louise collaborated on the composition of the rules — at one point his hand is more evident, at another, hers. It would be quite difficult to pull out words and phrases distinctive of one over the other. Also, in some cases the hand of the assistants of either of them may be seen, although this is a matter to be studied in the future. In the third place, Vincent presents some of the work as his own (as in the request for episcopal approval in 1645.) In the fourth place, the rules of Alméras owe their origin to Vincent, but Alméras is their formal author, if not completely their material author. The newly-published "common rules of Vincent" show a clear distinction between his work and that of his successor.

Another question is: Which version is better, the Common Rules of Saint Vincent, or those of Alméras? Like most questions of this type, the answer depends on individual perspective. From the perspective of vividness and interest, the rules of the founder(s) are more interesting. From the perspective of completeness and organization, those of Alméras are a distinct improvement.

No matter who the author was, or what our perspective may be on the value of the rules, they breathe the Vincentian spirit. They have empowered the Company of the Daughters of Charity since its foundation, and in addition have given life to several communities which look to Saints Vincent and Louise as their spiritual guides. Our understand-
ing of the specific contributions, motivations and outlook of the two founders will help us interpret their words more exactly for today.52

Appendix I
Comparison of Early Rules
Mission and Purpose

1. Draft Rule (Before 1645)

The Confraternity of widows and village girls has been instituted to honor our Lord, its patron, and the Blessed Virgin, and to imitate, in some way, the women and young girls of the Gospel who followed and ministered to our Lord and His Apostles. While doing this, they shall work at their own perfection, for the salvation of their families, and for the corporal and spiritual assistance of the sick poor of this city [Paris], and of the country, whom they shall serve themselves in their parishes and for whom they shall procure the able assistance of the Ladies of Charity in the villages.53

2. Rule of 1640

The Company of the Daughters of Charity is established to love God, to serve and honour Our Lord, their Patron, and the Blessed Virgin, ... to serve the sick poor corporally, by supplying them with all they need, and spiritually, by taking care that they live and die holily.54

3. Rule of 1645

The Confraternity of girls and widows, servants of the poor of the Charity, will be instituted to honor the charity of Our Lord, its patron, for the sick poor of the places where they are established or sent. They will serve them corporally and spiritually, according to the plan given

52These rules have also taken root in the Anglican Communion. Rules of Anglican communities based on Saint Vincent are the Sisters of Charity, Knowle (Diocese of Bristol), founded in 1868; and the Sisterhood of Our Saviour (Sisters of the Poor), diocese of Southwell, founded in 1902. See A. G. Cameron, Directory of Religious Communities of Men and Women and of Deaconess Communities and Institutions in the Anglican Communion (London, 1920).
53Ecrits, A54, 723; Spiritual Writings, 63.
them by the women officers of the Charity of the parishes where they will be: Corporally, by preparing for them and bringing their food and medicines; and Spiritually, by seeing to it that those who are dying will leave this world in a good state, and that those who will be cured will resolve to live better in the future. 55

4. Rule of 1646

The Confraternity of Charity of the servants of the sick poor of the parishes has been instituted to honor the charity of Our Lord, its patron, by helping the sick poor of the parishes and hospitals, the convicts and the poor foundlings, both corporally and spiritually: Corporally, by administering their food and medicines; and Spiritually, by seeing to it that those who are dying will leave this world in a good state, and that those who will be cured will resolve never to offend God, by his grace, and that the foundlings be instructed in the matters necessary for salvation. 56

5. Common Rules of Saint Vincent (forty-three articles); Conference 71

They will often remember that the principal end for which God has called them and brought them together is to honor Our Lord, their patron, by serving him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor, whether as a child or a poor person, sometimes as sick and other times as a prisoner. And to be worthy of such a holy occupation, and of such a perfect patron, they are to try to live holily and to work carefully for their own perfection. For this purpose, they will do whatever is possible to put into practice the present rules, which are other great means to accomplish it. 57

54 Coste, CED, 9:30; Leonard, Conferences, 1:17.
55 Coste, CED, 13:551.
56 Coste, CED, 13:559; the Rule of 1655 is identical.
57 Pérez Flores, Reglas, 2; Coste, CED, 10:122; Leonard, Conferences, 3:106.
Appendix II
Comparison of some rules, arranged chronologically
On sending and receiving letters

1. Rule for the Sisters of the Hospital of Angers (1641)

[Section on obedience]: ... and no one will speak, write, or receive letters except by order of the superior, unless it is from the superior. 58

2. Rules of 1645

They will not send letters nor open those which someone may write them without the permission of the same superior. 59

3. Advice of Antoine Portail at Angers, 1646

They will not write, nor have someone write, nor send any letter without having received permission for it from the Sister Servant, and they will not open those which someone sends them without the same permission. Yet if someone wishes to write to the General of the Mission or to the Superioress of the house in Paris, she will be able to do so without the Sister Servant reading it, who will also deliver those which are addressed to some individual sister by the General or the Superioress in Paris. 60

4. Rules of 1646 and 1655

They will not send letters nor open those which someone may write them without the permission of the superior. 61

5. Common Rules of Saint Vincent (forty-three articles); Conference 89
They will not open nor receive any letter without the permission of the superior. They will bring her the letters which they have written so that she might send or keep them as it seems best to her. The sisters who live far from the house of the superior will follow the same procedure with the sister servant. But all should know that this rule does not oblige them to show to anyone the letters written to the superior [general, CM], to the director, or to the superioress [general, DC], nor also those which they receive from them.62

5. Common Rules of Alméras

(Chapter 4, on Obedience; article 5): They shall not open the letters or notes addressed to them, without the permission of the sister servant, who should previously read them herself. Neither shall they write any without the same permission, and they shall give her those they write, that she may read them, and send or detain them, as she may think proper. The sisters who are distant from the house of the superioress [general, DC] shall act in like manner with the sister servant of the house in which they find themselves.

(Article 6): Each one should know, however, that the preceding rule does not oblige them to show the letters they may write to the superior [general, CM], the director, or the superioress [general, DC], should they be some distance away, any more than those which they may receive from them. These should not be shown to externs nor even to their own sisters, but they should be content to speak to them of the things which it would be proper for them to know.

6. Rules of 1954. (Changes only in Chapter 4, article 6; these are italicized):

Each one should know, however, that the preceding rule does not oblige them to show the letters they may write to the Holy See, to its delegate, to the superior [general, CM], the director, or the superioress [general, DC], or to the visitor, or to the local superior, should they be some distance away, or to the directress of the seminary in what regards the young sisters, any more than those which they may receive from

---

62Perez Flores, Reglas, 48, article 25, with the marginal title: “Not to write nor receive any letter without permission.” Coste, CED 10:404; Leonard, Conferences, 4:36.
them. These should not be shown to externs nor even to their own sisters, but they should be content to speak to them of the things which it would be proper for them to know.  

Appendix III
Particular Rules

(The references to each rule are only to those places where the rules are printed. The Mezzadri version represents the standard official publication of the rules. Items I-IV are the most important.)

I. Sisters of the Parishes, eighteen articles
   Abelly: Partial text
   Mezzadri: Text
   Letter 484: Notice

II. School-Mistress, twenty-nine articles
   Abelly: Notice
   Mezzadri: Text
   Ecrits: A90, Partial text

III. Sisters of the Villages, eleven articles
   Mezzadri: Text
   Ecrits: A90, Partial text

IV. Sisters in the Hôtels-Dieu and hospitals, fifteen articles (based on the rule for Angers, see VII)
   Abelly: Notice
   Mezzadri: Text
   Letter 484: Notice
   Ecrits: A84, Partial text

"Means to be employed," twenty one articles
   Mezzadri: Text

---

64Pérez Flores, Reglas, 49, for the preceding rules of Alméras.
65Abelly, Vie, Book 2, Chapter 9, 345-49.
66Mezzadri, Pérez Flores, Regola, 117-45.
V. Special regulations for the sisters who work with the foundlings, thirty-five articles
   Abelly: Notice
   Ibáñez: Text, with twenty articles for the Sister Servant
   *Ecrits*: A90, partial text

VI. Rules for the Daughters of Charity who work with those condemned to the galleys, eighteen articles
   Abelly: Notice
   Ibáñez: Text
   *Ecrits*: A83, Partial text

VII. Rules for those who serve the sick in other hospitals of the kingdom (such as Angers, 1641; Saint Denis, and Châteaudun)
   Abelly: Notice
   *Ecrits*, A88 [Horarium; different from IV above]

VIII. Rules for the Motherhouse:
   Particular rules for the Superioress, First Assistant, Treasurer, Procuratrix, Directress of the Seminary; also for School-Mistress, Portress, Pharmacist, Baker, and Cook.
   *Ecrits*, A91b
   Coste, Conference 70: Notice

   A second set of particular rules for the Bell-Ringer, Portress, Cook, Infirmaryian, and Pharmacist.
   *Ecrits*, A92

---

*José María Ibáñez, Vicente de Paúl y los pobres de su tiempo. (Salamanca, 1977); see appendixes.

*Conference of 29 September 1655, Coste, CED, 10:112-113.*
X. Rules for particular houses and works:
   Angers: Coste, *CED*, 13:539, document 143
   Cahors: *Documents*, #682
   Chantilly and elsewhere: *Documents*, #437
   Châteaudun: *Documents*, #591
   LeMans, *Ecrits*, L134
   Montreuil: *Ecrits*, A85
   Saint Denis: Archives Nationales, L/1054
Having for convent the houses of the sick and that in which the superioress resides; for a cell a hired room; for a chapel their parish church; for a cloister the streets of the city; for enclosure, obedience, with an obligation to go nowhere but to the houses of the sick, or places that are necessary to serve them; for a grille, the fear of God; for veil, holy modesty; making use of no other form of profession to assure their vocation than the continual confidence they have in divine providence and the offering they make to God of all that they are and of their service in the person of the poor.

(Saint Vincent de Paul, conference to the Daughters of Charity, 24 August 1659).