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The Foundations of Saint Vincent de Paul

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The Foundations of Saint Vincent de Paul
by
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Translated
by
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The foundations established by Vincent de Paul constitute an interesting area of study for two fundamental reasons. On the one hand they highlight a relatively unstudied aspect of Vincent’s own psychological makeup: his qualities as administrator and organizer, which in him were inseparable from apostolic concerns, and on the other hand, they allow us to follow the historical development of the Congregation of the Mission from its earliest stages.

Before looking into these matters, we should define clearly the theme that we are dealing with. When I speak of foundations, I do not use the term in its mystic-religious sense (Saint Vincent as founder of the Congregation of the Mission or the Daughters of Charity or the Ladies of the Hôtel-Dieu), but in its concrete meaning, that is, the foundation of establishments or houses of the Congregation of the Mission. For that reason I am going to omit the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission in 1625 at the Collège de Bons Enfants and that of Saint Lazare in 1632 which, more than the foundation of any single house, can truly be considered as the second foundation of the congregation itself.

1. Documentation

Before all else, let us look at the documentation on which we will rely. If it is not as plentiful as we would like, it is still sufficient for us to know both the *modus operandi* of Vincent and the vicissitudes encountered by each one of his establishments.

1. 1. Vincent’s correspondence

First of all, we have Vincent’s correspondence. It is impossible to list here all the references to the different foundations scattered throughout eight volumes of letters. Suffice it to say for now that in volume 14 of Pierre Coste, C.M., *Saint Vincent de

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*This article was originally given as a talk at the Vincentian month in Paris, July 1984, and was published as *Vincentiana* 18:4,5,6 (July, December 1984):457-86.
Paul: Correspondence, entretiens, documents, under the names of each of the houses or of the persons who were involved in their foundation, there is an almost exhaustive index of the references made by Vincent and his correspondents to one or other of the establishments. That in itself would perhaps be enough to enable us to outline a complete foundation-history of the Congregation of the Mission. And I say "perhaps" because evidently, in what has been preserved of Vincent’s correspondence, there are occasional lacunae that tell us nothing about the fate of an undertaking or do not permit the identification of the persons, places, or events referred to in the documents. Throughout this work, we will have occasion to pore over a generous selection of those texts.

1.2 The first biographers

In addition, we have the information that has been transmitted by his first biographers.

Abelly has already traced the complete list of the foundations of the congregation of the Mission in Saint Vincent’s lifetime, with a brief outline of the principal characteristics of each one of them. This did not prevent him from relating, in other passages, the principal activities and outstanding events that occurred in the more important houses.¹

1.3 Official documentation

On the other hand, what we really lack is easily accessible, official documentation—I mean, in published form. The national and regional archives of France have preserved practically all the contracts signed by Saint Vincent for his foundations. Coste consulted them but was unable or thought it unnecessary to publish them in volume 13 of his work—I do not know whether he feared the volume would be too long or the cost too high. Personally I think it would be supremely useful if an edition of those documents was available to researchers. That would avoid the bother and the expense of going directly to the originals. Such an enterprise would not be beyond our resources. As a matter of fact, according to Coste, everything important can be found in the files of the National Archives of France MM 354 (contracts for Aiguillon, Richelieu, Troyes, Annecy) and S 6700 (Agen), 6706 (Lugon),

67076 (Crécy, Marseille, Le Mans, Montpellier), 6708 (Montmirail, Narbonne), 6710 (Saintes), 6711 (Saint Méen), 6712 (Tréguijer), and a few more in two or three regional or ministerial archives.

As I have said, only a few have been published, aside from those relating to Bons Enfants and Saint Lazare. Though not complete, they are those of Marseille, Sedan, Crécy, Saint Méen, and Montpellier.

1.4 Catalogues and notices

This lack of published documentation is compensated for in part by the catalogues of foundations that have been published at different times and that show a direct dependence on the sources. The following, among others, belong to this category:

1) "List of the houses of the Congregation of the Mission founded in the time of Saint Vincent," which appeared in the Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux, 1:2.


3) The "Liste des établissements des missionnaires fondés de 1625 à 1660 et noms des Supérieurs," published by Coste from a manuscript in the Archive of Saint Lazare (but with corrections by the editor in view of his own research into Vincent's correspondence), in volume 8 of Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, entretiens, documents, 516-20.

1.5 Monographic studies

Another important chapter in the documentation is made up of monographic studies of particular foundations, whether they deal with the topic as such, or within the wider context of the history of a diocese, region, or person. Without any attempt at being exhaustive, I think that it would be interesting to cite the

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3 Ibid. 303.

4 Ibid. 386.

5 Ibid., 387.

6 Ibid., 395.
following ones, almost all of them dealt with by Coste.


Bousquet, E. "Le grand Séminaire de Montpellier", in Revue historique du diocèse de Montpellier. 1909.


Charpentier, F. "Saint Vincent de Paul en Bas Poitou," Revue du Bas Poitou. 1911.


Fillon, B. Une fondation de Saint Vincent de Paul à Luçon. Fontenay-le-Comte: Robucho. 1848.


1.6 Broader studies

Finally, I must make reference to the broader studies of Vincent's foundations. Any biography of Saint Vincent usually contains a chapter or section devoted to this topic. But today the one that continues to be unequaled and, therefore, irreplaceable, is that done by Coste in volume 3 of his Monsieur Vincent: le grand saint du grand siècle, chapters 23 to 27.

In these pages Coste condensed his meticulous and, for the
time, exhaustive researches into the topic that we are concerned with, gathering the original contracts and comparing them with the data provided by Vincent's correspondence. Although I will make extensive use of it, my emphasis will be completely different. Rather than being interested in the detailed history of each foundation, I am trying to sketch a broader picture of Vincent's foundational activity, its beginnings, methods, demands, and results—that is, to talk more about Vincent de Paul, founder, than about his foundations considered in themselves.

2. Doctrinal Principles

Nowhere has Saint Vincent left behind a structured body of doctrine on the subject of foundations. Of course, the same thing occurs in other areas. Saint Vincent was not a man of theoretical syntheses, but of profound and radical convictions, of vital attitudes assumed once and forever that dictated to him at each step the path that he was to follow in order to be true to himself. Therefore, only to the extent necessary would he enter into enunciating the principles that were to be followed. It is we who must, on the heels of these declarations, reconstruct the basic plan of his ideas.

On this basis, Vincent's teaching on foundations can be summarized in a few principles as simple as they are firm.

2.1. To leave the initiative to God

Before all else, Vincent declared again and again his determination, which was that of his Congregation, never to seek foundations on his own but to wait for a sign that would show the will of God, so that it could be said that it was God who called him. Of course, this was no more than the concrete application to the foundations of Vincent's wider and more universal doctrine, that of not hurrying ahead of providence. Here is the key text, although not the only one, that describes this approach. In January 1651 he wrote to Charles de Montchal, archbishop of Toulouse,

We have given ourselves to God for many years now in order never to ask for any foundation, since we have already experienced God's special providence in our regard, in establishing us himself, without any inter-
vention of ours, in all the places where we are established, so that we can say that we have nothing that Our Lord has not offered and given us.\textsuperscript{7}

He had explained the same idea in almost the same words four years before, and also in regard to a possible foundation in Toulouse, to Mother Catherine de Beaumont.\textsuperscript{8} These are not the only texts. It would be easy to gather many more examples from texts in which the same basic thought is repeated but with differing shades and tones.

But in this case equally as important as the theory, in my opinion, is the fact that Saint Vincent declared that this had been the practice in all the foundations of the Community. In spite of such a clear declaration, I still have certain small doubts in regard to some concrete cases. One of these is the establishment in Rome, whose long and painful birth gives every indication of having been Vincent's own idea, pursued with admirable patience and tenacity. Even more so is the case of the foreign missions, undertaken on what seems to have been beyond doubt Vincent's own initiative, according to a rather well known text.

Since the three Arabias--Felix, Petrea, and Deserta--have not been entrusted to any congregation nor to secular priests for Christian cultivation and evangelization, Vincent de Paul, superior of the Congregation of the Mission, offers to send his subjects to the said Arabias whenever Your Eminences will be pleased to entrust the mission to him for cultivation \textit{sub nomine proprio} [in his own name].\textsuperscript{9}

There is room for believing that the singular nature of these two cases allows the exception to prove the rule. The foundation in Rome, the capital of Christianity, was necessary for the ecclesial consolidation of the little Company. The foreign missions had an irresistible attraction for Vincent's zeal, without the smallest possibility of material gains that could tarnish the purity of his intentions.

\textbf{2.2. To accept only stable foundations.}

\textsuperscript{7} Coste, CED, 4:138.

\textsuperscript{8} Coste, CED, 3:194

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 335.
Though he did not look for foundations, when these were offered Vincent had it as an invariable norm to accept only those that would give guarantees of stability. "It is against good order and our custom to commit ourselves to a place for a set period of time and not permanently." That is what he wrote to Firmin Get, 13 June 1659, with regard to the projected foundation at Montpellier, whose bishop had just failed to give the missionaries the necessary guarantees. For that reason he added, "If God wants us at Montpellier, he will certainly find the means of establishing us there; and if he does not want it, then neither should we want it."\textsuperscript{10}

There have been at times loose and imprecise writings and discussions about the itinerant character of the apostolate that Vincent wanted. In his thought, the missionary was itinerant in the sense that he was not at the service of the church in just one place, but that he ought to go from town to town and from parish to parish, evangelizing the poor. The missionary base, however, was supposed to be fixed and established in perpetuity. On this Saint Vincent was immovable. At any rate, the different nuances between the first and second of these principles should be noted. The former is called a "maxim." The opposite of the latter "goes against good order and our custom." So, then, a hierarchy of values is established.

2.3. Small foundations: out of necessity

On occasions I have spoken of the opposition to Saint Vincent that, to a certain degree, existed within his community. Not all of the founder's decisions were accepted with the same equanimity by all his missionaries. One of the more critical, on different occasions, was Jean Dehorgny. He had the credentials: he was one of the earliest missionaries, he had occupied important positions in administration, and he had a formation and preparation superior to that of the majority of his confrères. It is precisely to one of his criticisms that we owe the fact that Vincent took the occasion to explain another guiding principle of approach to the matter of foundations. Vincent wrote to him on 20 September 1652,

\begin{quote}
I recognize as well as you do that it is not good to have so many small establishments, and I propose to give thought to this, with the help of God's grace, but it is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Coste, CED, 7:592.
also difficult to establish large foundations at the beginning of a community such as ours. Our situation is not the same as that of the mendicants. They need only to drive the stake in order to be established. But as for us, who receive nothing from the poor, we lack an income. And that income, which ought to be enough, does not come to us all at once, nor always in the cities, so that we can establish ourselves there. It we had not accepted Nôtre Dame de Lorm, which is in the country, perhaps we would never have had the opportunity to establish ourselves in the diocese of Montauban. And perhaps in time God may be pleased by this means to call us to the city. And so, at the beginning, one does what one can, and little by little Providence arranges things for the best.¹¹

As you will have observed, we are not now in the area of principles, but of tactics. Vincent recognizes that small foundations are not good, but he accepts them as a necessary means for achieving something better. This is Vincent's pragmatism in action.

From another point of view, this text presents us with yet another of the ruling ideas of Vincent’s conduct in the matter of foundations: the need for financial resources—something that we are now going to examine.

2.4. The financial basis

Of Vincent de Paul it has sometimes been said that he was a good business man. I do not know if this is true. He never proposed as a goal the creation, and even less the accumulation, of riches, but exclusively the assurance that his works would have the financial means necessary to function effectively. He was certainly—and there is not the least doubt of this—a practical and realistic man at the service of a high apostolic idea, in which he resembles another great founder, the Spaniard Theresa of Avila. In this regard nothing is more illustrative than a letter of his to Father Edme Jolly, 12 July 1658:

I neither make nor set up nor accept those plans for establishments that are not made by those who have the power to do so, but by persons who have only the desire and do not wish to meet the costs. You will do

¹¹ Coste, CED, 4:480.
well to let them know that it is not enough that the missionaries have lodging, but that they ought to have enough "quoi vivre pour travailler" to carry out their work, since taking up a collection is neither permitted nor appropriate for them.\textsuperscript{12}

As is evident, it is the same thought that he expressed six years before to Dehorgny. The voluntary and free nature of the ministries discharged by the missionaries--no recompense was, or should be, asked for the missions--obliged them, if they were to support themselves and carry on their work, to count on a financial base in the form of foundation-capital. This was in clear contrast with the mendicants who, because they lived by alms, had no need for capital in order to establish themselves.

As a matter of fact, as we shall have occasion to observe, in all the foundations made by Vincent, the contract stipulated exhaustively the financial conditions, on which depended the number of members of the new community and their ministerial obligations. Serious attention was paid only to founders who were capable of putting their good intentions into execution on a solid financial footing. Once again we encounter Vincent's realism.

With regard to the forms that this financial footing could take, Vincent preferred investment in real property.

Nevertheless, in order to perpetuate the work, the income must be in securities. Otherwise, within fifty years, its fund will be reduced by half. The cost of things doubles every fifty years.\textsuperscript{13}

Saint Vincent was fortunate not to know the galloping inflation of our days, in which the cost of things doubles not every fifty, but every eight or ten years at the most! But, leaving aside the anecdotal, the quotation shows us Saint Vincent's economic outlook, clearly influenced at the same time by his peasant origins--land is what is secure--and by the physiocratic current of the age.\textsuperscript{14}

2.5. Implications for the foundations.

\textsuperscript{12} Coste, CED, 7:208.

\textsuperscript{13} Coste, CED, 1:394. \textit{Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence Conferences Documents I. Correspondence. Volume I (1607-1639)}, (Brooklyn, 1985), 384.

\textsuperscript{14} The physiocrats were a school of economic thinkers of the eighteenth century who believed that agriculture was the basic source of wealth in a nation. [Trans.]
And now some final reflections in this section on the implications that this kind of thinking and acting had for the foundations of the Congregation of the Mission.

First of all, it was not easy to make new foundations: benefactors with sufficient financial ability to support a community were scarce.

Another consequence was that it would be necessary to restrict establishments to smaller localities, with the hope that when circumstances improved, it would be possible to relocate in the cities. Possibly this thought can shock those who may have a romantic vision of the country missions. Giving missions in the country was not the same as living in it. Vincent's idea was to have establishments in the cities and from them radiate the missions to the surrounding country areas. That meant that the missionaries, whose vocation did not destine them to preach in the cities, had to be Carthusians at home.¹⁵

Lastly, Vincent's sense of justice led him to demand that the missionaries carry out strictly the obligations of the contracts, even if it meant renouncing important apostolic undertakings. That was the reason that, in December 1637, he gave to Father Bernard Codoing for obliging him to give up the missions that he was preaching with great effect in Romans and transfer to Richelieu, in Poitou.

What has caused me to decide in favor of Richelieu is the obligation we have there, since the foundation is perpetual. That is why, Monsieur, I most humbly entreat you to leave upon receipt of this letter, if you are not on a mission. If you are, let it be immediately after you have finished, without letting it be known until your departure. We must not fail in our obligation to be in the foresaid Richelieu by January 20 or 25.¹⁶

3. The Chronological Pace of the Foundations

For ten years, from 1625 to 1635, the Congregation of the Mission had no other establishments than the two initial ones in Paris: Bons Enfants and Saint Lazare. The small number of mis-

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¹⁵ Coste, CED, 1:122. Saint Vincent de Paul, 120.

¹⁶ Coste, CED, 1:413. Saint Vincent de Paul, 403-404.
missionaires did not permit dreaming of a greater expansion. In fact, until 1636, the total number of Vincent's followers did not exceed half a hundred, of whom some thirty were priests, ten clerics not yet ordained, and about ten brothers.\textsuperscript{17}

On the other hand, the new Congregation was little known. Only the extent to which its works in the diocese of Paris and other neighboring dioceses were attracting attention aroused in bishops, ecclesiastics, and pious lay people the desire to provide for their diocesan priests, faithful, or vassals the benefit of the pastoral activity of the missionaires.

In 1635 the first foundation was made in the provinces, that of Toul in Lorraine. Beginning at the moment, it began to grow without interruption at a quite satisfactory pace. Before all else, let us look at the dates. They are the following.

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1635</td>
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<td>1639</td>
<td>Alet (to 1641)</td>
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<td>1659</td>
<td>Montpellier</td>
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<tr>
<td>1661</td>
<td>Meaux (to 1661)</td>
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</table>

The breakdown into three columns is the result of my desire to present the foundations within the framework of what I consider to be the distinct periods in the biography of Vincent de Paul. In fact, the most flourishing stage in Vincent's life unfolds between 1634 and 1653, the period of action, which is subdivided into two periods: 1633-1642, which is the stage of ascent, "the irresistible

\textsuperscript{17} Data drawn from an analysis of Catalogue du personnel de la Congrégation de la Mission depuis l'origine (1625) jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe siècle (Paris, 1911), and the Notices sur les prêtres, clercs et frères coadjuteurs de la Congregation de la Mission, vol. 1, 453-509.
accent of Mr. Vincent" it could be called; and 1642-1653, which is
the time of fullness, the culmination of his human and priestly
career. From 1653 on, Vincent entered the sunset of his old age,
even though it was a luminous sunset, in which his impact on
the church of France was made mostly by means of the institu-
tions he had set in motion and a universally accepted moral as-
cendancy. This is not the place to justify the choice of these im-
portant divisions, something that I have done in another context.
Let us return to the foundations.
A look at the number shows us that there was a total of thirty-
one houses, of which twenty-four were in France. The pace, then,
of the French houses was one per year between 1635 and 1659,
an indication of the expanding force of the young Congregation
and how its activities responded to the needs of the church in
France.
Another interesting insight that emerges is the fact that it was
between 1642 and 1653--the period of fullness in the biography of
Vincent--when the greatest expansion takes place and, above all,
when the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission out-
side France takes place: in Italy, Poland, North Africa, Madagascar,
and the British Isles (not included because there were never
"foundations" in the usual sense of the term).
Finally, I also want to observe that in the last years of Vin-
cent's life, the pace was slower and less sure. Various houses
founded during that time had a short-lived existence (Agde,
Meaux, Montpellier). Only those of Turin and Narbonne were
successfully stabilized. Other projects undertaken during this
last period--Metz, Amiens, Noyon--would not be completed until
after Vincent's death.

4. Geographic Distribution
Let us now examine another bit of data: the geographic distribu-
tion of the foundations. The adjacent map permits us to grasp
it at first sight, without need for more than a few rapid observa-
tions.
The first is that the houses of the Congregation of the Mission
dating from Vincent's lifetime formed a network on the periphery
of the map of France that more or less followed the land and sea
boundaries of the nation. In contrast, it still did not penetrate
the interior of the country. Of course, this cannot be attributed to a deliberate plan. What prevents us from believing this is that the foundations of the Mission did not follow any plan mapped out ahead of time, but were the result of spontaneous offerings from different benefactors or, as the Saint would say, from
Divine Providence. At any rate, why not see a superior plan in this outline which covered the heart of the land of France like a protective net?

In reality—and this is the second observation that I would like to make—the geographic distribution of the foundations followed principally on the locations of the pastoral and financial interests of M. Vincent's most important friends: the Gondis (Paris and Montmirail); the Duchess d'Aiguillon (Aiguillon and Marseille); Cardinal Richelieu (Richelieu and Luçon); Alain de Solminihac (Cahors); Saint Jane Frances de Chantal (Annecy); the Fouquets (Agde and Narbonne); the Séguiers (Crécy and Meaux); Nicolas Pavillon (Alet); Noël Brûlart de Sillery (Troyes); Marie Louise Gonzague (Poland).

Finally, it is no accident that the greatest concentration of foundations was in the northern part of the country. It was the logical consequence, on the one hand, of the fact that Paris was the initial focal point of the irradiation and that in the north Vincent would expend the greater part of his personal effort; and, on the other, it was point of origin of the majority of the missionary vocations. As I have shown in another place, these came principally from the northern square of France: Champagne, Artois, Picardy, île de France. By themselves four northern dioceses—Amiens, Paris, Rouen, and Arras—gave a contingent of more than 140 missionaries out of a total of 614 admitted into the Congregation of the Mission during the founder's lifetime. In contrast, the natives of the regions situated to the southeast of the Loire-Rhône line did not account for thirty in all that time.18

5. Initiatives for the Foundations

We have just said something on the topic of the initiatives for the foundations. Let us look at it more carefully.

As we know, Vincent professed—both in theory and practice—"never to request a foundation." The initiative, then, was never his. Whose was it, then? That is what we are going to see in this section.

5.1. Bishops

Among these benefactors—founders, according to the thinking of the age, since anyone who endowed a foundation financially

was considered a founder--bishops stood in the forefront.

The foundation at Toul was at the initiative of the apostolic administrator and later bishop of the diocese, Charles Christian de Gournay; Alet, of Nicolas Pavillon, the friend and companion of Vincent's first labors, with whom he would break later on as a result of the Jansenist controversy. Was this also a reason why the foundation did not last long? Cahors was due to Alain de Solminihac, the combative reformer-bishop; Saintes to Jacques Raoul de la Guibourgère; Le Mans to Emeric de la Ferté; Saint Méen to the bishop of Saint Malo, Achille de Harlay; Tréguier was the result of the continued efforts of two successive bishops, Noël des Landes and Balthasar Grangier de Liverdi; Agen of those of Barthélemy d'Elbène; Périgueux, of those of Philibert de Brandon, although the inspiration came to this latter from his friend, Alain de Solminihac, something that perhaps contributed to the fact that the foundation was never stabilized; Montauban owed its origin to the decisive will of Monseigneur Anne de Merville; Agde, to that of the two Fouquet brothers, François and Louis, who succeeded to that see; Meaux had as its promoter Dominique Séguier, the brother of the chancellor, whose intervention was also decisive in saving Crécy; Montpellier was the work of François de Bosquet and Narbonne of François Fouquet, who was translated there from Agde. Among the foundations outside the country, that of Genoa was very much the personal initiative and realization of Cardinal Durazzo, archbishop of that city.

All in all, there were fifteen foundations that owed their origins primarily to diocesan bishops. Evidently the reasons that moved them were of a pastoral nature, something that tells us of the high appreciation that the nascent congregation had learned how to win for itself among those responsible for the destiny of the French Church. A more detailed study would bring us to the conclusion that, in general, those bishop-founders were among those who had taken most to heart the task of restoring French Catholicism and who saw in Vincent's congregation an instrument well suited to accomplish it.

5.2. Laity

Together with the bishops, although in a considerably smaller proportion, there figured as inspirers of Vincent's foundations
well-to-do lay persons who put at the saint’s disposition a part of their fortunes and influence with the intent of procuring for the tenants on their lands the spiritual benefit of the missions. Among them we must place, after the Gondis, the Duchess d’Aiguillon, to whose munificence were due the foundations of Aiguillon itself, later moved to the sanctuary of Nôtre Dame de la Rose, and of Marseille. She also endowed the foundations at Rome, Algiers, and Tunis. In these last four cases there is reason to ask whether the initiative was truly that of the Duchess or if it was not rather the ideas and intentions of Vincent himself, who sought and received the help of that illustrious lady, even though he, with his natural modesty, attributed the idea to her. That is what he did with Madame de Gondi for the initial foundation of the Congregation. It was precisely to another Gondi, Pierre, older son of the founding couple of the Congregation of the Mission, that the establishment of Montmirail in the patrimonial lands of the family was due. Finally, Crécy took its origin from another important lay person, Pierre de Lorthon, the king’s secretary, who secured the support of the king and the local bishop for his project. Thanks to the bishop, it was not possible for him to back out of his initial proposals, as he tried to do later. It was also to a lay person that the foundation of Turin, in its definitive form, must be attributed: Filippo Emmanuele de Sirmiano, prime minister of Savoy-Piedmont. Actually, the original idea was that of a Piedmontese ecclesiastic who, because of his poor standing in Vincent’s eyes, received a refusal from Vincent who opposed any projects that did not come endorsed by what he considered to be the voice of God.\textsuperscript{19}

5.3. Teams of founders
Other foundations were the result of a happy combination of two or three persons who pooled their efforts in order to offer Vincent a new place to work in. This was the case in Troyes, where the Carmelite Mother Marie of the Trinity who was inspirer, Commander Noël Brûlart de Sillery who was partner and shareholder (if I may be permitted to use the expression) and the bishop René de Breslay, who was formal patron, all joined forces.

5.4. Royal foundations
Two other foundations had an inspiration of a higher rank, those of Sedan and Warsaw, which owed their origin to the will

\textsuperscript{19}Coste, CED, 5:154
of two sovereigns who were friends of Vincent de Paul: Anne of Austria, queen of France, and Marie Louise Gonzague, queen of Poland.

5.5. Vincent's own initiatives?

Finally, in the case of the foreign missions—the British Isles and Madagascar—offers were made by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and accepted by Vincent. However, we have already seen how, at least in the case of Madagascar, the possibility must be admitted that it was Vincent's missionary zeal that first suggested the idea to the Cardinals of this high Roman dicastery.

Taken together, then, the facts support Vincent in his affirmation that he had never been the one who looked for the growth of the Community, but that this was due to the designs of Providence, acting through those directly responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the souls to whom the Mission was going to offer its services. Who were these? The question brings us to the following section of our presentation.

6. The Objectives of the Foundations

It can be said, in general, that the foundation of each house was a repetition, with new personnel and a new scenario, of the Community's initial foundation. It was a question of establishing in a new geographic location, in a new ecclesiastical or seignorial surrounding, a center from which Vincent's disciples could repeat his deeds from Bon Enfants in favor of the lands of the Gondis or from Saint Lazare in favor of the diocese of Paris. For this reason, until 1642 the foundations had as their exclusive end missions and retreats for ordinands. From 1642 on, the majority of them also included the direction of seminaires. An entirely separate group included the foundation of Marseille, with its satellites in Algiers and Tunis, with its extension in favor of the galley slaves and the captives in North Africa; Rome, which would carry out, in addition to its missionary function, the role of bridgehead for needed dealings with the Holy See; and Madagascar and the British Isles, with which the Community widened its missionary charism, giving it the character of a commission to go forth to the gentiles, and of strengthening Catholicism in the hostile environment of the reformed churches.
On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that the initial contract did not always make clear all the obligations assumed by the new house. Often that contract received additions in later documents which widened or, in some cases, narrowed the initial commitments.

6.1. Missions and ordinands

Keeping this in mind, let us point out that the following foundations had missions as their purpose:

- Toul: missions in the diocese.
- Aiguillon: missions in the duchy four times a year, to which was later added the obligation of receiving ordinands from the diocese and giving missions in the territories of Agen and Condom.
- Richelieu: missions in the duchy and in the two dioceses of Poitiers and Luçon, with obligation of making a complete circuit every five years and retreats for the ordinands and clergy of Poitou.
- Luçon: the same as the previous one.
- Troyes: missions in the diocese and every five years in the lands of Brûlart de Sillery; ordinands and retreats for clergy.
- Alet: missions and a seminary that was never formalized.
- Annecy: missions during eight months of the year in the diocese and one every five years in Brie-Comte-Robert. Later on, the direction of the seminary, which was actually the first to begin operation, was added.
- Crécy: missions.

6.2. Seminaries

The seminary figures as the principal end, although always combined with missions, in the houses of Cahors, Marseille, Saint Méen, Tréguier, Agen Périgueux, Montauban, Agde, Meaux, Montpellier and Narbonne.

Obviously, the seminary spoken of in these contracts was something very different from what we understand as such today. This is not the place for an explanation of the system, organization, and functioning of Vincent’s seminaries, a topic for which I defer to the specialized literature, and especially the works of
Roche and Poole. Suffice it to say, in a general way, that it was a question of simple and practical institutions where for a few years, and sometimes only a few months, the candidates for the priesthood received the spiritual and pastoral training necessary for the effective discharge of their ministry.

6.3. Other ministries

To these three principal works - missions, retreats for ordinands and seminaries - each foundation added special commitments or obligations, which shaded and enriched the initial physiognomy of the Congregation. So it was that among the purposes of the new houses could appear the direction of a hospital (Toul, Le Mans), help to the poor (Crécy), suffrages for the founders (Aiguillon), the establishment of confraternities of charity (Troyes), the administration of chapels or sanctuaries (Notre Dame de la Rose), the chaplaincy general of the galleys (Marseille), or accompanying the bishop in his pastoral visits to the diocese (Le Mans). In that way Vincent's work went on being enriched and diversified. Despite that, there was little danger of spreading the ministries thin, since the missions, ordinands and seminaries were included in every foundation.

7. Personnel

I am going to be very brief on this point. As we have seen above from Vincent's own words, in general the foundations were small. This was necessary both because of the scarcity of members in the Community and its small financial endowment. Another reason was the specific end of the houses, which was to be a network of mission posts that would assure the services of the Community to a diocese or territory, generally one of reduced dimensions. For that reason, the personnel assigned to each of these hovered around an average of four or five men. The largest houses - Sedan, Crécy - each had an endowment for eight priests and two brothers. The smallest, Montmirail, numbered only two priests and one brother. In the others the intermediate figures of four, five, six or eight missionaries were repeated. There is no need to point out that the demands for personnel were not always met, and in Vincent's correspondence there are abundant

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references to the lack of personnel, to the difficulty of finding all the missionaries necessary for each house, or the complaints of superiors because of the conditions of contracts were not being fulfilled in this regard.

8. Financial Endowment

The financial endowment and management of Vincent's foundations has not yet had the monographic study that it deserves, given the importance and complexity of the subject. What I am going to present is simply a synthesis, not intended to be exhaustive, of the available data, in the hope that some specialist will complete the research, evaluation and analysis of the complex world of M. Vincent's finances.

Starting with the principle already explained - that the missionaries could not charge for their ministries, they had to have their support assured by means of a financial endowment of the house in which they lived - there is not a single one of Vincent's foundations for which provision for the necessary capital and income was not made from the beginning by means of a contract of foundation. That is to say, for every foundation in the canonical sense there was a corresponding "foundation" in the financial sense. That is what was done in setting up the foundations of Bons Enfants and Saint Lazare.

The endowment had a variety of forms. It can be said that every income producing system known in that preindustrial society was represented in the contracts signed by Vincent.

8.1 Ecclesiastical benefices

The most frequent resource, especially when the foundational initiative came from some bishop - and we have seen that these cases were the most numerous - was that of uniting a house of missionaries, especially if it was a seminary, to some ecclesiastical benefice. Saint Vincent had no reservations about using this system of financial endowment that was so widespread in the French Church of his time.

8.1.1 Abbeys and priories

In this respect the most significant case was that of the Breton abbey of Saint Méen, which the bishop of Saint Malo designated as the site for his seminary, uniting to it the abbey's total revenue and emoluments as the basis for financial support.
More numerous were the priories incorporated to different houses. Thus, Richelieu benefited from those of Saint Nicolas de Champvant and Roche; Cahors, from those of Vaurette, Saint Martin de Balaguier, and Gignac; Saintes from that of Saint Vivien; Agen, from that of Saint Foy. As a general rule, the union was brought about by naming the superior of the house as prior of the respective benefice, an appointment that passed from one superior to the next.

8.1.2 Hospitals

Other houses had annexed to them the direction and benefit of former hospitals (a case analogous to that of the priory of Saint Lazare). To this group belonged the houses whose income came from the Hôpital de Saint-Ésprit. The superior of the missionaries - first Father Dehorgny and then Father Jolly - was named administrator of the hospital. The same thing happened in Meaux and Montmirail. The former had use of the lands, income, and inhabitants of the hospital Jean-Rose, and the latter that of the Hôtel-Dieu de la Chausée with its real property.

8.1.3 Churches, chapels, sanctuaries

Sometimes it was a question of churches or chapels whose benefices or income was granted to the missionaries. That is what happened in Le Mans with the collegiate church of Notre Dame de Coeffort, and in Montauban with the sanctuary of Notre Dame de Lorm. These are the two most notable cases. But others also, like Tréguier, had chapels of lesser importance joined to them.

8.1.4 Tithes

We can consider tithes as very much of the same order as ecclesiastical benefices. On more than one occasion, the founder-bishops of house of the Mission granted them part of the tithes that they had the right to collect in their dioceses. Among other, the bishop of Saint Malo endowed his seminary, when he established it in the abbey of Saint Méen, with 500 livres of income from the tithes of his diocese. Similarly, in Sedan, the missionaries collected the tithes of the town and those of Balam.

8.1.5 Parishes

The most common resource, however, was that of uniting parishes to the houses of the missionaries. This is a point that simplistic or excessively-literal interpretations of Vincent's decla-
rations have tended to cover with a discreet veil. In actual fact there is no doubt that as a matter of principle Saint Vincent was not in favor of his Congregation's taking on parishes. In this regard there is his definitive statement of 1653 which he wrote to the superior of Notre Dame de Lorm in Montauban:

You have done very well in refusing the parish of Glatens no matter how valuable it could be, both because it would have been a horrible scandal for you to take charge of two or three parishes at the same time, and because parishes are not our affair. We have very few, as you know, and those that we have been given to us against our will, or by our founders or by their lordships the bishops, whom we cannot refuse in order not to be on bad terms with them, and perhaps the one in Brial is the last that we will ever accept, because the further along we go the more we find ourselves embarrassed by such matters.21

Perhaps, as on other occasions, it may be necessary not to take Vincent literally or, if we do, to understand his words more as an expression of a desire and of an interior activity than as a factual description. Otherwise, his words could not be harmonized with what really happened. In fact, the parishes accepted by the Congregation of the Mission in the time of Saint Vincent were numerous enough. Let us look at the situation.

The house at Toul had two parishes attached to it, one in Toul itself and the other in Écrouves. The house at Richelieu had charge of the local parish; the house at Troyes, the parish of Barbise, endowed with 2,000 livres of income. At Alet the intention had also been to give the missionaries a parish, but this did not come about because of the short duration of that foundation. At Cahors, the missionaries were given charge of the parish of Saint Barthélemy de Soubirous. At Saintes, they directed the parish of Saint Preuil by means of a vicar. Those in Le Mans exercised the right of presentation over the parishes of Montbézat and Maison-Dieu. The house at Montauban came to have three parishes united to it: Saint Aignan, Brial and Falguière. The house at Sedan had direct charge of the principal parish of the city. At Adge, only a lawsuit prevented their making another the source

21Coste, CED, 4:617.
of their resources for the seminary. The parish of Maiour was legally awarded to the house of Narbonne. As is evident, Vincent accepted some other parishes after having said that Brial would be the last.

This list, certainly incomplete, proves that Vincent's wishes, including his intimate convictions, were one thing and the limitations imposed by reality on numerous occasions were another.

The same can be said, although it may be in passing, of the other prescription, this one imposed as a global rule on the missionaries, that of not being obliged to officiate in choir with the singing of the hours and mass. In spite of that, both the missionaries at the collegiate church of Coëffort in Le Mans and those of Saint Méen in the abbey church were obliged to sing the canonical house while dressed in surplice, at least on certain days, and the high mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation.

8.2 Capital and income in cash

Next in importance to endowments of ecclesiastical benefices came those consisting of capital or income in cash granted to the foundations. It can be said that in greater or lesser amount, they all received some funds of this type, since it was often customary to add a certain amount of cash to the assignment of other sources of income, whether for the purchase or rent of the house or as funds for investment.

In this situation we find the houses of Troyes and Annecy, which received substantial amounts from Brûlart de Sillery, and the houses of Sedan (splendidly endowed by King Louis XIII and then by his widow, Anne of Austria), Tréguier, Meaux (to which the bishop at his death left a capital of 25,000 livres), Saintes and Le Mans.

A special way of setting up these endowments consisted in some cases of an extraordinary contribution that certain bishops imposed on their chapters of canons and holders of benefices with the seminary as the beneficiary. This happened in Cahors, Agen and Montauban, not always with a high degree of grace on the part of the involuntary contributors.

8.3. "Feudal rights"

As people of the twentieth century, our attention can be directed more toward another form of financial endowment, that in terms that are deliberately inexact, we can call "feudal rights".
By that I mean sources of financial resources consisting of the collection of certain services of a clearly feudal origin that some founders turned over to the houses of which they were patrons. Thus, for example, Cardinal Richelieu granted the house in his ducal city the fief of Bois Bouchard, the seignory of Saint Cassien, and, what is most notable, the notaryships or public registers of Loudon. In these cases the missionaries replaced the lord of the place in the collection of the taxes that were theirs.

Similar to the latter was the case of mills. It is well known that the rights of the mill were one of the banalités [a feudal lord’s monopoly of wine presses, ovens, flour mills, and the like] that survived well into the seventeenth century from ancient feudal rights. Hence various houses owned mills. Richelieu had that of Tuet, by disposition of the cardinal, and Montmirail that of Fountaine-Esarts by the last will of Louis Toutblanc, secretary to Pierre de Gondi. They were not the only ones. Research into the depths of French national archives would undoubtedly present us with some genuine surprises.

8.4 Public Services

Because of a lack of sufficient bureaucracy, the administrative organization of the Old Regime permitted, when it did not actually compel, the public sector to grant to the private the management of certain specific services. In this way they were converted into sources of income for the concessionaires or lessees, who charged the users for the service in question and paid the stipulated amount to the public treasury. The difference between the two amounts constituted one’s profit.

Among such services, those that necessarily stood out were royal transportation or coaches of public transport. Vincent, or more exactly, some of his houses, had incomes that were produced by these services. The houses of Aiguillon-Nôtre Dame de la Rose, Marseille and Rome, as well as the missions of Algiers and Tunis, had the most substantial part of their foundation capital in coachlines. Vincent did not operate the coaches personally, but leased them out in return for a yearly rent. It should be mentioned that the business did not always turn out to be profitable, because of the frequent intervention of the government, which cut back the profits or seized the payments for one or other quarters. At any rate, the aforesaid houses of the Mission had in-
terests, that we may know of, in the lines of Paris to Chartres, Rouen, Orléans, Soissons and Bordeaux. They were all due to gifts made by the Duchess d'Aiguillon. It was not for nothing that her uncle, Cardinal Richelieu, had been the founder of the royal post in France and its dominions.

Still more shocking to our outlook, but fully in agreement with that of the seventeenth century, was the obtaining of profit on the taxes of different classes by a process analogous to the one described above. Brûlart de Sillery granted to the house at Troyes his share of the taxes on dry goods, merchandise and wine from the parishes of Saint Aubin and Saint Maurille de Ponts de Cé, and the house at Annecy his rights to the aides or helps [tax on beverages and other articles of consumption] of the city of Melun, equivalent to the income from a capital of 40,000 livres. The house at Crécy found itself endowed in part with income coming from the taxes paid by the retailers of salt of Lagny-sur-Marne.

8.5. Properties

Finally - though by no means the least important - many houses had their foundation capital or part of it in the form of urban or rural real estate, with whose income or direct management the missionaries supported themselves.

At times it might be townhouses or houses built in some city. Troyes owned a townhouse of the same name in Paris in the Faubourg Saint Michel, and the house of Richelieu owned various of the cardinal's houses. Lands, farms, farmhouses, dairies, woods, meadows, gardens and nurseries were managed by Richelieu, Annecy, Crécy, Montmirail and, especially, Le Mans.

In some cases, Vincent resorted to investing in houses capital that had been received in cash. This he did with the 24,000 livres bequeathed by the last will of Louis XIII, which Anne of Austria designated for use as a stable endowment for missions of Sedan. Vincent invested it in the construction of thirteen small houses near Saint Lazare that he rented to the Ladies of Charity for foundling homes. The rent collected went to the missions of Sedan.

8.6. "A rich congregation?"

At this point it would be necessary to begin a new chapter dedicated to calculating the total amount of the funds managed by
Vincent's foundations. I have to confess, however, that on this point my efforts at research have clashed at one time or another with obstacles that up to now have been insuperable. The lack of data, the imprecision of the data that are known, the variability of factors to be considered, and many other reasons mean that only very "iffy" conclusions can be arrived at. Under these conditions I prefer not to present conclusions that probably will soon be undone by later research.

What it is appropriate to say is that, as an old Spanish proverb has it, "all that glitters is not gold". In Vincent's correspondence there is abundant lamentation about the lack of resources with which almost all the houses, even the best endowed, struggled: uncollected rents, taxes seized, harvests ruined, the destruction of wars, delinquent debtors, the scant dependability of founders or the fickleness of others, the refusal of heirs to abide by bequests left in wills, etc., etc. These frequently reduce to something very small what on paper seems to be a buoyant financial situation.

9. Difficulties in Foundations

If up to now the panorama of Vincent's foundations seems to move in the serene, if complex, territory of contractual arrangements or juridical norms, the study of the living reality of the foundations, whose success had to overcome on more than one occasion obstacles that were almost unconquerable, is something else altogether. We already know that, in fact, some of the foundations were not successfully consolidated. That is what happened with those of Alet, Périgueux, and Montpellier, all of which lasted less than two years. Others, like Agde and Meaux, because of their insufficient financial or pastoral bases, also had a fleeting existence, since they closed in 1671 and 1661 respectively.

Others, finally, saw themselves seriously threatened in their interests and in their very existence. I will refer only to three of the more important cases.

Richelieu, which appears at first sight to be one of the better foundations, was on the point of going under at the death of the cardinal. He had sold the notaryships of Loudon, which constituted the principal capital of that house, with the intention of
investing the money in lands that he would give to the Mission. But death overtook him before he could finish this project of reconversion, as we would call it today. A long suit with the heirs seemed inevitable. The Mission could lose much; nothing less than 101,360 livres had been invested in the construction and furnishing of the dwelling. Fortunately the Duchess d'Aiguillon intervened, bringing it about that the lands of the seignory of Saint Cassien and some houses that the cardinal owned in Richlieu were granted to Vincent and the case was resolved.

In Crécy, the founder, at some point in time, regretted his good gesture and decided to assign to the hospital of the locality the funds that he had assigned to the missionaries. Vincent, in conformity with his line of conduct, refused to sue. But the bishop, Dominique Séguiere, undertook the litigation and won a victory for the house.

And at Saint Méen, the picturesque story is very well known, with suggestions of an episode from The Three Musketeers, of the hand-to-hand armed fight between the Benedictines, backed by the parlement of Brittany, and the bishop and missionaries, supported by the royal decrees and the troops of the Marshal de la Meilleraye.

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It has not been my intention, as you will have observed, to trace the history of Vincent's foundations in the sense of narrating the vicissitudes they encountered, the men who animated them, the works and ministries that they unfolded. This would have been another topic, nicer and undoubtedly more pleasant. But, apart from the fact that Coste has already written almost all of this history in the chapters that I have indicated, the lessons that can be learned from this chapter in the life of our Holy Founder are now a matter for the reader to draw out in personal reflections.
The state of poverty is the nearest earthly condition to the kingdom of heaven, and by far the most innocent.

Saint Vincent de Paul

Poverty is the bond of religious, disengaging them from all earthly ties and attaching them perfectly to God.

Saint Vincent de Paul

To say "Daughters of Charity" is just the same thing as to say "Daughter of God."

Saint Vincent de Paul

A Daughter of Charity's rule of life should be for her what wings are to a bird -- a motive force without the weight.

Saint Vincent de Paul