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Congregation of the Mission

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To all the Members of the Congregation of the Mission

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

In this Jubilee year of the 350th anniversary of the death of our Founders we have selected as our theme “Charity and Mission”. We are called to reflect upon and deepen our own Vincentian spirituality in and through the gift of charity for mission. It is my hope through this Mission Appeal Letter, conferees throughout the Congregation of the Mission will render their hearts and think seriously whether or not the Lord is calling them to fulfill their missionary vocation in one of the following missions where there is need.

As a young confere wrote: “It is not easy to make a decision to choose to move on from one’s own particular province to a new mission experience.” It is important to pray, discern, listen carefully to what God is saying to one’s heart, and then to speak simply with the Visitor of the Province in order that he too might help you to discern the ways that God may be calling you to give of yourself in the Congregation of the Mission. The need for charity is vast throughout the world. Many of the missions that have been entrusted to us clamor for greater assistance and the presence of evangelizers. We have also received further requests from Bishops who are in dire need of pastoral agents.

I begin with our own international missions and some offshoots from those particular missions where requests are pouring in. Then as usual, we will present the needs of our provinces which have mission territories and yet lack personnel. If you are unable to give of yourself as gift in mission, we ask that you might express your charity in and through concrete donations. Further information can be found at the end of this message. Echoing the words of Bishop Helder Camara, another confere recently said: “No one is so poor that he does not have something to spare; no one is so rich that he cannot receive something.”
INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

1. Papua New Guinea:

a) Vladimir Malota writes: “I am the first priest residing permanently in Our Lady of Fatima parish in Woitape in 19 years. It has suffered structural and pastoral collapse. Today I am rebuilding first the pastoral system of the parish. I re-established regular visits to all our villages in the mountains and in the jungle. For the first time after 20 years many older people, with tears in their eyes, can receive the sacraments and die in the grace of God. I am also repairing the mission station that has deteriorated drastically during the last two decades.”

“In a spiritual sense I am experiencing... raising from ashes a very poor parish in one of the most remote areas. Can there be something more Vincentian?”

“Woitape is located in Goilala Mountains and is accessible only by small plane or chopper. All supplies have to be airlifted. The catholic mission station is located in a beautiful valley; the villages are scattered in the mountains and can be reached only by foot.”

“Weather reflects the dichotomy of dry/wet season mountain climate. During the day the temperature can reach 30°C, while during the night the temperature often falls to zero.”

“Officially under our administration is also St. Martin de Porres parish in Kosipe. It can be reached only by foot, in a one-day walk from Woitape. The mission was destroyed completely by a wildfire in 1997. In a pastoral sense it is almost completely disintegrated and waits for a full-time parish priest. It was in Kosipe parish that I found a village that a priest last visited 60 years ago!”

“There are many more like that waiting for any Vincentian willing and fit to walk and preach the Gospel to the poorest of the poor in Papua New Guinea.”

b) Holy Spirit Seminary, Bomana, is an interdiocesan Seminary located on the out-skirts of Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea. Presently it is housing 38 seminarians and has only two formators. The need to have more priest formators here is very important and urgent as the work load has drastically increased. At this time last year, there were four resident priest formators: two were Vincentian confreres — Frs. Rolando Santos from the Philippines and Tulio Cordero from the Dominican Republic. Father Tulio left the seminary late last year to begin a new appointment as the provincial of the
Province of Puerto Rico while Father Rolando Santos left this year in June to assume the office of the General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The second diocesan priest formator has since left for studies in Rome. The seminary has now only Father Justin Eke, our confrere from Nigeria and the rector of the seminary, Father Peter Artiken.

The church of PNG is growing with the challenges that a young church faces. One of these is the discipline and faithful commitment of the clergy. Recent experience reveals that a new dimension in the formation of the seminarians preparing for mission needs to be carried out. It is common in the Church of PNG to see a priest within the first three years suspended, laicized, or even to leave Holy Orders. This raises concern about the initial conviction of the persons involved.

At this point our confreres are as much needed now, as it was at the beginning of our mission in the seminary, especially as it has been very difficult to get any local priest to occupy the positions held by Fathers Santos and Tulio. The seminary needs a Spiritual Director and a Counselor (Guidance Counselor / Psychologist). The Bishops of PNG look forward to our increasing presence to help build the church, starting as Vincent did, with the clergy.

c) Bishop Gilles writes from Kiunga, Papua New Guinea:
"I come to you to follow-up on my two petitions presented some years ago after my visit to your generalate. Father Rolando Santos had told me he was to come to work in our diocese but then he got the job as General Secretary for our Bishops’ Conference. So my two petitions are still the same; one priest to be a companion to my priests and one priest to care for the Formation House where we want to prepare candidates for the seminary life. I am aware that your needs and requests are many but the only way to obtain priests is to keep asking for priests. Please do not forget us." The language is English and pidgin English.

2. Solomon Islands. Father Greg Walsh, superior in the Solomon Islands asks: "Would you like to serve in a vital vibrant Church and plant seeds to bear good fruit for years to come? Here in Solomon Islands the Congregation is privileged to be involved in forming a new generation of priests and serving a young community thirsting for more knowledge of their faith. The needs are great and we feel sure you will find joy in working here alongside your brothers. Come for a semester, for a few years or for
many! We badly need confreres willing to teach in the seminary, since it has expanded into a complete major seminary recently. Our biggest needs are Scripture and Moral Theology. We would dearly love to have a confrere willing to teach in these areas. There are also plenty of opportunities for pastoral ministry, adult education, CM vocations cultivation and popular missions to isolated communities. We warmly invite you. Primary apostolate: Holy Name of Mary Seminary; other apostolates in order of their importance as we see them: Red Beach Vocations House, Good Shepherd Parish, Nazareth Apostolic Center, Burns Creek Settlement, Honaira Prison. New possibilities: a parish in nearby Auki Diocese (Solomon Islands’ most populated and vibrant diocese), CM formation (currently our students are sent to Fiji.) We are planning to offer a ‘Solomon Islands Experience’ to allow confreres to see the needs here, to discern their own response, and to spread the word.” The language is English and pidgin English.

3. El Alto, Bolivia. Some may recall that in one of our past circulars for *tempo forte*, I announced a restructuring of our mission in El Alto, Bolivia. That restructuring is coming to a completion at this time. Our attempt has been to have confreres closer together so that they might support each other and might be able to live out what our Constitutions call us to, community for mission. As a result we have had to give up one of the three mission parishes that we have in El Alto. Two confreres will live together in one of the mission parishes and two in the other mission parish. One of the members of this team of four has recently arrived on 28 September, Father Aidan Rooney, from the Eastern Province of the United States. He joins Father Diego Pía in Mocomoco. The superior of the mission, Father Aníbal Vera will live together with Father Cyrille De La Barre de Nanteuil in Italaque. At the end of this year, one of the missionaries who has been there for ten years, Father Abdo Eid will be returning to his province of origin after having given ten generous years in the mission in El Alto and with the hope of resting up in order that he might assume yet another mission experience in the near future. I am very grateful to the generosity that Abdo has expressed throughout these years in El Alto with his special contribution being given to our seminarians, those of La Paz, El Alto, as well as his work with university students.

4. We are also opening a new mission as was mentioned in a former circular, in Cochabamba. On 7 October, we have had a visit from the Archbishop of Cochabamba to discuss further
details of this new mission where we hope to have at least three confreres, one of them being the Director of the Daughters of Charity of Bolivia. I write to request yet a fourth member for this house because as I listened to the Bishop, with his pastoral vicar, the needs are great and the work is vast. The confreres who will be working in this mission will collaborate also with the Daughters of Charity who have four houses in the area as well as other branches of the Vincentian Family, particularly a community of the Vincentian Marian Youth from Spain. The language in both El Alto and Cochabamba is Spanish plus Aymara and Quechua respectively.

NEW MISSIONS

5. I recently received a letter from a Bishop in Angola. He says the following: “I was recently named Bishop of the Diocese of Mbanza Congo, Angola. Visiting the diocese I was struck by the lack of diocesan clergy and missionaries as well. Some information concerning the diocese that is situated in the north of Angola, area in km² 39,459. Inhabitants 676,400. Catholics 339,300. Parishes 6. Diocesan priests 6, religious priests 12, religious women 33. As you can tell, missionary personnel is very limited. In order to assist the Catholic population present in the diocese and not only them I confidently and humbly write, looking to your congregation with the possibility of opening a presence in our diocese having as the principal reason, the evangelization ad gentes, or the direction of our minor seminary. With the hope of having a positive response, I renew my sentiments of respect and consideration with regard to your person. And I thank you ahead of time for your generosity and availability. In faith, Vicente Carlos Kiaziku, OFM Cap. Bishop of Mbanza Congo.” The language is Portuguese.

PROVINCIAL MISSIONS

6. Parish-Mission Santiago Apóstol, Amubri, Talamanca, Costa Rica. William Benavides Araya tells us: “The parish is in a mountainous area of Talamanca. It is inhabited by 10,000 indigenous Bribris and 3,000 Cabécares. The region has 33 communities in the district of Bratsi and Telire. The parish center is in Amubri and in order to get there you must go to a place called Suretka (canton Talamanca, province of Limón), and cross the river Telire and Lari by boat and then on foot 8 kilometers
(actually there is a bus) to the parish center. There are in Amubri means of communication, public transport, electric lights, running water, radio stations, a school, a college, a health center and internet access. The character of our people is very simple: they are open and generous, but at the same time careful in the way they act and reserved in their customs. The typical family is made up of a mother and children or grandmother and grandchildren; the father is usually absent. The young people are drawn into the consumer society: hedonistic, conformist, quickly losing their customs and traditions. We rely on pastoral agents in the different communities; their leadership is fundamental. In the area of religion, Catholicism still is followed for the most part although the sects 'attack' each time with more strength. The Church is weak and the commitment of the Christian community is misunderstood. Nevertheless we encounter expressions of faith and willingness to go forward. The vice-province of Costa Rica makes a call to the Congregation throughout the world for some missionaries who want to share this way of faith with the indigenous of Talamanca so that our brothers may also enjoy the privilege of knowing deeply the Reign of God in them.”

The language is Spanish.

7. We have received a request from the vice-visitor of Costa Rica, Oscar Mata, for an experienced formator to accompany the seminarians in the formation residence in Ipís. The language in Costa Rica is Spanish. The house of formation is located in a poor section of the town, providing ample places for pastoral activities on the part of the students as well as the formator. Also living in the house is the director of the lay missionary movement and the director for vocations.

8. Cuba. Once again I make an appeal for our small province of Cuba, which is always in need of further missionary support. Thank God, this year we have a new missionary in place there, Father Angel Garrido, former missionary for many years in Madagascar, originally from the province of Madrid, Spain. As you know we have very few confreres there but they are hard-working and good men, and yet advancing in age and needing assistance and support from younger confreres. The language in Cuba is Spanish, but one has to learn to live within the limits of a political, social structure that is unique unto itself.

9. Honduras. The province of Barcelona requests assistance in their mission in Honduras. At the present time we have the support of two confreres from other provinces, Father Miguel
Angel Renes from the Province of Madrid and Alexander Cortez from the province of Central America. The need for accompaniment on the part of the people is particularly important in these times of turmoil and political unrest in the country. The mission involves a great deal of work with lay missionaries and pastoral team ministry. The language is Spanish and Moskitia.

10. Recently I received a request from the new visitor of the Province of Congo, Father Stanislav Zontak, appealing for a mature confrere with experience in formation. The province of Congo is very blessed with vocations but the men in general are very young and lacking in experience in formation. So he puts out this urgent appeal. The language spoken in French.

11. China continually makes this appeal for the very international community of the province in Taiwan; but I want to make a more special appeal for confreres to participate in a new experience in mainland China where presently the province has three confreres: one Polish confrere, Pawel Wierzbicki, an American confrere, Tom Sendlein, and a Dutch confrere, Henk De Cuypjer. This past year there has been a new volunteer from the Province of the Philippines, Father Francis Cruz, who has also been working in a special ministry in mainland China, as well as a confrere from the province of Ireland, Father Padraig Regan who generously gave six months to the mission in mainland China. I have asked, together with the Province of China, the Conference of Asia Pacific, to study the situation of preparation for evangelization in mainland China as many religious congregations throughout the world are doing. Father Padraig wrote and told me that there are vocations. With patience, good guidance, and a mature vocation plan in process we can attract young Chinese men who are being called to give their lives to evangelize the poor.

12. Another regular request is from the vice-province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, an area that is challenging and yet promising for evangelizers. Gradually the vice-province is nurturing vocations from the Ukraine as well as Belarus and yet not fast enough to be able to respond to the various needs that the vice-province has, since a number of the missioners who have served there are returning to their provinces of origin. Members of the Congregation of the Mission can learn much from the former vice-visitor, a veteran missionary, Father Paul Roche who after having finished his term as vice-visitor, continues to remain
in the mission, offering himself to serve in Siberia. Would that there be other young men in the Congregation of the Mission willing to make this sacrifice to serve an area of the world that clambers to know God’s love in the Christian Catholic faith. The common language of the confreres in the vice-province is Russian.

13. Another province that is certainly a missionary territory and has requested assistance, being one of the first territories Saint Vincent de Paul began to send missionaries, is Madagascar. The Province of Madagascar has requested from the province of Paris possible missionaries from Vietnam where God has blessed this region with an abundance of vocations. The languages are French and Malagasy.

14. Another missionary province that is always in need of assistance is Mozambique. It has a number of confreres from Portugal as well as from Mexico and we are delighted to be able to say that other provinces and vice-provinces in Africa have also been supporting the mission in Mozambique. There are recently arrived two young confreres from the province of Nigeria, Gabriel Ugwunwangwu and Nicholas Ikpeme as well as confreres from Ethiopia, Brazil and Congo. Also in Mozambique is the mission of the province of Salamanca, in Nacala, where presently there is a community of Vincentian Marian Youth and two confreres, one from Spain and the other from Eritrea. It is a mission that needs at least one more confrere in order to make the experience more viable and less stressing for those who make up the mission team. The languages are Portuguese and other local languages.

15. Possibly Equatorial Guinea. MISEVI, Spain has initiated steps towards opening a new community. They will be supported by the Daughters who are there. They would hope that the CM too would join the missionary effort. The language is Spanish.

I conclude with the initial part of our prayer for 350th anniversary of the birth into heaven of our Founders:

Lord God Almighty, Father of the poor, you give us the grace to celebrate this year the 350th anniversary of the death of St. Vincent and St. Louise. Through their intercession grant that we allow ourselves to be transformed more fully by the Spirit you gave them. May the Spirit of Charity so fill our hearts
and minds that our love for our brothers and sisters, who are marginalized and rejected by society, be gentle, attentive, compassionate, proactive and inventive unto infinity. Help us make our faith strong and humble in a world that seems so far away from you yet that thirsts so much for you. Make us become a sign of hope for many, as were Vincent and Louise.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

Please see next page for important information
INFORMATION AND CRITERIA
FOR THOSE WHO WRITE

1. After a period of serious discernment, if you should feel moved to volunteer, please send your letter or e-mail to Rome no later than 27 November 2009.

2. It is, of course, helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for the missionaries. Details will vary according to the particular place to which a conferee is sent.

3. While we have decided that no automatic age cutoff would be established, it is surely necessary that the missionary have reasonably good health and the flexibility needed for inculturation.

4. Confreres who volunteer should inform the Visitor that they have done so. I will also dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.

5. Your letter should give some background about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your training. It should also express any particular interests that you have, such as the mission in which you would like to take part.

6. Even if you have already written in the past, please contact me again. Experience has demonstrated that confreres who are not available at one moment might be available at another.

7. If you cannot go to the missions, perhaps your monetary contribution can represent your zeal for the mission. Every year about 15 eligible provinces needing help to realize their mission, seek a micro-project grant of $5,000 or less from the Vincentian Solidarity fund. These grants can be awarded by the VSO (through the Curia) quickly and with minimal paperwork. The VSO reports on the wonderful fruits of these grants in its quarterly bulletin (available at www.famvin.org/vso). The well for the micro-project grants is going dry. There is less than one year of funding left. Donations to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund are the only source of funding for these micro-project grants.
VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND:
TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION

Provincial, House and Individual Contributions:

1. Checks made payable to: “Congregazione della Missione” and with “Deposit Only” written on the back. These should be sent to:

                John Gouldrick, C.M.
                Treasurer General
                Via dei Capasso, 30
                00164 Roma Italy

2. Other possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.

In every case:

1. All gifts received will be acknowledged. (If your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable time, please contact us for clarification).

2. Please inform us if you are making any transfer of money, as described above.
YEAR OF THE PRIEST

Rome, 15 October 2009

To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission and Superiors of International Missions

My dear brothers in Saint Vincent de Paul.

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

In our most recent tempo forte meeting we had an open dialog regarding the Pope's designation of this year as the Year of the Priest. I am attaching to this note, a letter that we received from the Congregation of the Clergy. I want to encourage you as Visitors to look for creative ways of implementing some of the aspects or contents of this letter and to do so in the context of our Jubilee Year, the 350th anniversary of the death of Saint Vincent, "the light of the clergy."

I have asked Father José Antonio Ubillús to coordinate different activities or articles to make available in the web page www.cmglobal.org. We have considered things like the edition of Vincentiana a number of years ago that was dedicated to Saint Vincent the priest, a letter from Father Maloney regarding Vincentian priestly qualities. I have also asked a number of other confreres of the Council to contribute short articles, that in some way speaks about their experience of priesthood in the context of their Vincentian vocations.

I hope that this will be a year of grace for all the priests of the Congregation and in a special way a year of grace for those who may be struggling in their priestly vocation. I pray for each and every one of you, that through your leadership you might help the members of the province/mission be strengthened in their call to serve as missionaries in their priestly vocation following Jesus Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General
To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

I would briefly like to share with you some of the subjects that we touched on in our most recent tempo forte meeting. We began with an ongoing formation session with Don Gino Franchi who is an affiliate member of the Congregation of the Mission, diocesan priest from Livorno, pastor of a parish dedicated to Elizabeth Ann Seton. He has done an incredible amount of research on her and written books, because it was in Livorno that Elizabeth Ann Seton had what we could consider her conversion experience from the Episcopalian faith to the Catholic Church through her attraction to and worship of the Eucharist.

We also had as special guests this week, Father Miles Heinen, the Executive Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office as well as Father Javier Álvarez, the Director General of the Daughters of Charity, who for the first time in the history of the relationship between the Daughters and the Congregation came to give a report to the General Council on aspects of his role particularly from the perspective of the confreres mission towards the Daughters of Charity.

1. The first item that we treated was the immediate preparation for the General Assembly of 2010. The General Assembly is going to be made up of a number of Round Table session. We spent a good amount of time discerning the different persons who would be present to initiate the conversation/dialog with the rest of the delegates of the General Assembly. The titles of the various Round Tables are “The Signs of the Times,” “Systemic Change,” “Permanent Formation Regarding the CIF Program,” “Reconfiguration,” “The Vincentian Family.” We also discussed the logo for the General Assembly that was presented by Father Alexis Cerquera Trujillo, in which he makes a connection
between the 350th anniversary and the theme of the General Assembly which is *Creative Fidelity to the Mission*. We also discussed the persons who will be considered for synthesizing the dialog in the General Assembly, one in each of the official languages of the Congregation: English, French and Spanish. The Technical Committee for the General Assembly reported on their most recent trip to Paris. It seems that together with the team in Paris, things are well underway for the preparation of the General Assembly.

2. We discussed the 350th anniversary of the death of our Holy Founders. As many may know, the Heritage Committee has already published two themes to be reflected on in the months of October and November. We examined, as part of the 350th celebration, a report that was sent to the Curia by Father Robert Maloney on the micro financing project for Haiti. We also discussed the Executive Summary of the Projects Committee in which we were asked to respond to a number of different questions. We considered ways to continue with the project including the establishment of a Vincentian Board and made our recommendations regarding the persons who should be part of that Board as well as recommendations regarding the Executive Director for the Haitian micro project itself.

3. We discussed a number of the responses that we have recently received regarding a letter concerning reconfiguration. The letter was sent to the Provinces of Italy, Spain and France with the hope of generating enough dialog to come up with a process of how to best serve the poor, taking into consideration the aging of the different provinces in the Congregation and the diminishing numbers of members. We hope that this will be part of a continuing dialog from now until our General Assembly in 2010. Overall the response to the Superior General's letter has been very positive and welcomed.

4. We discussed a letter that we received from the Congregation of the Clergy regarding the Year of the Priest. We have decided that we would like to celebrate this year promoted by His Holiness Pope Benedict, but in relation to our own Jubilee Year of the 350th anniversary of our Founders, particularly Saint Vincent whom we know as the "light of the clergy." The Assistant General, Father José Antonio Ubilllú, has been asked to coordinate different activities and articles that will be published on the www.cmglobal.org web page concerning the Year of the Priest.
5. We studied a working document presented by Father Julio Suescun, Executive Secretary of SIEV, in preparation for a meeting that the General Council had with the members of SIEV the weekend 10-11 October.

6. We treated economic matters with a presentation given by the Econome General, John Gouldrick. Among other things we discussed the economic reports of a number of the provinces. We also studied a model of a simplified version of the year-end report that the Econome General presented for our consideration and modification.

7. With the presence of Father Miles Heinen, we discussed the Vincentian Solidarity Office report. In the meeting we changed the title of Miles from Director to Executive Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office in conformity with the standards of his role in the world of development today. I recommend that you review the web page of the Vincentian Solidarity Office www.famvin.org/vso.

8. We reviewed the report of the Delegate for the Vincentian Family, Father Manuel Ginete, who reported basically on his presence in Yaoundé, Cameroon for a meeting of the AIC, then the meeting of the Vincentian Moderators and Systemic Change, and finally his participation in a meeting of COVIAM of Africa.

9. We had our quarterly report from the Vincentian NGO Representative at the United Nations, Father Joseph Foley. In the report it was made clear that today there is a need to focus with great clarity and deep reflection on questions of climate change, immigration and racism.

10. We also received a report from Father John Freund, the web master on the web pages developed for famvin together with Julio Suescun and Claude Lautissier in Spanish and French respectively. Father Freund is working on a number of different projects, one in particular on how to communicate the activities of the General Assembly in an efficient yet prudent way.

11. We studied different reports and information that we have received from the different Conferences of Visitors or Provinces of Visitors, Asia Pacific and COVIAM in particular. I would like to highlight from the COVIAM report that they are moving ahead with a project of an interprovincial mission in Chad, hopefully starting in 2010, a project of the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the death of our Founders.
12. We discussed the situation of our **international missions of El Alto, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands**. With the reconfiguration of the mission of El Alto, four confreres will be working in two rural parishes, one of them being a new member, Father Aidan Rooney from the Province of Philadelphia who arrived at the end of September. Our great hope in Bolivia is to begin a new mission in 2010 in Cochabamba with the generous response on the part of the volunteers through the October Mission Appeal.

13. In **Papua New Guinea** we elected a new local superior for our confreres who live in one community yet in four different places where their responsibilities include: one confrere, the Executive Secretary of the Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, one confrere working in the seminary in Bomara, one confrere as pastor of a parish in Bomara and one confrere in a missionary parish in Woitape. They presented to the Council their plan for community. The plan was approved with recommendations to strengthen it with the help of the Guide for the Local Superior and the Statutes of the International Missions. Together with El Alto and Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea has been advertised in the Mission Appeal Letter for October.

14. We studied the situation of our **volunteer missionaries in different places**.

- I am happy to announce that in **Mozambique** we have the arrival of a new missionary from Congo as well as two missionaries from the Vice-Province of Nigeria who will soon be arriving.
- We also studied a reflection that was sent to us concerning the mission in continental **China** by Father Padraig Regan who had a new six months experience in China. His reflections were discussed by the General Council and passed on to the Visitor of China.
- We took into consideration a request from a Bishop in **Angola** asking for missionaries. Such request is included in the Mission Appeal Letter for October.
- As well as the continual request of the Bishop of Daru-Kiunga, **Papua New Guinea**, who once again has written and asked for seasoned missionaries to accompany young seminarians and young priests in his diocese.
- Included also was a written dialog with the Regional Superior of **Cameroon** wherein there is the hope that the Congregation, through the support of the Province of Paris and other
missionaries can begin a mission in **Equatorial Guinea**, accompanying the Daughters of Charity from Gijon, Spain and MISEVI of Spain.

- In this *tempo forte* we received a letter from one confrere volunteering for one of our international missions and we have moved forward in taking the necessary steps to secure his participation as requested.

15. As mentioned at the beginning of this letter we had a dialog of a little over two hours with the present **Director General of the Daughters of Charity**, Father Javier Álvarez. He shared with us his role as Director of the Daughters of Charity and the responsibility of the Congregation of the Mission toward the Daughters, the role of Directors as well as the participation of many other confreres in what would be the spiritual life of the Daughters, their formation, pastoral activities as well as the government of the different Provinces of the Daughters. It is the first time that the General Council has had a meeting with the Director General of the Daughters of Charity. We found it quite helpful and at the same time, a way to express our gratitude to the Director General for his role in supporting the Daughters.

16. We concluded our meeting discussing the upcoming **calendars** of each of the members of the General Council. These next months, October, November and December will be filled with different pastoral activities. Father José María Nieto will be making a canonical visit in Chile as well as a retreat for the confreres there and an informal visit to the Province of Peru. Father Józef Kapuściak will be making the canonical visit of the Province of Turin. Father Gérard Du, together with the Superior General, will make a visit to the Region of Viet Nam. Father General will also visit CIF, Poland, AMM international meeting in Paris, USA and Italy for a number of events related to the Vincentian Family.

Please continue to pray for the activities of the General Council as we do our part to accompany the Congregation.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General
Since the start of the celebration of the 350th Anniversary of the departure for heaven of St. Vincent and St. Louise there have appeared literary, pictorial and musical expressions which evoke their image. Vincentiana also joins this festive event with this number dedicated to St. Vincent and St. Louise.

In line with the objective of the anniversary, to revive in us the charity-mission in which they consumed their lives, Vincentiana does not want to present in this number particular studies on the lives of our founders, but rather on the relationship which maintained them intimately united to God and in fruitful service of charity-mission.

Vincentiana has knocked on the doors of a few experts on the lives of our holy founders, asking them to pay attention to this communion in charity which produced such well-seasoned fruits of collaboration for the mission of making God's love known in the world of the poor.

Vincentiana feels the joyful obligation of thanking the authors for their replies. From the personal perspective of the relationship between the two saints, their passion for the poor, their passion for making the Kingdom a reality or the balance between a daring and creative fidelity, the authors have presented to the whole Vincentian Family an ideal of collaboration in charity-mission which, even after
350 years, helps us maintain alive the fidelity which inspired the two saints.

This number of Vincentiana also includes a work on the martyrdom of charity. It appears in the section of studies because it is part of a work presented for a university exam. This is the beginning of something that Vincentiana wishes to continue during the anniversary year: How did the followers of Vincent and Louise understand their passion for the poor, their collaboration in the service of the Kingdom and their uncompromising fidelity? Those who lived and died with their weapons in hand were considered by St. Vincent as true martyrs of charity because they offered their lives in love.

Vincentiana wants to gather together in the issues of this anniversary year the lives of the first missionaries, the first Daughters of Charity and the first lay people who, feeling themselves inspired by the fires of passion which embraced the founders, knew how to offer their lives in an uncompromising fidelity to a mission of love, which continued the mission of Christ, sent by the Father to manifest his love for the poor.

Translation: John P. Prager, C.M.
Vincent and Louise, a Parallel of Bold and Creative Fidelity

by Benito Martínez Betanzos, C.M.

We who have faith believe that every person who is alive has the objective of giving glory to God and to extend his kingdom among all people. We also say that each one has to achieve this objective in a distinct manner according to one's personality, and the family and social situations that influence one's life. This is called one's vocation. And I think that fidelity is above all, to remain faithful to one's vocation.

There is no doubt that choosing a definite way of living one has to take into account the invitation of Jesus to follow him and continue the mission. The invitation is clear, but generic: "He who wants to follow me...." The answer to the divine call cannot be a superficial one; on the contrary each one's answer is conditioned by a series of personal, familial and social circumstances. Hence, it is natural that God manifests his will to each person by means of the nature created by Him so that each one can extend the reign of God, sanctify self and find happiness. However, the divine call is not clearly manifested and one can be left with a doubt as to what is really the will of God. God respects the capacity of rational initiative of the freedom of all and accepts as divine will the answer that each one gives, whether that person is married, priest or religious, if the person responds in good will and according to reason. Fidelity is to respond according to personal, familial, social situations and in conscience to God who speaks to us through the events of life.

Speaking more concretely, we know that the salvation of the poor is primarily for the glory of God and the extension of his Kingdom. And speaking in human terms, we say that God needed a priest, and a widow to begin the Charity work, the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity and by means of them, to serve the poor. He set his sights on Vincent de Paul and Louise La Gras whom he would find in Paris.

Consciously or unconsciously, the answer that this priest and this woman gave to the vocational charism, they gave in the context of
the social condition and the customs of the French society of the XVII century. They responded to that which they had committed themselves to and with the decision to be faithful to their obligations. God accepted their good responses.

Saint Vincent

The de Paul family were not poor, but like all country people in times of war or failed harvest, became extremely poor. On his mother's side, the Moras were of the bourgeois class and Lords of Peyroux\(^1\) about 20 km to the south of Dax. Some of his mother's brothers were lawyers and officials. On his father's side, the Paul family were strong country people with land, forest, and cattle in Puy and in other parts near Dax. But like all families, the Paul-Moras family wanted to better their social situation and chose one of their family members to seek to progress through priestly life.

To present a member of the family to be a priest was only possible for the families that could have influence in the collection of clerical benefits that pertained to the Pope, the king, the nobles, the higher class or clerical hierarchy. The Paul-Moras family had the social condition to reach the goal. In that century, the sacred was introduced into all without distinction among the social, political and religious\(^2\) spheres, and the priesthood was considered a mixture of worldly occupation and ecclesial ministry, and to have a vocation or not depended on the family benefice and the needs of the church. St. Thomas and the Council of Trent ask only for a moral life and the knowledge to realize the ministry.\(^3\) Vincent accepted to be a priest for faithfulness to the social category of the family and to himself without breaking the fidelity that he owed to God for his catholic faith.

The Paul-Moras family on the initiative of Mr. Comet, considered Vincent with the sufficient ability to do ecclesiastical studies and to reach a high position in the Church. When he went to study at the age of 15 at the college of the Franciscans in Dax, he passed three courses rapidly and in only two years he was prepared to study theology. This supposes that even though as a child he tended cattle he probably had some special teacher that came through the house of

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3. Summa Teologica, Supl. 31, 1-2 and q. 36; Council of Trent, Session XXIII, Decree on the reform, cp. XIV; c. 12-13 de ref.
his maternal grandparents. It is not odd that the Judge Comet considered him to be a tutor for his children.

And at the same time, they could see his pious qualities. Even though he appeared in the future with a somber, harsh, and quick character, he had an affective and compassionate temperament. He was a good young man who wanted to be faithful to his priestly obligations and also, without a doubt to be faithful to the destiny that he believed was given to him by God through his family and the social circumstances. The fidelity of Vincent de Paul was not the fruit of a sudden conversion, but rather the natural evolution of his personal situation in a peasant family of the southeast of France in the XVII century.

Fidelity to God

This was Vincent de Paul's primary fidelity: He decided to follow through permanently on his promises according to the project that God was presenting to him through the events of life. His fidelity was a conscious and rational answer to the confidence that God had deposited in him through his family and society. In agreement with Ricoeur, I would say that Saint Vincent changed the gamble of his destiny for fidelity to a continuous choice, and desired to be faithful to God moved by this mentality.

At times, Saint Vincent gave the impression that nature was programmed to find happiness and that fidelity to God was noth-

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4 Childhood devotion to the Virgin, charity of handfuls of flour or 30 sueldos to the poor, tears when recently ordained priest he went to Rome and saw the tomb of the apostles, cried when he visited his parents and refused to help them economically. Abelly tells us that around 1650 the Lord of Fresno gave him one thousands pounds to help his family taken from the soldiers. When the saint accepted this help he exclaimed "Do you think I do not care about my family? I have all sentiments of love and tenderness that any other can have for his family, and this natural love gives me encouragement to help them, but I must work according to the action of grace and not of nature and think of the most abandoned poor without detaining myself because of my friendships nor relationships" (L. 3, cp. XIX, p. 745-746). Then there is the fact of that priest who having abandoned the Congregation and who saved the life of Saint Vincent; asked various times to be readmitted but in vain. It occurred to him to remind the saint of the service that he had given to him. In the face of that memory the saint was moved and he responded to him: "Come, Father, and we will receive you with open arms" (COLLET, V, 516).

ing more than living according to human nature fulfilling the will of God.\(^6\)

This context can explain why when he went back to his hometown in 1623 he was tormented by having been unfaithful to his family commitments; and for this failing in justice, he supposed that his brothers would cast in his face that they had made financial inversion in his formation even to the point of selling a pair of oxen so that later on he would be able to help them financially. And since this was one of the ways of investing money at that time, still the tenderness that he felt for his family would torment him later on in life. On the other hand, he realized that he should be faithful to his promise made to God; he was a priest, and all he had he owed to God and the poor. And so, in order to calm his conscience he gave back to his brothers all the benefices that he had inherited from his parents, plus 900 pounds.

It is difficult to be faithful to God when in the events of life the will of God is not presented with all clarity and it is the task of human intelligence to discover it and then the freedom of man to fulfill it following Jesus and guided by the Holy Spirit. It is then when one discovers that the universe, which God has created, is ordered in a rational way and the divine will is that man — part of creation — acts and governs himself by reason. All that is rational is the will of God and God cannot contradict himself (SV I, 173; SV IX, 385). We come to the conclusion that to be faithful to God is to be faithful to personal reason, up to the point that in the ultimate instance it is the man of good will who discerns, decides, and acts, convinced of doing the will of God, if his conscience is guided by reason and prudence.\(^7\)

\(^6\) SVP.ES IX, 492 s., 693.

\(^7\) Conference of March 7, 1659 on conformity to the will of God (SVP.ES XI, 445 ss.). See the pious attitude that the saint tells the young superior Durand: "The superior not only has to pay attention to the spiritual things but also to the material things of the confreres. Since they consist of body and soul, they ought to be concerned for both and this according to the example of God who... besides creating the interior world also created the exterior world, concerned always for the well being of all, producing new grain and new fruit on the trees, etc.... This consideration seems to me to make us understand that we are not dedicated solely to the higher things that are evident in the spiritual life, but also the superior in a certain sense represents the amplitude of the power of God and should attend to the smallest material needs of the confreres without feeling that this attention is unworthy of him. Therefore, the superior should give himself to God to seek out the temporal well being of the house to which he is assigned. The Son of God, when he sent out his apostles in the beginning wanted them to not take money, but later, the number of apostles grew he wanted one to take care of the common goods.
Some biographers, considering the foundation of the Charities, the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the Spiritual exercises to the Ordinands or the Tuesday conferences as the immediate result of an event, conclude that for Vincent, to be faithful to reason is the same as being faithful to the divine experience that is lived out in every moment of life in order to make the lives of the excluded happy. Hence, the plan that God has placed in creation is a plan of love always in favor of the poor and this will of God is placed above all others.

Although his family was pretty comfortable, Vincent de Paul had seen the poor in his childhood and in his captivity in Tunisia; he suffered poverty in his own life. He escaped slavery, returned to Paris and through the influence of Berulle, gave himself to prayer. In a mystical experience one night, he discovered that he could not be disinterested in the poor and he had the obligation to help them personally. If up to then, his fidelity consisted in being faithful to himself and to the social category of his family, according to reason, after that mystical experience his fidelity had reference to his personal obligation to serve the poor. This will be his new destiny.

Saint Louise

Something similar happened with the fidelity of Saint Louise. In an epoch of history when people considered the will of God as destiny, Louise, when she was 16 years old, went to the Capuchins and asked them to explain to her why her life had so many sufferings. They told her that the answer lies in the eternal plan of God. But she is not a defeated person; she was free and voluntarily decided to collaborate faithfully so that the divine design, which is called vocation, be fulfilled in her. This was her principal fidelity. In this collaboration she found the solution to the questions that filled her mysterious life: illegitimate daughter of a Marillac who even today we cannot identify, taken as a daughter by the head of the Louis de Marillac family, educated in a good college-convent of Paris.

That care meant not only feeding the poor, but also taking care of the needs of the companions. He even let some women continue with him for this same end. The gospel commands that no one should be worried about tomorrow, this means that we should not be too worried for the goods of this world, but that we have to be careful not to disassociate ourselves from the means of living and clothing ourselves; on the contrary, it is not necessary to sow” (SVP.ES XI, 241-242).

CHALUMEAU - DUGRIP - MORIN - RENOUD - SYLVESTRE, Vincent de Paul His Spiritual Experience and Ours (Document for the General Assembly of the Priests of the Mission, 1980).
and its environs, but excluded from the family by the Marillac and by the civil laws at the death of Louis, even to the point that she confesses that God has given her a cross that will never abandon her from the moment of her very birth (SL 19). Formed in a secular boarding school with the thought of a bourgeois marriage in the future, she wanted to be a capuchin and make her vows to be a religious, but the Marillac family obliged her to marry an official of the middle class, Anthony Le Gras and better the political position of the Marillacs. When she was only 34 years old, she became a widow with a 12 year old son.4

Five years before the death of her husband, in a mystical experience at night, the Holy Spirit communicated to her she was needed to be the founder of the Daughters of Charity. She did not understand this at the time. She only felt that she had been unfaithful to God for not entering religious life but getting married. This infidelity tormented her for many years.

In 1642, the floor of the meeting room at the house of the Daughters of Charity fell, but no one died because they had changed the meeting. Three years later, when she heard of the bad life of her son and also heard that the Company came under the authority of the Archbishop of Paris, she thought that that day, the Company had been saved (SL 53). When she was 54 years old, she revealed how God had guided her to meet with Saint Vincent to found the Daughters of Charity though she did not understand the reason for this. Now she realized the usefulness of having been prepared in the humanities at the college-convent of Poissy and in household duties in a boarding school so she can teach the Daughters of Charity. She set out to write a type of spiritual diary and she realized that she had collaborated faithfully with God, before getting to know Vincent de Paul, in an unconscious way because she found Him in the events of life. We understand today how God gave her the charism of founder precisely because she was a widow, and had a life that would lead her to do a good job and to realize that God presented to her the great spiritual director Vincent de Paul.

This is the first fidelity that we discover in Saint Louise: to collaborate with the eternal plan of God for her and to be faithful to that which God speaks to her through the events of life and prayer.

In her personal project, the faithfulness appears that will save her and her son. That fidelity appears in the poor. There was a time in her life when she identified with the poor. It was contagious from

4 Benito Martínez Betanzos, C.M., Empeñada en un paraíso para los pobres, CEME, Salamanca 1995 (Life of St. Louise de Marillac).
Saint Vincent. Her fidelity grew more and more creative and aided her commitment to serve the poor in the Company in which she was living. When she was 54 years old she realized the God had taken her from the mystical experience of that night to be faithful in a more creative way to serve the poor even though she did not understand it at the time.

Creative and Bold Fidelity

Certainly, but from different sources, both saints had creative and bold fidelity toward the poor, based on the fidelity to God that spoke to them throughout the events of their lives. Wanting to be faithful to that divine language that Saint Vincent calls Providence, they supported each other in all things. Fidelity supposes a past, present and future. Saint Vincent wanted to be faithful in every moment to the commitment that he assumed in that nightly revelation and wanted to be faithful to it all his life. Also, Saint Louise never wanted to abandon the promise she made to the poor in May 1629 when she offered herself to God to serve the poor. The fidelity to the poor supposes to seek out the most valuable and useful ways to serve them, even though they already existed or had been used. This is the genius that makes fidelity creative.

St. Vincent was not an ingenious inventor, he was a genius innovator. Many others had attempted the majority of his works, but to no avail. The archetype of the three great foundations, Charities, Congregation of the Mission, and Daughters of Charity, were ideas that Christianity had been ruminating about for a long time, but was never able to realize them in a stable form.

Saint Vincent possessed something that the earlier ones did not have. This special something was, together with a prudent psychology of a peasant who knew how to wait, a combination of appropriate circumstances and the opportune moment of Providence. Saint Vincent confided in Providence which was evident in all that happened and he wanted to be faithful to that Providence spreading that same fidelity to Saint Louise, a nervous, quick and dynamic woman. They both realized that a creative fidelity needed boldness to be realized, tenacity not to be abandoned, and wisdom so as not to confront the church or civil powers. This we can see in each foundation.

The Charities

The Charities already existed; they were a slow evolution of fraternal charities of the middle ages. They arose to defend the professions against intruders. Later they included in their statutes
help to the widows, the orphans, and the sick and they were converted into confraternities that functioned as societies of mutual help for all the members. This mutual help aided the poor country people to construct barns that were burned down and help save a destroyed crop. Later, they were placed under the tutelage of a holy Patron and extended their services to all the disenfranchised even though they did not belong to the confraternity. They were then called “Charities.” The groups were made up of men who at that time were the only ones that were able to be merchants and have property.10

In his vision, Vincent de Paul discovered that the poor touched him personally and that it was his obligation to help them. When he arrived at Chatillon, he recognized that charity, in order to be efficient, ought to be achieved in groups and organized. In that city, he established the Charities as it existed in other places. He quotes expressly the Charity of Rome (SVP.ES X, 574). But he makes two modifications and here we find his creative fidelity: First he forms the groups exclusively of women. This was a brave inconceivable act at a time when women were excluded from all aspects of civil society, the workforce, and politics. In the same association were included, against all normal ways, nobles and common people. The women “of money” helped support the expenses. This showed that the experience helped them see that it was absolutely necessary that the women did not depend on the men above all for the finances. (SVP.EX I, 141),11 and the women workers — caregivers of the sick poor — received a salary to care for and clean the sick. The second modification, was to centralize all in such a way that being autonomous in their functions, all pertained to the same confraternity of Charity whose director general is Vincent de Paul and nothing can be founded without his consent (SVP.ES II, 7; SVP.ES X, 605-607).

He wanted to be faithful to his renewed ideas. He believed that the civil or parochial institutions of charity, such as they were working, were lacking many things and were monotonous and absorbing; he had to modernize them with creativity. It was then that he assumed


11 “The men and women together were not in agreement with matters of administration; the men wanted to be in charge of all and the women would not support that. The Charities of Joigny and Montmirail were governed at the beginning by one or the other sex... but since their was a common fund, it was necessary to remove the men. I am able to give testimony in favor of the women, and there is nothing that I can say against their administration, because they are very careful and faithful" (SVP.ES IV, 71).
the works that did not depend entirely on himself, like the Foundlings and the General Hospital of Paris.\textsuperscript{12}

In agreement with this mentality, the Archbishop of Paris, John Francis de Gondi, gave to the priests of the mission the faculty to "erect the confraternity of Charity in all places that they deem convenient" and Pope Urban VIII in the Bull of erection of the Congregation of the Mission indicates that the missionaries "will procure and establish the so-called confraternities of Charity" (SVP.ES X, 262, 309). Saint Vincent himself considered these new charities as unique to him and his congregation and he felt obliged to visit them, animate them, direct them or correct them.\textsuperscript{13} Such was one of the first missions that was entrusted to Louise de Marillac, to visit the charities of the towns as their representative and liaison.\textsuperscript{14}

Here, the organizational genius of Saint Louise begins to appear, or if you wish her fidelity to Saint Vincent, but with the delicate and astute personality of a woman. She sends Saint Vincent information about her visits and redacts faithfully in an objective and clear manner, putting a verb, an adjective, a conjunction, or an adverb, indicating what has to be changed or completed: but... it is necessary... there is only one... for this reason the others... too soon... the others are complaining... the town is murmuring... She took on the concrete problems and the practical situations of the poor of each Charity in each place and each day (c. 5).

Having given the same organization to all the charities by means of the same rules and objectives, and to live out the same Vincentian spirit, one can consider the principal reason why the Charities have lasted with vitality throughout the years and in so many nations, despite the diversity of cultures, even up to forming a world-wide federation in 1971: The International Association of Charities (AIC).

There was a certain model of unity, when the Charity of the Hotel Dieu de Paris (Municipal Hospital) (SVP.ES I, 275) was founded, its center was not a parish, rather the Hospital and its director was not the pastor but Vincent de Paul himself or a Vincentian missionary who was his delegate. Any woman, no matter where she lived, was able to be part of this Charity. Women of high category, of the aristocracy or wealthy women strengthened the charity with


\textsuperscript{13} SVP.ES I, 155, 159-160, 352-353.

\textsuperscript{14} SVP.ES I, 133-134; SL.E, 16, 17, 25, 26.
millionaire funds, being able to help in great catastrophes and embrace companies that needed millions. It came to be a multinational network of charity: poor, abandoned, galley slaves, immigrants, hospitals to which only the poor would go.\textsuperscript{15}

The Daughters of Charity

Eleven years after founding the first Charity in Chatillon, Vincent de Paul heard of a young farm girl, Margarite Naseau. He thought it would be better to substitute the salaried workers with girls who did the work for love and vocation and she offered to begin the work. Her fidelity entered into conflict: on one side, he wanted to be faithful to the rule of the first charity, but on the other side he wanted to be faithful to God who spoke through that young girl.\textsuperscript{16} The innovative faithfulness was reborn.

It is now when a tremendous doubt arises in both saints between the fidelity to the traditional divine message in favor of the poor and the bold creativity to accommodate the Charities to the new situation which has been presented. Saint Vincent knew that many marvelous projects were abandoned for not knowing how to join together faithfulness and creative boldness. Saint Louise knew it, but seven years after the death of her husband, and tormented by the infidelity of not having become a religious, she unconsciously put being faithful to herself before being faithful to the poor. And this infidelity put her on the brink of throwing away the fidelity to her vocation. Louise right from the start was thinking about forming a new religious congregation with the young women that had united themselves to Margarite Naseau and to be faithful to the vow she had made as a young woman. Vincent vehemently opposed this because it would enclose them in a convent (SVP.ES I, 141, 175).

They dialogued, prayed and reached the conclusion that fidelity to God and to the poor would lead them in a new direction: faithfulness to a distinct association, the Company, gathering together the young women from the town in a Charity exclusively for them. Louise sought to assume this new charity without the least doubt: though nervous, she insisted on realizing it very soon and stubborn as she was, she would not give way to the pressures come wind or high water. Saint Vincent tried to hold her back (SVP.ES I, 251) but he was convinced that God had something exceptional planned for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] Benito Martínez Betanzos, C.M., Building a Paradise for the Poor, CEME, Salamanca 1995, p. 73 ss.
\item[16] SVP.ES IX, 20, 90, 203, 233-234, 416, 542.
\end{footnotes}
Louise (SVP.ES I, 266) and he authorized her to begin the experience on the weekends (SVP.ES I, 266). Finally, in November of 1633 they decided to begin the New Charity with Marie Joly and another two or three companions (SVP.ES I, 227, 261; GObillon, p. 51). Margarite Naseau had died nine months before (SVP.ES I, 238-240). Their faithfulness was so strong that the Procurator General was afraid to give them authority seeing that young women without noble titles would direct public establishments (SL., c. 320).

The Charity of the young women was the Charity of Saint Vincent and he named himself director and named Louise the Sister Servant. The immediate government and direction as well as the administration depended on the superioress. Vincent knew very well the gifts and talents of Louise de Marillac, and even more, entrusting her with the Company, he put it in her hands. The first rule and order of day was redacted by Louise. Vincent made some few annotations and proposed that she explain the rules to the women and only due to the great reverence that Louise had for Vincent did he explain them himself in the month of July 1634.

Vincent, without paying attention to the social rules of the time that the woman is subordinate to the man, destined Louise from being a simple collaborator to taking a role equal to his and gave her as much responsibility as he had. Nevertheless, Louise never wanted to put herself at the same level as her director. Her faithfulness was that of a helper. He knew that and was aware also that Louise never took on anything independently from him without his knowledge.

I think that the parallelism of creative and bold faithfulness is so evident that judging in a natural and human way; I would dare to affirm that if one were not present the actual Company of the Daughters of Charity would not have been realized. Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac are equal founders of the Company of the Daughters of Charity: the Vincentian charism is also the charism of the Daughters of Charity.

Conflict of Fidelities

Saint Vincent as well as Saint Louise wanted to be faithful to God who spoke to them through the events of life and reason with regard to the well being of the poor. However, their formation, their personalities and their families were different. This affected the way that they conceived of their approach to God and the poor. Also entering here are the structures of the Company especially in

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17 SVP.ES I, 281, 308, 325, 326, 336.
reference to the Superior General of the Company: The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission or the bishops of the Dioceses?

The disagreement between the two saints had a basis: Vincent de Paul, wanting to be faithful to the poor, saw that it was difficult for the Archbishop to approve the Company if it depended on a priest, even if it were Saint Vincent himself; but depending on the archbishop he thought it easier to obtain approbation. The dependence on the Archbishop favored the nature of the confraternity as opposed to a religious institution. Besides, Vincent de Paul felt the opposition within his very own congregation to which he had to maintain fidelity to assume the direction of the female company. For all these reasons, he desired that the Company depend completely upon the archbishop of Paris.

Louise vehemently opposed this but with her gentleness and delicate female manner (SL, c. 181, 228, 374). Louise wanted to be faithful to her vocation as Daughter of Charity to the Company and to the poor and the motives were not important. Always the realist and very attentive, Louise knew all the daughters in their psychology and ways and she knew that those simple women needed some well prepared priests to assist them; besides the Daughters of Charity were rejected in other dioceses if they were under the authority of the Archbishop of Paris and if they depended on the Bishops, each one would direct them in his own way.

The faithfulness of Saint Louise was bolder than that of Saint Vincent in the manner of conceiving the structure of the Company. More than bold, it was a daring fidelity. While Vincent de Paul, titled in law, was involved with the Council of Trent and the Constitution Quaecumque of Clement VIII (1604) he needed to look at the juridical nature of the Daughters of Charity. Louise was thinking in a practical mentality: she dreamed that there would be only one institution or congregation made up of Vincentian missionaries and the Daughters. It was a dream and only a dream, it never came to be realized while she was alive nor after her death. It seems that none accepted their wishes for being too daring or perhaps prophetically too premature.

Her vision could have become historical, but it was enough to have been able to impose her vision concerning the Superior General. Four times she wrote concerning the natural union between the Company and the Congregation and four times seems to want a curious union that would perhaps have changed our history.\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\) SL.E, 33, 53, c. 228, 374.
Vincent de Paul assumed this daring vision and even considered that he had to be faithful to it. He reacted in the beginning; however at the end of his life, he assumed the position of Louise. The arguments that he proposed to the confreres to convince them of the congruence between the spiritual help to the Daughters of Charity and the ends and nature of the Mission (December, 1658) were very well known. He gave the sense that he did not dare to present in public to the missionaries a suspected argument for them, but he proposed it to P. de la Fosse in February 1660.

"The Daughters of Charity entered in the order of Providence as a way that God gave us to do with their hands that which we could not do with ours... these Daughters dedicate themselves like us to the salvation and care of the neighbor; and if we would say they work *with us*, they would say nothing contrary to the gospels" (SVP.ES VIII, p. 227).

Some days before, he had written to P. Dehorgny that it is the obligation of P. Cuissot, "as superior of the missionaries to take the same care of the Sisters that he takes of the seminarians and that he should instruct them, confess them and direct them; he should do it according to his counsels and not independently of them" (SVP.ES VIII, p. 220).

If the actual society and life demands and needs equality in the rights and functions between men and women, would it not have been the time to realize this vision of Louise de Marillac concerning one institution with two bodies?

**The congregation of the Mission**

Vincent de Paul, at the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, was faithful to the environment that filled the clergy of his time.

Since the beginning of the XVI century, European society had suffered great social transformations. Urbanization had demanded new forms of religious life. If the monks with their monasteries responded to the needs of the country society, then there was a need for mendicant preachers to evangelize the cities, some teaching theology in the Universities. With the spread of Protestantism, there was a need for clerics to catechize the towns and educate the children in the schools, living in small houses, but all centralized in the Superior General. So, a new class of religious was born, the regular clerics, living close to the faithful, with a style of common life that was easier and more mobile. Like the secular clerics, they did not wear habits to
help them realize the apostolate. They were not oriented toward a rigorous penitential practice, but rather toward apostolic activity: Jesuits (1540), Camilos (1582), Escolapios (1597). Of all of these, the Jesuits had a special importance, so much so that Vincent had them present in various aspects of the organization of the Congregation.

In the presence of a decadent secular clergy, there had to be created a new structure of priestly associations, the secular congregations: Oratorians of Saint Philip Neri (1575), Oblates (1578), Oratorians of Berulle (1613) Congregation of the Mission (1632), all without public vows, some with private vows and others with no vows.

Saint Vincent did nothing more than present himself in the current that was advancing. The Congregation of the Mission is the least creative and bold of all the institutions that the saint founded, but always encompassed his special fidelity to his country background and the poor. Because fidelity to the poor supposes permanency, he presented the private vows with the specialty of the vow of poverty concerning the use of material goods and not the possession of personal goods.

With regards to the vows, yes it was very daring. Since Luther published (1521) his Judgement of the Vows (Monastic Vows), convents of middle Europe emptied out, the religious state was depreciated, and the value of the vows deteriorated. In the time of St. Vincent, the mission counted more than the vows. It is not strange that there was so much opposition in the missionaries that they found it a threat to be considered religious, Saint Vincent himself confessed that the religious state was badly seen by society and even the Roman Curia and the Pope. But Saint Vincent thought that the vows of fidelity and stability were to better remain faithful to the poor.

Faithfulness to the written word: Once the grand foundations were established, the formation of the members continued. It is then that a new fidelity appears in the two founders: Fidelity to the Word through Sacred Scriptures.

Translation: ARTHUR J. KOLINSKY, C.M.

19 SVP.ES III, 224-225; SVP.ES V, 298-299, 301.
21 SVP.ES III, 348; SVP.ES IV, 541.
Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac worked together for 35 years. Both were driven by two passions: a passion for the Son of God living in the midst of others, and a passion for the poor. But how could this man and woman, with such different family and social backgrounds, and with such different temperaments, work together? What relationship were they able to establish between them? Reading the 600 letters they exchanged shows that their relationship evolved over the course of the years and passed through different stages before becoming a true friendship. Every relationship evolves, building itself up over days and years. Some lack of understanding can coexist with a shared passion for the poor that supports different ways of shaping action.

In Vincent de Paul as in Louise de Marillac, holiness was not innate. It rested on their humanity. Their relationship to God and to the poor, their mutual relationship, transformed who they were little by little, perfecting and embellishing them. The friendship which united them so profoundly was born in a series of encounters in which each one became more and more aware of a personal identity, discovered a reciprocal complementarity, and helped the other to come to terms with the self fully. Their friendship favored the beginning of innovative activities, sweeping along many collaborators in their daring.

A number of stages, with very different aspects, marked the thirty-five years of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac’s collaboration.

A Difficult Beginning (1625-1627)

Reticence, hesitation and uncertainty marked the first encounters between Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. The differences between them were great enough to explain this.

Relating her Pentecost experience, Louise de Marillac told her director: “I was assured that I should rely peacefully upon my director
and that God was giving me the one that he prepared for me, it seemed to me, and feeling repugnant to accept him, nevertheless I acquiesced.” She must have passed Monsieur Vincent often in the street, because the de Gondi mansion where he stayed is close to the house where the Le Gras family lived. She had noticed this young priest who had the characteristics of a peasant: he had neither the elegance nor the distinction of Jean Pierre Camus who, for several years, had guided her on her spiritual path. But when he became Bishop of Belley, he spent less and less time in Paris. So it was with no joyful heart that Louise went to meet her new director. It seems that the friendship she felt for Francis de Sales, who died three years earlier, eased this coming together. As a matter of fact, the Bishop of Geneva had entrusted to Vincent de Paul the direction of the monasteries of the Visitation established in Paris.

On the other side, Vincent de Paul hesitated to direct this sad and depressed young widow whom people thought scrupulous. He remembered the neediness of Madame de Gondi who did not want to be separated from her spiritual counselor, wanting him always close by. Jean Pierre Camus, a great friend of Francis de Sales, had to put heavy pressure on him. One of the letters of Vincent de Paul to Louise de Marillac shows that he humbly submitted to the will of God: “Know this, from now on, Mademoiselle, that the person whom God has designated in his wisdom to help another, does not find himself burdened with the explanations she asks for, which would make him a father to a child.”

From the first months, Vincent de Paul experienced what he feared: Mademoiselle Le Gras was very upset and very anguished during his absences. He received letters without interruption in which Louise expressed her anxiety. “I hope that you will forgive me for the liberty I take that bears witness to the impatience of my spirit with this long period just passed, and with my apprehension for the future, not knowing the place where you are going after the location where you are now.” A letter of Bishop Jean Pierre Camus shows how poorly Louise endured the numerous absences of her new director who was preaching the Mission in the villages of the Ile de France. “Pardon me, my dear sister, if I tell you that you have attached yourself a little too much to those who guide you and you lean too much on them. Here’s Monsieur Vincent in the dark and Mademoiselle Le Gras out of sorts and disoriented.”

Louise de Marillac’s financial situation became so precarious after the death of her husband that she could no longer stay in her old house in the parish of St. Nicholas in the Fields. Obliged to look for a more simple home, Louise moved to the rue St. Victor, a few steps
from the College des Bons Enfants where Vincent de Paul was Superior. If Louise de Marillac wanted to have her director at her beck and call, he was trying to keep his distance. Vincent de Paul answered a rather demanding request of his directee: "Our Savior himself took on the office of a director. Most certainly he does it in a way in which he wants you to see him." The tone of the letters from 1625 to 1627 is very polite, very respectful in the manner of the 17th Century. In spite of the initial difficulties, Vincent de Paul continued to welcome and counsel Louise de Marillac. He wanted to be faithful to the will of God.

Mutual Discovery (1627-1629)

In the course of their meetings and through their correspondence, Vincent and Louise revealed themselves little by little. Beginning in 1628, they wanted and hoped to meet. Monsieur Vincent expressed it in many letters: "If it were not too late, I was going to see you this evening to find out just what you wanted of me, but that is for tomorrow." This correspondence is received with joy. Monsieur Vincent demonstrates this in all simplicity: "My God, my dear daughter, your letter and the thoughts you sent me consoled me."

Vincent de Paul, attentive to human misery, saw that Louise, a very sensitive woman, had been profoundly scarred by a hard life: he well understood her suffering, her anxiety. He noticed how she strained to know and accomplish the will of God: this tension risked harming both her physical and psychological equilibrium. Vincent did everything to calm her: "But come, my dear daughter, continue to stay astride and allow God to act.... Take good care of your health for love of him." Vincent de Paul also watched Louise de Marillac's great distress about her son, Michael. Quite simply, he made himself the young man's teacher, guiding him in his studies and counseling him when his relationship with his mother became difficult.

On her side, Louise de Marillac discovered in Monsieur Vincent a rich personality: she admired his activities for the country poor. She knew that this priest, who seemed "simple" to her, had an obsession for the poor, and was capable of engaging his energies to go to the aid of those who suffered. She willingly participated in the charitable activities begun in numerous villages in the form of the Confraternities of Charity.

In these times of mutual discovery, Monsieur Vincent took the prominent role. It was he who plotted the course, gave back confidence. Humbly, Louise de Marillac let herself be lead, simply saying what she saw.
An Intense Collaboration (1629-1640)

An intense and effective collaboration built up between Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac in the midst of boundless activity. Both were at the age of their full maturity: Louise was 40, Vincent 50. Two events, “foundational” in the sense that they gave a solid base to this collaboration, marked this period.

Sending Louise de Marillac on a mission the 6th of May, 1629, was the starting point of this collaboration. Monsieur Vincent had established many Confraternities of Charity on the family lands of the de Gondis. As he went visiting them, he proposed that Louise join him there: “Father de Gondi wants me to meet him in Montmirail.... Does your heart tell you to come there? If so... we will have the happiness of seeing you in Montmirail.” After a positive response from Louise, Vincent, writing in a most solemn way, made her his “envoy with a mission.” “I am sending you the letters and reports you need for your trip. So go, Mademoiselle, go, in the name of our Lord. I pray that his divine goodness will accompany you, that it will be your consolation on the road, your shade against the heat of the sun, your cover against rain and the cold, your comfortable bed when you rest, your strength when you work, and, finally, that it bring you back in perfect health and full of good works.” Did Vincent really know that this event was important or did he simply let himself be guided by the Spirit?

After her first trip when he saw Louise de Marillac at work, Vincent de Paul leaned more and more on her for everything that pertained to the Confraternities of Charity. Louise responded to the requests of her director and involved herself actively in this work. In the course of the many visits she made, she informed Vincent by her reports more on the plan of the helping organization than on the manner in which aid was distributed. Nor did she forget the spiritual aspect. She submitted the problems she had encountered; Vincent replied by giving her complete freedom of action: “You want to know if you should speak to a group of the Charity. Certainly, I would like that very much; but I do not know if it is easy and expedient. It would be profitable for them. Speak with Mademoiselle Champlin and do what Our Savior inspires in you.”

Each day Vincent de Paul discovered more of the richness of the personality of his collaborator. He records that she was quite at ease among the Ladies of Charity, that she knew how to speak with them, and that she was not afraid to make whatever comments proved necessary. He did not hesitate to send her to a Charity that was going downhill. He used her abilities to rework the rules. The work was truly shared — one wrote, the other corrected. “I will send you, by the
pastor or by someone else, the rule of the Charity, which I have adjusted to be more suited to Montreuil. You will see it; and if there is something to be taken out or added, send it to me, if you please." In 1631, Louise de Marillac started a Confraternity in the parish of St. Nicholas du Chardonnet. She wrote the rule and sent it to Vincent de Paul: "You are a good woman to have accommodated the rule for the Charity and I like it."

A change in the style of their letters indicates that the relationship between Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac had really changed. While, in all the first years, Monsieur Vincent wrote to his directee calling her "my daughter," after 1629 he used the expression "Mademoiselle." Both of them left behind the dependent relationship of daughter to father and father to daughter. They recognized one another as mutually responsible for a shared mission.

The many letters from this period (at least one a week!) quite naturally went beyond the work of the Mission. Vincent and Louise shared their little daily news — for example, Vincent’s fall from a horse, the lack of water at St. Lazare, Madame Goussault’s (a Lady of Charity) trip to Angers, money worries, their reflections on what was going on. Sometimes this sharing went so far as to change their lives. St. Vincent reflected on his selfish manner of acting: "Remember to pray to God especially for rue, it’ho, finding myself between the occasion of fulfilling a promise I had made and an act of charity in regard to a person for whom we could do good or not, I did not do the charity so I could keep my promise, which left that person unhappy; that does not vex me as much as my following my own inclination in doing what I did." Louise addressed herself with confidence in her spiritual director: she told him about the joys of her missionary work, her fear of soaking up the compliments. She was reassured by this reflection of Vincent de Paul. "Relax and join yourself to the mockery, the misunderstanding and the rough treatment that the Son of God suffered, then you will be honored and esteemed. Certainly, Mademoiselle, a truly humble spirit humbles itself as much when honored as when misunderstood and acts like a bee that makes honey as easily from the dew that falls upon wormwood as that which falls upon roses." She was not reluctant to speak to him of her continual worries about her son and accepted the wise advice of this educator priest. Vincent’s words are often full of humor: "Oh, yes, our Lord did well not taking you for his mother, because you do not think of finding the Will of God in the maternal care for your son which he requires of you; or maybe you think that it hinders you from doing the Will of God in something else; nothing doing, for the Will of God does not oppose the Will of God. So honor the tranquility of the holy Virgin in a similar situation." Louise accepted the remarks of her director.
Louise, an intuitive and quick woman, was not afraid to take the initiative. In 1632, the Tour Saint Bernard, near the rue St. Victor, was converted to take in sick galley slaves. Louise immediately went to visit them. Vincent admired that, but knew that the action of an individual risked no follow-up. So he asked Louise about sharing a possible activity: "Charity toward these poor galley slaves has an incomparable merit before God. You did well to help them and you will do more good if you continue in whatever way you can. Think a little about whether the Charity of St. Nicholas might want to take charge of it. But whatever, it is difficult, and here I am tossing this idea to your spirit of adventure." Vincent, knowing the many needs of the poor, wished that the laity be associated in every work of charity which he encountered along the way. "Mademoiselle, it will be good for you to communicate with Madame Goussault and Mademoiselle Poullaillon about Germaine to have their advice. It is only two days since I focused on this way of doing things, which seems to me both cordial and deferential; and maybe I can cause them no pain by having you make the final decision about your work without telling them."

The second of the foundational events is the start of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. This foundation lets us see, in Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, different appreciations of reality. From 1629-1630, the Confraternities of Charity were established in many parishes in Paris. Numerous noble women wanted to take part. But difficulties appeared quickly. Their husbands did not like their wives going into the slums carrying large pots of soup, cleaning the rooms of the sick. They insisted that they send their servants. Vincent de Paul and Louise questioned one another about the future of the Confraternities in Paris; the service risked becoming a delegated job and not a work of charity.

During a Mission at Suresnes, Vincent de Paul met Marguerite Naseau, a woman with much initiative. Very happy with Marguerite’s proposal to come serve the sick poor of the Confraternities, Vincent sent this peasant to Louise de Marillac explaining what he wanted of her. Marguerite’s zeal quickly spread. Other young women came forward to serve with the Confraternities. The Charity in Paris was renewed. Louise accepted all these farm girls, spread them out among the different parishes, and resolved the little conflicts that came up between these "servants of the Charities" and the Ladies of Charity. A profound insight arose in her heart: she thought again about the Light of Pentecost, of the little community of servants of the poor that were coming and going. Would not gathering these girls into one community not be efficacious aid? The work was tough, the sick sometimes demanding, and discouragement could arise. Louise spoke to Vincent about her project. He saw no such need and
did all he could to discourage his collaborator. "You belong to our Lord and to his holy Mother; hold on to them and to the state in which you have been placed, waiting for them to show you if they desire something else from you." Louise, who saw the difficulties of peasants working in the Confraternities, followed her thought. She spoke to Marguerite Naseau about it, and thought it possible. Convinced it was God’s will, politely but firmly, she spoke up again. The answer of her director was always the same: he did not see the need for gathering the girls who serve in the Confraternities. "I ask you again not to think about this, until our Lord makes clear what he wants, who now gives indications contrary to it.... You are looking to become the servant of these poor girls, and God wants you to be only his, and perhaps serve other persons that you cannot arrange in this fashion; and when you arrange only his business, is it not enough for God that your heart honors the tranquility of our Lord’s heart?"

God spoke through what happened: in February of 1633, Marguerite died of the plague; she was contaminated by a sick woman she had let sleep in her bed. Her rapid death deeply moved Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. Charity cannot ignore prudence. Louise’s project was taken up again by Vincent de Paul: "In regard to the manner of your employment, I no longer have the clarity of heart before God touching the difficulty that prevented me from seeing whether this is the Will of his divine Majesty. I ask you, Mademoiselle, to put this matter before him during these days when God gives the graces of the Holy Spirit generously, yes, even the Holy Spirit himself. Pray fervently and keep yourself happy." What was the difficulty that was a problem for Vincent de Paul? The letter does not specify, but it is easy to guess. Would founding a group, a community, of the serving girls of the Charities under the responsibility of Louise de Marillac risk harming the Confraternities of Charity? Was it really necessary to form two distinct groups? Another question must have haunted Monsieur Vincent de Paul. Could you ask peasant girls to live a life totally consecrated to God in community? In the XVII\textsuperscript{th} Century, religious life was reserved for noble families and the bourgeois, and one needed a dowry. Was it reasonable to envisage a completely new kind of community? It seems that it was Louise de Marillac, a \textit{grande dame} of Paris who was going to influence the Gascon peasant. She knew the girls well, their desire for a life given to God, the seriousness of their spirituality. Drawing them together would assure a deeper formation to know them better before sending them off to where they were asked for. So Louise insisted.

In August of 1633, Vincent de Paul made his annual retreat. Louise took advantage of it and sent him another letter. On the last
day of his retreat, Vincent answered: "I think that your good angel has done what you told me in what you sent me. It has been four or five days that your angel has communicated with mine about the Charity of your daughters; for it is true that he often suggested that I recall it and I have thought seriously about this good work; we will speak about it, with God’s help, Friday or Saturday, unless you send to me sooner."

This meeting was decisive. Louise was able to propose to her daughters that they try this adventure. Some accepted, some refused. The 29th of November, 1633, Louise welcomed into her house 4 or 5 (we do not know the exact number) “so they could live in community,” writes her first biographer.

Both Vincent and Louise, knowing their responsibilities to this new group, assured the formation of the Sisters: Louise, their basic formation, beginner’s lessons in reading and the Scriptures, care of the sick, Vincent their spiritual formation. They reflected together on their response to requests that came from different villages and towns, Louise rewrote the rules, Vincent reread and corrected them. Their help to one another is evident. The optimism of Vincent could often calm Louise de Marillac in the wake of the many little daily difficulties. "Do not be surprised to find rebellion in this poor creature. We will see a lot more, if we live; and we will not suffer more with our Lord did with his. Let us submit ourselves completely to his good pleasure in what comes to us." When one of the Sisters died, Vincent, in admiration of the work of all the Daughters of Charity, exalted the beauty and grandeur of their vocation: “She died in the exercise of divine love, since she died in the work of the Charity.”

Vincent pushed Louise de Marillac little by little to assume complete charge of the Daughters of Charity. “Take charge” he often said to her. Most simply, and very delicately, he helped her to know that sometimes she was a little too serious: “I ask you to be happier, and you might lessen a little that bit of seriousness that nature gave you and which grace lightens.” Louise did not hesitate to call to Vincent’s attention, monopolized by his many duties, that he had easily forgotten his promises, their get togethers: “You have forgotten my need that I showed you that I have to talk to you.” The mutual understanding grew deeper between Vincent and Louise. They saw their qualities better, the richness of the other, but also the little faults, the failings. The experience of their complementarity forced Vincent and Louise to make progress together towards the truth.

This dose of awareness of their complementarity favored the beginning of some original works. The first concerned the foundlings. This work began in 1638, and was complicated by society’s rejection of these children. Vincent de Paul encouraged the Ladies of Charity
in their initiatives for these children condemned to certain death. Louise taught the Daughters of Charity to care for and educate these little ones. She also envisaged entrusting some of the children to welcoming families. Vincent confirmed, on the side, the idea of a child going to caring parents. When the work encountered a difficulty, Vincent was there, calling out to the Ladies and reassuring Louise.

In 1638, Monsieur Lambert, shortly after his arrival in Richelieu, wanted some Daughters of Charity sent to this town. Vincent de Paul approved the project, but Louise hesitated to send the Sisters for the first time so far from Paris. Vincent, with much delicacy, tried to conquer Louise's reservations. "The Charity of Richelieu has a real need right now of our Sister Barbe because of the number of sick there. What would you think of sending help to these good people in their need? They do not have contagious illnesses." And when two Sisters left Paris for this far-off town, Vincent was there, attentive to the motherly suffering of his collaborator. "Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle, what happiness for these good daughters to go and continue the charity which our Lord did on earth in the place where they have gone!"

The terrible misery of the sick at the hospital in Angers, described by Mme. Goussault, also moved Vincent and Louise greatly. Could the Company of the Daughters of Charity, should it take on a new direction, going to care for the sick, no longer at home, but inside a hospital? They reflected on the decision a long time. In December of 1639, Vincent prepared rules for this mission so far from Paris; Louise read them over and added some corrections. This first rule affirmed the ends of the Company: "The Daughters of Charity of the sick poor are going to Angers to honor our Lord, Father of the poor, and his holy Mother, to help the sick poor in the Hospital of the said town corporally and spiritually." He summed up the essential part of the life of every Daughter of Charity: "The first thing our Lord asks of them is that they love him above all and that they do all their activities for love of him; and the second, that they cherish one another like sisters bound together by the ties of love, and the sick poor like their masters, because our Lord is in them, they in our Lord."

The beginning of the service to the galley slaves by the Daughters of Charity in 1640 came from the same awareness of the extreme misery of these men. Vincent de Paul waited for Louise de Marillac's return from Angers before choosing the Sisters who would have to face this violent situation. "We are waiting for you with that affection which our Savior knows. You will come at the right time for the galley slaves."
A Perceptible Tension (1640-1642)

Toward 1640, the relationship between Vincent and Louise underwent a period of change. You could already detect, in the preceding years, some attitudes that revealed a great difference between these two personalities. Every friendship has its crises. That of Vincent and Louise was subject to the same law. Their friendship, which was established in truth, confidence, simplicity, had to face some tensions. The differences, accepted peacefully until then, became a source of impatience. They not longer worked like a complementarity, but rather changed into lack of understanding.

During Louise's stay in Angers, the Administrators asked for a written contract in good and proper form. Monsieur Vincent thought that that could be done by verbal agreement. Louise asked him: "Who can sign the contract, for the Company of the Daughters of Charity has no legal existence?" So no statement was then made. It is quite possible that Louise resented "the harmful effects" of the slow prudence of Monsieur Vincent. He responded: "Since these gentlemen want to deal in writing, do so, in nomine Domini, and make the contract in your own name as the head of the Daughters of Charity, servants of the sick poor in hospitals and parishes, at the good pleasure of the Superior General of the congregation of the priests of the Mission, Director of the said Daughters of Charity." The letter goes on with some rather complicated explanations. This answer did not satisfy Louise. She must have let him know her surprise, because a fourth letter of Vincent, the 28th of January, 1640, just confirmed everything in the first of the 11th of that same month: "I have told you my thought about the articles and conditions that you ought to have." Louise obeyed, and on the 1st of February, 1640, she signed the contract establishing the Daughters of Charity at the hospital in Angers.

The following year, the choice of a location for a new Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity became a source of several tensions. The house in which the Daughters of Charity set themselves up in 1636 had become too small after an influx of candidates. They had to find something larger. Louise took the opportunity to repeat her desire, already expressed in 1636 and denied by Monsieur Vincent — to live close to St. Lazare. Monsieur Vincent refused again because it was not prudent. When the people of the neighborhood saw a priest of the Mission go into the Daughters' house or a Sister entering St. Lazare, they would gossip and make comments. The Ladies of Charity looked for a house, but Louise refused the different suggestions. In February of 1641, she expressed her impatience. Vincent, who was ill, responded quickly: "I see always a
little of human feelings in you thinking that all is lost without a house while you see me sick. Oh woman of little faith or acceptance of the conduct and example of Jesus Christ! The Savior of the world, for the state of the Church, went to his Father for the rules and adjustments; and for a handful of daughters which his Providence has, we know, raised up and gathered, you think he would not supply a house.” A few months later, they bought a house, right in front of St. Lazare. Vincent accepted the sale and the Daughters of Charity moved there in October 1641.

From the beginnings of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Monsieur Vincent was in the habit of going regularly to speak to the Sisters who very much appreciated these conferences. But for several months, Louise remarked that Vincent always found some excuse for not coming. He was swamped with work, he promised to come and did not, because he put the Ladies, the priests, the Queen, etc. before the Daughters. Louise did not take it well. In the notes of some conferences which Monsieur Vincent did give, she made some comments. On the 16th of August, 1640, she copied the words of Monsieur Vincent: “I was quite close to not coming today because I had to go far into town; and I will have little time to talk to you.” On the 16th of August, 1641 — there had not been conferences for a year — she underlines the excuses of Monsieur Vincent: “It has been a long time since I called you together, but I have been very much hindered by my misery and my business. And so, my daughters, I hope that the goodness of God itself will supply what I owe you.” More severely, Louise wrote at the beginning of the conference of March 9th, 1642: “The ninth day of March, Monsieur Vincent was not able, on account of some pressing business, to be present at the beginning of the conference which his charity had resolved to give us.... Monsieur Portail began the conference....” In the middle of the recounting, she notes: “Monsieur Vincent arrived at five o’clock, and his charity, after having heard some thoughts of some of our sisters, continued: My sisters, it is getting late...; we will come back to this next Sunday....” These conferences given between 1640 and 1642 are the only ones that have these notations.

In spite of their slightly strained relationship, their different points of view, the life of the Company went on: accepting numerous postulants, responding to requests, new foundations (Nanteuil, Fontenay aux Roses, Sedan...) as well as the preparation for first vows in the Company, March 25th, 1642.

Suddenly, an outside event, small in appearance, happened to jostle the two Founders. Saturday, the 7th of June, 1642, the eve of Pentecost, in the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, the floor of the room where the Sisters usually gathered for the conferences
collapsed. The gathering expected that day had not taken place because the speaker was called off this time too. Vincent de Paul, always attentive to events, let it speak to him deeply. On the morning of Pentecost, he shared his thoughts with Louise: “Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle, how shocked I was this morning when Monsieur Portail told me about the accident that happened yesterday, and he said what our Lord said to those who questioned him on the subject of those who had been covered by the ruin of the fall of the tower in Jericho, that it did not happen because of the sins of those persons, nor for those of their fathers and mothers, but to manifest the glory of God. And, certainly, I tell you the same, Mademoiselle.... You have in this happening a new reason for loving God more than ever....” Louise de Marillac was herself quite transformed by this event. Her only preserved reflection was written some years later, on the anniversary of the accident: “I had a great interior change when the goodness (of God) gave me light and clarity on some great upsets and difficulties that I had.... It seemed to me that God’s goodness was working on a grand scheme for the solid establishment of this little family, interiorly in our Most Honored Father and in the spirits of some of our Sisters....”

Vincent and Louise welcomed this light from God. They came to a stronger awareness that he was the author of this little Company, that he took particular care of them and that he invited them, together, to persevere in the work begun for his glory and the good of the poor. The Spirit of God, on this Pentecost day, 1642, moved them to surmount the crisis that they were living in and to change themselves. A difficult stage was over. A long period of deep and effective friendship opened before them.

A Productive Friendship (1642-1660)

For 17 years (1642-1660), Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac traveled the same road, learning to know one another, to understand one another more deeply, to esteem and respect one another. Now freedom, that independence of spirit that is not ruled by fear of failure or apprehension, nor by prejudice, was the basis of their relationship. This freedom became a support for the realization of their multiple involvements, revealing their shared passion for the poor.

True collaboration never seeks to dominate or convince; it allows, by facing ideas, different points of view, a deeper knowledge of the self. Louise de Marillac was looking for a relationship that differentiated and made them grow: “I ask you most humbly, Monsieur, that the weaknesses in my spirit, which I have made known to you, not require of your charity the condescension, which you might have
been able to have given thought to, that I would like you to undo my thoughts.... God gives me the grace almost always to know and evaluate the advice of other people that is different from my own; and particularly when it is your Charity I am certain to see the truth clearly, whatever it be in areas that are hidden from me for a time." Decisions to be made were clarified by the light of the Gospel and their personal reflection. Louise suggested changes that appeared to be necessary at Chars where the Jansenist pastor showed himself to be quite intransigent: "The thought came to me yesterday to propose to your charity, if it should find it good, not to offend Monsieur the pastor of Chars so much, to send my Sister Jeanne Christine in place of my Sister Turgis and to keep Sister Jacquette for Chantilly, because I foresee that we will have to take the one who lives there away from Chars."

Vincent de Paul showed Louise the letter he had just written to the abbot of Vaux, spiritual counselor to the Sisters of the hospital at Angers: "I have written to the abbot of Vaux that you have promised to furnish Daughters in eight places before you can send him any. See, Mademoiselle, if that does not contradict what you wrote him."

In 1650, the Marquise de Maignelay had asked for two Sisters for the parish of St. Roch. The request was urgent, and the Marquise wanted to have the Daughters on the following day! Louise showed that she was very reluctant and gave her reasons to Monsieur Vincent: "[a former Daughter of Charity] was alive and was now married, and lived in the house where our Sisters would be living, and it is a dangerous closeness for us. I ask you most humbly to carefully tell me what I should say in the meeting so that I do not offend Madame la Marquise or do us any harm." Louise pressed him not even to speak to the woman, because she was the sister of the old General of the Galleys, Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi.

Neither Vincent nor Louise wanted to influence the other, nor make their advice prevail, much less exploit the other. They wished that the work they accomplished might be a step up to a more human condition for all those that they served and at the same time announce Jesus Christ. It was this unself-centeredness that let them share their thoughts very freely. Reading the Councils reveal that Vincent and Louise often had opposing opinions. They did not hesitate to express their own reasons, searching together for the will of God and the good of the poor. These Councils were a good place for the participating Sisters to be formed.

The Council of the 30th of October, 1647, studied two problems: accepting little boys in the girls' school, and the possibility of having lodgers in the houses. Vincent, who always presided over the Councils, put the first point: "Mademoiselle Le Gras proposes that,
if it is expedient, our sisters in town and in the country who run a school might take in boys as well as girls, and, in a situation where they take in boys, what age limit should they set.” Louise presented her reasons. These little boys would receive the basics of piety; this might be their only instruction. In most of the villages there was no school master. Many parents desired that their sons receive at least as much instruction as their daughters. And she recognized that such little children (less than six years) could not be the object of a temptation by the mistress. Vincent unfolded exactly opposite reasons: the mix is forbidden as much by an ordinance of the king as by one of the archbishop. The Sisters should be the first to observe these ordinances, and Vincent gave his word about recalling that school masters who welcomed young girls among the boys were condemned to be burned alive. The deliberation continued by hearing the other participants: one Sister is for it, another Sister against. Monsieur Lambert seemed rather favorable. Louise emphatically said that she had had to do it sometimes, because sometimes a girl could not come to school if she did not bring her brother with her, because the mother was not home to watch him. After having put forth his reasons again, Vincent de Paul concluded: “It will be good if we do not take any at all. Two or three of us advise this. We should keep it as is.” So Louise had to review what she had authorized in certain houses.

Then followed the discussion about welcoming lodgers. Here again, there was a big difference in the appreciation of the two founders. Louise saw some advantages there: the education of the girls, financial aid for to poor houses. Vincent saw many inconveniences: different food for the girls (the menu of the Sisters seemed to him to be too poor!), a risk that it would seem that there were disagreements among the Sisters in the Community, difficulties in uniting the care of the borders and fidelity to the Rule (prayer). Despite Louise’s insistence, Vincent’s decision was definite: “We should keep it as is, and not move one step further.” Louise de Marillac had to tell different communities of this decision without letting it seem that she opposed it. She knew that a decision made after a shared reflection should not later be contested by one or other member. Total unity was indispensable.

On the 8th of April, 1655, the Council studied the question of the Sisters leaving the hospital in Nantes, because constant conflict demoralized the Sisters and hindered their work. Vincent laid the problem out and developed his reasons for staying and for leaving. All the members present listened and then gave their advice. Three councilors were convinced of the need to leave. Louise’s advice was clear — they had to call the Sisters back because they had tried everything. Monsieur Portail suggested waiting and making a change
of Sisters to see what might follow. Monsieur Alméras, who had visited the Community two years earlier, thought that it was wise to “send for them as soon as they were ready, because it did no good to take more time.” Louise insisted again, saying “it was more expedient to end it from this moment, because our Sisters are of one mind in this; this would be good lest we give a cause for scandal to others.” The conclusion might seem surprising. But it shows that Vincent did not make a decision if he was not sure that it conformed to the Will of God. He ended the Council: “To omit nothing in such an important affair, I believe it is fitting to commend it to God. And since we do not want to do anything that does not conform to God’s holy Will, we have to ask for the light to know what it is.” It was difficult for Louise to accept the maintenance of the community when the Sisters suffered. On August 28th, she received a letter from Nicole Haran, the Sister Servant who made clear: “There is a continual war against us... we are almost unable to make the little advance that goes on here.” At the next Council, Mademoiselle brought the problem up again. She spoke about Nicole’s letter and her worry about the Sisters. Vincent’s response was the same: “We should commend the matter to God.” The departure of the Sisters from the hospital at Nantes did not happen until 1664!

When they looked at the life experiences of the Community at Nantes, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac sought to discern the will of God. For Louise de Marillac, the multiple challenges coming from the Administrators and the Bishop were the source of her worry and anxiety for the Sisters and affected her health. The service of the sick felt the effects. It seemed to the Foundress that a service that could not be done the right way should not be continued. Vincent de Paul reconsidered it. Every work done in the name of the Lord has its difficulties, its obstacles. You could not let yourself be discouraged by these difficulties, and as Jesus Christ did on earth, accept facing up to them. Louise welcomed the decision of Vincent de Paul.

Louise de Marillac also shared with Monsieur Vincent her point of view on the future of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. A very intuitive woman, she saw that this community, of a kind completely new in the XVIIth Century, would not survive if it were subject to the Bishops. Her thought was the opposite of the Council of Trent which had reaffirmed the responsibility of the Bishops for the whole of the Christian life of their diocese. But Louise said and said again that the Daughters of Charity were simply baptized women, the daughters of the parishes, and not nuns. Why subject them to the authority of the local Bishop? For Louise, that would end the service of the Poor. She knew that several Bishops were opposed to any consecrated life in the open world: the Visitandines of Francis
de Sales had been cloistered by the Bishop of Lyon; at Bordeaux, the Congregation founded by Jeanne de Lestonnac had to live inside their establishment when the Bishop insisted. If the Daughters of Charity were not able “to come and go” in the streets, in the villages, then say goodbye to the service of the poor in their homes!

Louise tried to convince Vincent de Paul to be the legally responsible ecclesiastical person for the Daughters of Charity. The confrontation would be long. Vincent rejected Louise’s idea. He had submitted himself to the decisions of the Council of Trent, and did not want to touch the authority of the Bishops. Moreover, the Congregation of the Mission had its goals of the Mission in the countryside and the work of seminaries. It did not have the vocation to be busy with women, even if consecrated.

From 1640, Louise de Marillac hoped that Monsieur Vincent would take the necessary steps for the recognition of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Toward 1642-1643, Vincent made or had made several outlines of Petitions. But it was not until August, 1646, that he finally decided to send the request to the Archbishop of Paris. Louise did not read over the last version. She was in Nantes where she had gone to bring six Sisters to the hospital.

Monsieur Vincent was delighted in November, 1646. The Archbishop had signed the approval of the Company. This document was then submitted to the Parliament for official recognition by the Kingdom of France. When Louise de Marillac read the text, she reacted strongly. With some vehemence, she wrote to Monsieur Vincent about her unhappiness. She had the words of the Archbishop before her eyes: “Monsieur, I do not dare ask you if I should tell this to the Sisters nor have I done so.” And she explained everything that she objected to: giving the Sisters the title “Servants of the Poor”; she held on to the one they were usually given: “Daughters of Charity.” But above all she could not accept that the Daughters of Charity were subject to the Archbishop of Paris. She saw that as a serious risk to the service of the poor. She ended the letter with a strong admonition to Monsieur Vincent. The tone looked for no reply: “In the name of God, Monsieur, do not permit anything to happen that lets any small part of a day go by that draws the Company away from the direction that God gave it because you can be sure that it immediately would not be what it was, and the sick poor would not be cared for, and then I believe that the Will of God would no longer be done by us.”

Vincent was aware of Louise’s intensity. He thought it wise to say nothing and to wait. Six months went by…. In the middle of a conference on Thursday, May 30th, 1647, he announced to the Sisters: “Now, my daughters, God wants you to read carefully the approval that he has permitted to be given to our way of life and our rules by the
most illustrious and Reverend Lord, the Archbishop of Paris. Here is the request which was presented to him, and here the rules, and then the approval. I am going to read them to you one after the other."

Louise, who was present, was very upset. It would take more than six months for her to calm down. Then calmly, she repeated her thought to Vincent de Paul, now with a firm refusal to see the Company of the Daughters of Charity subordinate to the Archbishop of Paris. Her letter was dated November, 1647: "Monsieur, it seems to me that God has given my soul a deep peace and simplicity in the prayer, quite imperfect from my part, that I have made on the subject of the necessity that the Company of the Daughters of Charity to follow step by step the path that Divine Providence has given it, as much in the spiritual as in the temporal. In this I think I have seen that it would be more advantageous to God's glory that the Company write down all we do, rather than follow this other path, because it seems to be contrary to the Will of God." Louise did not receive a reply to this letter, full of simplicity and seeking to calm things down. Vincent also sought the Will of God about the Company of Daughters again. Several times, Louise came back to these two points: the Will of God and the care of the poor. She well knew that Monsieur Vincent was quite reasonable on these issues. She learned patience, and waited long years....

Towards 1652-1653, the elderly Vincent de Paul, seeing on the one hand that the Daughters of Charity had spread into many dioceses and as far as Poland, and on the other hand that Louise's health was more and more precarious, wanted to settle the situation of the Daughters of Charity. A new request was written, and in January of 1655, Cardinal de Retz approved the Company again, placing it, this time, under the authority of Vincent de Paul, Superior General of the Mission, and his successors. Louise was happy, not because of her success, but because the Company could pursue the work begun in the design of God. The Company could be faithful to the charism that God had entrusted to it.

The confrontation was tough, long. No one wanted to or could give up what seemed essential to the mission to the poor. These positions held firmly did not hinder their missionary work or the responses to new requests: for the Daughters of Charity, new placements at Nantes, Montreuil sur Mer, Poland, transferring the foundlings to Bicêtre, etc.; for the priests of the Mission, the mission to Madagascar, relief to Picardie and Champagne, provinces devastated by war, etc.... The Founders were not obsessed by their personal difficulties. They knew how to bypass them to handle an urgent need, and to respond to the many unending needs that surfaced.
Vincent de Paul, who had for so long been hesitant to accept the role of Superior of the Daughters of Charity, had to defend this choice, competing with his responsibilities to the Congregation of the Mission, before his own confreres. In 1660, he explained at length; "If we have the direction of the house where they [the Daughters of Charity] are formed, it is because this path of God, giving birth to their little company, used our company; and you know that the same things that God uses to create something he also uses to keep it going.... The Daughters of Charity entered into the order of Providence as a way that God gives them to do by their hands what we cannot do with ours, for the bodily help of the sick poor, and to tell the poor personally some words of instruction or encouragement for their salvation. We have some obligation to aid them in their own advancement in virtue to better accomplish their charitable works." Vincent and Louise had learned to assume fully their decisions taken after shared deliberation, without repeating their opposing reasons that they had already presented.

**Giving Thanks**

Knowing that death was near, they both felt the need to express their thanks for all that they had received from one another. In March of 1659, Vincent wrote to Louise: "Never has charity seemed so noble and so amiable as yours. God be praised because it is demonstrated so perfectly by the said Mademoiselle, to whom I give my thanks with all the gratitude of my heart."

In January of 1660, Louise expressed her gratitude to Vincent for "the work of God, which, my most honored Father, your charity has supported with such strength in the face of all opposition." Thus simply did Vincent and Louise help one another prepare themselves to "leave this world" to be born in a new creation. The desires that they exchanged at the end of the year 1659 reflected their mutual understanding and the hope of always following the will of God. Louise first: "I beseech God that he conserve your weak health and that he, for his glory, give you soon the fulfillment of his designs for your soul." And Vincent sent her a note written by his secretary: "I wish for Mademoiselle le Gras the fullness of the Spirit as a special gift and that the Company preserve such a good Mother so that she might give them more and more the gifts of this Spirit."

Gently, always desiring to be united by the will of God, they accepted that they would not see one another again. Their friendship was beyond any meeting; it had become so simple and transparent that it had no need of natural support. On the 14th of March, Vincent sent this short message to the dying Louise: "You are leaving first,
and if God forgives me my sins, I hope to come soon and rejoin you in heaven.”

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac had learned to get past their differences and work together, to be certain to accomplish the will of God. The immense love of God for humanity that they discovered contemplating the Incarnation of the Son of God had been their strength. Their exchanges were based in authenticity, that is to say, the profound acceptance of the identity of the other, the understanding and respect of their complementarity. Their friendship had become a communion like that of the Trinity, the great mystery of God in which the gift of reciprocity is lived in unity and diversity.

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac have enriched the Church by their institutions that humanized and evangelized the poor. Above all, they illuminated the world by their witness of a simple and humble life full of love.

Translation: THOMAS S. KRAFINSKY, C.M.
Passion for Making the Kingdom Present

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac:
A Relationship that Promoted Bold and Creative Fidelity

by Carmen Urrizburu, D.C.

It was an ordinary day; one whose exact date we do not know. Perhaps on the Rue Saint-Denis, in that section very near the walls which widened to form the atrium of the Parish of Saint Sauveur, in Paris. But it also could have occurred in one of the nearby streets. No one knows exactly when, because there are no details of that meeting in any of the documents of human experiences that history has recorded. Perhaps because in that moment, it was not especially meaningful for the two people involved.¹

She lived on Rue Courtau-Vilain.² He on Rue Pavé.³ Both belonged to the same parish of Saint Sauveur.⁴ There she regularly attended the celebration of the Eucharist, Vespers and other devotional activities in which the faithful participated. There she also usually spent her time in private prayer. He would very occasionally attend the parish because he alternated his time in the capital with frequent

¹We can suppose that this meeting happened before June 4, 1623. By this date, Louise de Marillac knew Vincent de Paul, but she felt a certain displeasure at the idea of relating to him. (See Santa LUISA DE MARILLAC, Correspondencia y escritos, Ed. CEME, Salamanca, 1985, p. 11).


trips to the de Gondi's lands. This family was of the nobility and they honored Vincent with their friendship and trust. They welcomed him into their luxurious mansion and, from 1617 on, they offered him the pastoral attention of the great number of peasants who lived in the cities, towns, and small villages that were their property.

**BY DIFFERENT PATHS**

These two persons apparently had little in common. Life had led them by different paths. And, curiously, life also led them to come together in a common project, supporting an evangelical alternative in the midst of an unjust society.

**In the development of his personal capacities**

He was short of stature but had a large soul. His look was penetrating. He was friendly, full of life, happy, in full development of his personal capacities. His bearing reflected the process of interior growth that he was experiencing. He was a cleric and dressed in a simple but very dignified manner. He was easily identified as one of the clergy who came from the peasantry. He was then about 42 years old.

The days of his serious crisis of life were now past. The meaninglessness of living superficially. The disappointment with a self-centered lifestyle. The security which he thought he would find in an ecclesiastical benefice. In that moment, after the brief experience of possessing abbeys, parishes, canonries and priories, and knowing what that meant for his future, he had not only lost all interest in them; he also had resigned from almost all of them.

His personality was being restructured, bringing to light an enchanting spiritual and human maturity. He was convinced that he had now discovered the purpose of his life. "I am resolved to dedicate my whole life to the service of the poor for the love of Jesus Christ." His heart had declared this with determined serenity some time ago. And now he had no other concerns. Along with his preferred poor, the eyes of the people of Paris and its surroundings were on him. Without knowing very well how, he had felt drawn into the world of the poor; and he witnessed that in his inmost self there emerged a surprising sensibility to perceive their situation, their needs, their sufferings, and to approach their hearts. The de Gondi family was a strategic and a privileged place for him, because the family permitted him to relate with the galley slaves, with the peasants on
their lands, and also with the elite of both the society and the church of Paris.

When he arrived in the city, more than ten years before, he entered into contact with Pierre de Berulle, a priest who represented the most devout and active current in the French Church. Vincent received tremendous support from him in his process of personal transformation. Around then, captivated by finding spiritual meaning for his life, he became friends with André Duval, Adrien Bourdoise and Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, abbot of Saint-Cyran. They envisioned a renewed church, a new situation that would require the commitment of each one. He also wanted to know all that was emerging in the spiritual circles and the reform movements of his time.

Despite his humble simplicity, his personality was beginning to be noticed in Paris. He was of peasant stock, and without intending to, he attracted the attention of the nobility. On first meeting them, he captivated people. He and Francis de Sales met when Francis arrived in Paris at the end of 1618. And they developed a warm friendship. Within a few months they developed a great familiarity, and Francis knew and valued Vincent so much that he wanted to entrust to him in 1622 the direction of the first convent of the Visitation in Paris.

Vincent considered himself a person in process; he struggled interiorly to free in himself “the new man.” And hidden behind his dynamic demeanor and his attractive appearance there was life, like a spring that wells up, an experience: the touch of God, the fire that God Himself had placed in his heart and that harmonized all the facets of his personality, and moved him to express the richness of his being, the vitality of his depth, the evangelical creativity of his imagination.

Moved by the natural impulse to taste the joy of living

In her face, in her restraint, and in her character, she also manifested the personal situation she was experiencing. Timid, at times crestfallen, withdrawn, with a rather sorrowful appearance, she could be seen coming and going hurriedly through the streets of the Marais neighborhood. Alone, or accompanied by a friend, she would enter one of the mansions in the neighborhood for a social visit, or she would frequent the Church of Saint Nicholas des Champs or her parish Church of Saint Sauveur. Over time her trips out were almost exclusively to the churches. More and more she would stay at home. She was about 32. She was married to Antoine
Le Gras, at one time the secretary of the Queen Mother, and she had a son.

Her presence at the court was now only a memory. The invitations to parties at the palace, her modest participation in the receptions, lunches and balls, her careful seeking out the proper place for the not so noble couple Le Gras... all this had given her the opportunity to know from the inside the life of the nobility of the kingdom. Her friends called her "Mademoiselle" and because of her dress she appeared to be of the middle class. But there was something in her that made her seem different. Rejecting the frivolity around her, she looked for the proper way to approach life from the perspective of spirituality.

She was a woman with a broad experience of culture. She had received a wonderful education. She was intelligent, sensitive, intuitive, refined and clever. She was cultured in all facets of her personality. She read the classics. She understood Latin well and she knew Greek. She knew how to make lace and do other handcrafts. She painted and she could skillfully manage all the tasks of a household. She knew how to be present and open in her social environment. She often would go to the spiritual circles of Paris. She would devour the modern spiritual publications. She had spiritual companions of great depth and she could relate well to all kinds of people.

Her life up until then had not been easy. She did not know her mother. Her family had rather ambiguous social connections. She was obligated to enter into marriage and now she was caught between the nobility and the middle class, a woman with a sick husband, without sufficient economic resources, and with a son who was maturing very slowly and was somewhat troubled. From deep down she experienced with great force the natural impulse to taste the joy of living.

She was having a difficult time. A profound crisis of identity was eating away at her soul. She felt out of place. Her frustration and sense of dejection were noticeable. More and more her ponderings gave way to negative thoughts. She was filled with sadness, disappointment, and feelings of guilt. The self image which she had created, and in which she felt secure, was inadequate for her now. The lifestyle which she had forged for herself and her family was now like a corset which squeezed the very life out of her. The best of Louise, held captive in her deepest self, had to come to the surface.

There were few decisions which she had been able to make for herself. Almost everything had been planned out and imposed upon her. But there, sinking its roots in a decision which she had made for herself as a resolution when only 15 years old, was prayer. And this
living internalized experience of prayer was leading her, though she did not know it, toward the awakening of the fullness of her being. She was going through a profound “dark night” from which she would soon emerge more mature and calm.

She did not go unnoticed in the society of Paris. She was a Marillac and she had a wide range of relationships. She admired Francis de Sales, whom she received in her home in 1619. And she wanted to be able to speak with him again. She had a strong curiosity which was focused on things spiritual. An insatiable “thirst” maintained her in a constant seeking. She was looking for appropriate spiritual direction, but was not able to find the peace she sought. And so she remained... waiting in the darkness of night for the dawning of her true self.

On June 4, 1623 she intuited that a person whom she did not know well, and only knew superficially, would become her spiritual companion. Both had something in common: the commitment to respond to the call to make of their lives a spiritual experience, and affection, admiration, and a certain spiritual connection with the Bishop of Geneva. She, for the moment, communicated the movements of her soul to a friend of Francis de Sales who did not live in Paris: Jean Pierre Camus.

And so, one day, we do not know when, nor where, nor why, two persons, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, met each other. And so, also in a simple and intimate way, without any particular importance, there began a relationship that, little by little, would have a decisive influence on and meaning for the society of Paris, the poor of France, and for the Church.

**A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE**

Some time would pass before the relationship which was intuited, would begin to be cultivated. Both she and he were busy, occupied with their own issues and attentive to the process that was unfolding in their being. Both of them were in a decisive stage of their lives. By the time that they began to communicate regularly, the lifestyles of both had changed notably. On April 17, 1625 a group of priests had been formed around the person of Vincent, with the end of giving missions in the villages. He had now definitively left the de Gondi home, and was living with his companions on the other side of the Seine, in the College of Bons-Enfants, in front of the Port de

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Saint-Victor. Early in the morning they would leave Paris, handing over the key of the house to a neighbor, and they would return in the evening, after a day of meetings, preaching the Kingdom, and evangelical joy. When the site of the mission was far from the capital, Vincent would spend days away from home. This style of life attracted the attention of the woman who was observing him. She, a widow since December 21, 1625, had also left the Marais neighborhood, and had moved to a rental house on Rue Saint-Victor, very near Bons-Enfants and the hill of Sainte Genevieve. There were some small free schools in the area where her son, Michel, could continue his studies.

He, free, joyful, and decided, lived this stage of his life with determination, trying new paths, new attitudes and new projects. She, unstable and indecisive, was still looking for her place in life. She needed affection, advice, attention. She needed to be listened to. And she turned to Vincent. They developed a rich personal relationship. It began as a helping relationship, spiritual direction or accompaniment. And it evolved through a beautiful friendship, and a wonderful complementarity, into a relationship of rich, evangelical collaboration.

FROM A HELPING RELATIONSHIP

From an early age, Louise felt the need for help. Perhaps it was the sense of abandonment, the lack of affection and family attention in the first moments of her life that caused her basic insecurity. She felt the need to find someone who would pay attention to her. But it was also evident that the dynamic of seeking was very much alive in her. She had sought out religious experience since her adolescence. Her whole self, her soul, remained oriented toward God in the darkness, in the play of shadow and light of daily life. And she was looking for someone to accompany her along the way. She had always turned to qualified persons for counsel: Honoré de Champigny, Michel de Marillac, Francis de Sales, Jean Pierre Camus... and now, Vincent de Paul. He was also having the same

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experience of spiritual accompaniment. First with Pierre de Berulle, later with André Duval. And he also accompanied others: Madame de Gondi, Madame Du Fay, some of the religious of the Visitation, the companions he lived with and others. And so both agreed, despite their initial reticence, to have periodic interviews in which she could express her inner experience.

This relationship, named by both of them as spiritual direction, led them correctly down the path of personal growth and it contributed decisively to the enrichment of all the facets of their personalities. What Louise was looking for was "to live," to experience the joy of living, and this was also Vincent's intention, for himself and for those with whom he related. Life is a dynamic force in expansion that springs up from within and holds within itself the demand of liberation from all the ties that strangle and enslave. It always moves toward wholeness. Life carries in its heart the seal of God. Both of them remained attentive to this emerging movement of life in each of them, willing to consent to its momentum toward wholeness.

In tune with the project of God

The priority of this task, and the clarity with which it was perceived by both before the beginning of their relationship, is evident. "Is it not reasonable that I should belong totally to God...? I desire this with all my heart and in the manner which pleases him," Louise wrote to a cousin of her husband as she informed him of her husband's death. In the conscience of both, this was the only specific objective of the helping relationship that they had decided to undertake. This clear orientation, in the direction of finding the meaning of life in the fulfillment of God's project in each of them, was not merely an idea. It had not come from the reading of manuals of spirituality. It was not part of a dry voluntarism. Both were trying to cultivate a "spiritual sensitivity" to perceive the mysterious presence God in their lives. Vincent, from the time of Folleville and Chatillon, in 1617, when he felt overcome by the certainty: "It is clear that there God was acting with power." Louise, since the day of Pentecost in 1623, when she perceived the "light" about herself and she felt illuminated by the evidence: "It was God who was showing me all this." And both

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8 Santa Luisa de Marillac, Correspondencia y escritos, Ed. CEME, Salamanca, Letter 2.
were also growing in depth in their inmost being. This allowed the natural “thirst for God,” expressed in the particular manner of each, to surface and be recognized. “I felt moved by the desire to give myself to God, to do His holy will my whole life,” Louise had written around 1622. And this was the heart of the matter, respecting the flow of God’s life in each one of them, and supporting the way in which this was expressed. In short, to leave the initiative of their lives to God, to allow the image of God, imprinted in the inmost depths of their being, to express itself, by its own dynamism, in their personalities.

Louise felt that she needed help to discover what God had planned for her. She lived with the sensation of interior misalignment, and that the fundamental option of her life was yet to be discovered. She needed to feel supported in her efforts to be attentive to her deepest self. She felt moved to practice “discovering,” and she wanted to share with another person all that was happening in her. The practice of personal prayer had given her the opportunity to deepen her conscience, to know her soul well enough to be able to know “when she was smothering a good desire, preventing it from being formed,” and when, conscious of God’s action in her, she gave her consent: “It seemed to me that our good God asked me for my consent, that I give it fully, so that He could bring about what He wished to see in me.”

Luckily, Vincent was living in the same dynamic and he greatly admired this way of life in Francis de Sales. He had observed him well. “Opening his heart to me he once told me that when he was preaching, he would become aware that someone was moving him interiorly” Vincent recounted. “I became aware, he told me, that something came out of me, not by my own will, because I had not thought about it before, and I knew nothing of it, but rather I said it by a divine impulse.” In the experience of others and in his own, he had verified that the decisions motivated by human criteria led one down the wrong paths that could not lead to fullness. These decisions led people down a path so narrow and tortuous that they could not enjoy life.

And they both felt motivated to give their lives to God’s project, to the intensity of feeling themselves inhabited, to the task of discernment. “As for the rest, I beg you, once and for all, not to give it
a thought until Our Lord makes it evident that He wishes it, and at present He is giving indications to the contrary. We want a number of good things with a desire that seems to be of God, and yet it is not always from Him. God permits it that way to prepare the soul to be what He desires.”13 The two began to support each other mutually, establishing a subtle bond of unity between being and doing. “To be as He desires,” that is, to allow to come to the surface what God has imprinted as His image in the depths of one’s being. And that the “doing” flows from “what one is” as the most pure expression of one’s being. She manifested that discovering and committing herself to this project of God was “the only desire of my heart.”14 And he, more sure of himself and inwardly peaceful, encouraged her with expressions such as: “Always wait patiently for the manifestation of His holy and adorable Will.” “What is our Lord doing with you?”15

To Louise this process of discernment seemed long. She was a passionate person. When she intuited something, she immediately wanted to see it done. Vincent would tell her that this was “indiscrete zeal.” She realized that one of the aspects of her personality that needed to be modified was “haste.” And he also knew that he was “too slow in getting things done” because he had “a special devotion to follow the footsteps of God’s Providence.”16 Louise felt moved to dedicate her life to the formation of the young women who served the poor in the Charities. At last, respecting God’s timing, and discerning the signs that lighted their path, dominating the natural impulse to take their own initiative, and placing the gifts that each one had received from God at His disposition, they believed that the hour had now come. Because “it is up to His Divine Providence to call us to the works for which He has given us some talent, and it is not our place to aspire to them.”17 And toward the end of the summer of 1633, while Vincent was making his annual retreat, there appeared the proof. On November 29, the first community of Daughters of Charity met together in the house of Louise de Marillac, on Versailles Street, in front of a house that had the sign of a royal sword. What had been announced was now being fulfilled, because she was in a place dedicated to the service of the poor, with others who were doing the same thing, coming and going.

13 Coste I, 113 / SV I, 118.
14 Santa Luisa de Marillac, Correspondencia y escritos, Ed. CEME, Salamanca, E. 7, num. 18.
17 Coste VII, 144 / SV VII, 158-160.
In the exercise of freedom

Although Louise now had experience in helping relationships, her meeting with Vincent de Paul opened a different horizon for her. It situated her in a new perspective in which she discovered an indescribable attraction. Her searching soul was finding a way through the midst of whatever difficulty. And she found in Vincent a person who was clear, sincere, free, who had no reservations about giving his opinion, exactly as it was. She was a woman who was living a personal situation of chronic pessimism and sadness, which he was helping her to overcome. Moved by her anxiety, urged on by her emotional neediness, and settled in her loneliness, she perceived in Vincent's attitude, in his words, and in the testimony of his life, an atmosphere of confidence that allowed her to open up her inmost self. She found in him the horizon that reflected the answer to her life's questioning.

She “hastened” to go to him, forming a dependence that did not let her live in peace. “Forgive me for telling you, — said Jean Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley — that you cling to those who guide you and you depend too much on them. Monsieur Vincent de Paul is absent, and here is Mademoiselle Le Gras, beside yourself and disconcerted.”

Quite soon the time between their meetings grew shorter, and the letters more frequent. She would ask his forgiveness for being “so impertinent.” For his part, he would tell her: “I do not answer all your letters.”

Vincent, who was not willing to accept that kind of relationship, spoke frankly to her. He adopted the strategy of acting with freedom, making clear what was the goal of his life, committed totally as he was to the mission of evangelization. And he invited Louise to become aware of this dependence. “I did not notify you of my departure because it was a little sooner than I had expected and I was reluctant to upset you by letting you know about it. Well now! Our Lord will use this little mortification to advantage if He wishes.”

Louise maintained the habit of consulting Vincent about everything until the end of her life. Because of her burning desire to reflect in her life God’s will for her, she accepted him as a qualified mediation as well as a touchstone. Mathurine Guérin told how “She resolved almost nothing without first having taken the matter up

with our most honored Father, at least when she was dealing with something rather extraordinary.” This fact is absolutely certain in their relationship. And it is difficult to ascertain the motives which led her to make a habit of consulting him before making a decision. It could be because of a social dependence, since in their world the woman had to be subordinated to the man in almost everything. Or it could be a functional dependence that led her to make decisions together concerning all that had to do with their collaboration, without disregarding the spiritual aspect mentioned above. Their correspondence reveals how on many occasions Vincent would tell her, “do what you think best,” and “what you are saying seems right to me,” etc.

Choosing joy

Vincent found himself before a woman who frequently felt herself besieged by the force of her negative thoughts that would lead to feelings of low self worth and guilt. He had now discovered a joyful outlook on life, and after working on himself to overcome what he called his “black moods,” he considered himself an optimistic person who was both joyful and happy. In his correspondence and writings there are a great many expressions about happiness, delight, and joy. Louise, however, had not yet accepted herself. She experienced moments of impatience and anxiety, and her inner self was not peaceful. He knew that joy was the most appropriate interior disposition to bring out the best in each person. He had become convinced that God is pleased when we live with joy. And at the same time that he maintained his own option for joy, he patiently observed the appearance of this joy in Louise. He invited her to live joyfully. She, for her part, was doing her own inner work. And she began to live more from her options rather than from her reactions. Joy, more than a feeling, is a part of life, and as such it is there, in our inmost depths, sustaining our being and struggling to grow and manifest itself, until it brings fullness to our life. In our inner self we are joy. It is not something that comes from outside a person when things are going well, when life smiles, or when one achieves what is desired. Joy does not vanish with the arrival of problems, difficulties or trials. It springs up and floods our life with happiness when we enter into contact with joy in the depths of our being. It is not

possible to “achieve joy,” for we possess it in our inner self. It is necessary for us to create a way of being in life that allows us to enter into contact with joy, and to allow it flow.

She had to decide. He was resolute, positive, joyful in his look, his gestures, and in the way he carried himself. She observed him, admired him and paid attention to his joyful manner, opening herself to his influence. He spoke to her in terms like, “remain joyful,” “be joyful,” “maintain yourself joyful,” “do with joy what you must do,” “live resting in joy.” And she responded by applying herself to the practice of choosing joy, and she committed herself to “work joyfully,” and to follow “the sentiment of joy that I now experience,” and to “maintain joy.”

Together they would also discover a special source of joy. That which comes from the beauty that there is in the “things of God,” in the living of the Gospel, in the following of Jesus Christ and in serving Him in the poor: “I have firmly resolved to follow Him, without any distinction, but rather filled with joy on finding myself so happy to be accepted by Him to live my whole life following Him.” On August 24, 1650, Louise hurriedly picked up a sheet of paper to write this to Vincent: “My heart, still full of joy because of the understanding that it seems to me our good God has given it of these words: God is my God! and because of the sentiment that I have experienced of the glory that all the blessed offer Him as a consequence of this truth, I can do no less than communicate this to you this evening to ask you to help me to make (good use) of these excesses of joy.”

The interior Master

One of the keys to the success in the relationship of these two people is perhaps the respect that both felt for the autonomy of the dynamism of life in the evolution of their persons. Vincent, ten years older than Louise, was ahead of her in this way of experiencing life. And he brought to the relationship his experience, as Louise brought her confidence and docility. Mathurine Guérin would remember in 1660 that after many years of knowing and helping each other, when Louise spoke freely with her sisters, she would say that:


24 Santa Luisa de Marillac, Correspondencia y escritos, Ed. CEME, Salamanca, E. 22, num. 67 and Letter 348.
"To direct souls, there are few people who have the method of our honored Father, who had received a special gift from God to know that way by which He wished to lead souls and to direct them by these ways, in this he was different from other directors who, rather than making an effort to know what God asks of each one, give their own directions and not those of God: their directions, although good, are not always appropriate for all."  

With great respect and mutual affection, Vincent placed this "special gift" at Louise's disposition. By personal experience he "knew" in his depths the Master who had guided him, and enthusiastically he accompanied Louise on the road to this same discovery. He encouraged her to observe, to listen, to recognize the "interior Master," telling her "He Himself will act as your director. Yes, He will surely do so, and in such a way that He will lead you to see that it is He Himself." And when she would set out on her journeys to visit the Charities, he would convey to her that "He will tell you Himself what you should do."  

He, for his part, was attentive; he waited, observed and respected the rhythm of life in Louise. He rejoiced when the very best of Louise, her true self, began to manifest itself. "For a month now, our good God has allowed my soul more feeling for Him than usual. "I felt suddenly the desire that Our Lord come to me along with all His virtues to communicate them to me."  

Consolidating the experiencing of being a Beloved Daughter  

On October 30, 1626, when they had just begun to relate frequently with each other, Vincent gave her this encouraging imperative: "Be then His dear daughter." The context in which these words are found draw our attention to the experience that Louise needed to live in her relationship with God. To be, to live, to support each other mutually, to walk together in the direction of experiencing the love of God in the same way that Jesus of Nazareth experienced it, and which the Gospels place on the banks of the Jordan. To hear in the depths of one's being: "You are my beloved son/daughter,

The experience of feeling oneself connected with the origin of life, with the source from which existence itself flows. The experience of “being born again.” To cultivate this experience, to deepen it, to live from this experience and to radiate it. They felt themselves called to this. They intuited that this was their “inner strength.” And in this experience to know themselves to be supported by a love which does not pass away, nor diminish. An experience which, grounded in love, is oriented toward a commitment to the Kingdom.

To feel loved. As she asked for Vincent’s attention as director, Louise was also expressing her need to feel valued, appreciated, supported and loved. Every human being, in one way or another, must find an answer to this need. And they both also knew this well. To live life with passion, with all its risks and possibilities, without being tossed about by the contrary winds of difficulties or overcome by them, it is necessary to ground the experience of feeling loved on a very firm rock.

It happens frequently that people whom life has treated badly, and who are deeply wounded, find healing in a providential encounter with someone who can help them. Perhaps this is exactly what happened to Louise when she met Vincent. But he, knowing well his own possibilities, invited her to move beyond their encounter, clearing the path by which she would be led to the Source of Love itself. Cultivating this way of living, enjoying the love they receive from God, is to settle down into joy, and to build a firm foundation for a lasting friendship. “I desire your heart to be immersed in the love of God alone,” and so to rest in confidence. From the beginning of their relationship Vincent invited Louise to work on this attitude. “And why would your soul not be full of confidence, since you are, by His mercy, the dear daughter of Our Lord?” “Please live peacefully in this assurance.”

Louise was very rich in this experience. “It seemed to me that my soul was given to understand that its God wanted to come to me, not as though to a place of recreation, nor as though to a rented space, but rather as though to His own property or place that belonged entirely to Him; and because of this I could not deny Him entry, but rather as land which is alive I should receive Him with joy as its sovereign

\[29\] Mark 1:11.
\[30\] Coste IX, 703 / SV IX, 552.
\[31\] Coste I, 39 / SV I, 35-36.
\[32\] Coste I, 51-52 / SV I, 46.
\[33\] Coste I, 77, 90 / SV I, 68-69, 84.
owner, by a simple acquiescence and with the desire that my heart be the throne of His majesty." And this was complemented by another experience which she had in the dead of winter as she was visiting the Charities. "It seemed to me that Our Lord gave me the thought of receiving Him as the spouse of my soul, and that this was also a kind of marriage, and I felt so strongly united to God in this consideration that for me was extraordinary, and I had the thought of leaving all to follow my Spouse and to consider Him from now on as such, and to support all the difficulties that I would encounter as though receiving them as the sharing of His goods." And she was open to receive the most sublime motivation for acting: "I shall have no desire to serve God other than in the measure in which His holy love draws me."  

THE CENTRALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

From the beginning Louse de Marillac admired in Vincent de Paul the way he dedicated his best energies in announcing the Kingdom of God. And she was also able to discover as a call the central place the Kingdom should have in her life. Vincent loved to contemplate Jesus Christ calling the attention of his contemporaries to recognize that the Kingdom of God was in their midst. "Seek before all else the Kingdom of God.... Seek, seek, this means concern, this means action.... Seek God within yourselves, for St. Augustine confesses that while he was looking outside himself, he could not find Him. Seek Him in your soul, as His preferred dwelling place.... Let us grow interiorly, so that Jesus Christ may reign in us...." "But it is not enough to labor so that God reigns in us, but rather it is also necessary that we desire and make sure that the Kingdom of God is spread to everywhere, that God reign in all persons, that the world live in a different manner from how it now lives, by the power of the Spirit (the virtue) of God; finally may His justice be sought and imitated by all with a holy life." "To seek the Kingdom of God means that we have to work unceasingly for the Kingdom of God without looking for comfort or remaining idle."

Louise, in her own time, entered into this current of apostolic life. "I have to give Jesus voluntarily the possession of my soul, of which He is King by right, and I shall try to conserve the joy that comes to me from seeing the desire and the possibility that each one of us, in particular, may become His beloved." And she found the purpose of her life in dedicating herself "to make God known to the poor,

34 Santa Luisa de Marillac, Correspondencia y escritos, Ed. CEME, Salamanca, E. 7, num. 21, E. 13, num. 38, and E. 16, num. 45.
35 COSTE XII, 131 s. / SV XII, –.
to announce Jesus Christ to them, to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is near and that this kingdom is for the poor. What a grand thing this is!"\(^{36}\)

**IN THE JOY OF FRIENDSHIP**

This relationship that began with a certain sense of aversion on the part of Louise, and also perhaps on the part of Vincent, that was conceived as a helping relationship and that was established on the solid foundation of looking together toward the same horizon of allowing God's project to be expressed in their lives, this relationship became a precious friendship and a rich source of joy.

Quite soon Vincent's way of being respectful, simple, direct, and friendly, made it easy for Louise to express herself. She felt captivated by his singular personality. She was fascinated by his style of life, so evangelical, free, committed, joyful and enthusiastic. That way of being in life, that attraction, began to exert an irresistible influence on the spirit of this woman.

They had to overcome the perplexity that could have been present in their first meetings, and overcome the timidity and shyness that inhibit the expression of intimate experiences. There also arose some difficulties because of the natural tendency toward attachments that was part of Louise's affectivity, her predisposition to become depressed when Vincent left her because he had to be away from Paris for some days.

But although their origins were different, they soon became aware of the things that united them. A keen spiritual sensitivity, the great attraction of living the Gospel fully, being in tune with the spirituality of Francis de Sales, the joy that they experienced when each discovered the rich personal depths of the other and the possibility of collaborating on a common project. Coinciding with Louise's decision to visit the Charities in the towns, in May of 1629, their friendship experienced a turning point. Vincent no longer addressed her as "daughter" or "dear daughter" and began to use the term "Mademoiselle" to address her. There was progress in their relationship, an evolution from an uneven relationship toward one of equality. The woman who was before him would become his collaborator. And their sharing broadened and their intimacy was strengthened. Louise was decided and resolute in her action as well as in her telling Vincent what she had done in the villages. He valued

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\(^{36}\) Santa Luisa de Marillac, *Correspondencia y escritos*, Ed. CEME, Salamanca, E. 22, num. 66. And Coste XII, 80 / SV XII, –.
her. "You are a valiant woman." He encouraged her in her difficulties; he assured her that he was very pleased with what she was doing.

The evolution of Louise's inner self, now in its first moments, was attractive to Vincent. Both experienced pleasure in sharing it. "If it were not so late as it is, I would come and see you to find out from you the details of the matter you wrote to me about." "I could not tell you how ardently my heart desires to see yours in order to know how this has come about in it." The affection between them arose spontaneously, for there was a strong connection between them and both had personalities which were rich in sentiments. "What shall I tell you now about the one whom your heart loves so dearly in Our Lord?" "My heart will have a very fond remembrance of hers in that of Our Lord and solely for that of Our Lord." "Forgive my heart if it is not a little more expansive in this letter." "Please tell me what is going on in your heart. Mine has been focused on you, this morning, and on the thoughts which Our Lord has given it." "I wish you a good evening with much tenderness of my heart." Their time of mutual discovery was very rich. Communication awakened interest. For Louise, being able to go to Vincent, to speak with him, was extremely important. He also experienced a positive feeling of wellbeing and joy. He wrote, "When I have the pleasure of seeing you...." "If I return soon this evening, I will have the pleasure of speaking a word with you." They experienced joy from their meetings, while the feelings of union became obvious: "And we shall have the pleasure of seeing each other in Montmirail." "I have in His love, I think, one and the same heart with you." "And my heart is no longer my heart, but yours, in that of Our Lord, Whom I desire to be the object of our one love." And also the pleasure. "Mon Dieu, my dear daughter, how your letter and the thoughts [you] sent to me console me! Indeed, I must confess to you that the feeling has spread through every part of my soul, and with all the more pleasure, since they let me see that you are in the state God wants of you. Well now, continue, my dear daughter." Pleasure that surfaced when she made a lovely gesture to him, when he saw in the chapel of Bons-Enfants

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38 Coste I, 51-52, 71-72 / SV I, 46, 63.
41 Coste I, 72-73, 86-88, 169-170 / SV I, 63-64, 81-82, 172.
the altar cloth donated by Louise. Vincent could not contain his emotion and he wrote her with enthusiasm: “That altar cloth you so kindly sent us; it was so beautiful and delightful that it almost stole my heart away with pleasure yesterday seeing your own in it. Even though I did not know it was there, I saw it the moment I entered the chapel. The pleasure lasted all day yesterday and still lingers with an unexplainable tenderness.” It is not a matter of superficial sentiment. Vincent’s sensitivity had evolved and was now oriented toward what was most sublime in life.

The intimacy between them grew, as did their shared experiences. The personal life of each one became transparent and clear to the other. They worried mutually about each other’s health. They carefully communicated the incidents and accidents of daily life. The confidence between them grew very solid and whatever one happened to be going through mattered to the other. “That family seems to move my heart with tenderness.” The relationship of Louise with her family was a recurrent theme in their conversations. Her son, who caused her many headaches, appeared frequently in the considerations of Vincent, who helped him greatly throughout his life. But he was also concerned about the ups and downs of all the members of the Marillac family. Louise, besides sharing her own issues with him, also shared with Vincent all that had to do with the Confraternities, the Ladies and the Daughters of Charity.

A BEAUTIFUL EVANGELICAL COLLABORATION

Their dear friendship was also enriched by a beautiful evangelical collaboration. It all began with a few simple services that Louise and some of her friends such as Madame Du Fay offered to Vincent while he was away from Paris in the small villages. These services consisted in giving Vincent a sum of money for his use, and in sewing clothes for the sick who were assisted by the Charities and in making vestments for the churches. For this he would courteously thank them. The admiration that they felt for this priest, and the attraction that the apostolic work held for them, awakened the desire to help in these women who wanted to express their femininity beyond the narrow domestic environment in which they lived. And it was a great help to the missionaries who felt overwhelmed by the

43 Coste I, 152-153 / SV I, 162-163.
44 Coste I, 351-317 / SV I, 505-506.
terrible poverty they encountered in the places where they preached the Mission.

Almost at the same time there arose a new need. It had to do with receiving in Paris young women from the same villages in which he announced the Gospel. The poverty in which they lived made it necessary to find a house of the nobility where they could be placed as domestic servants. At other times it was necessary to get them away from a complicated or dangerous situation. Louise and the other women could take them into their homes while they spoke with the ladies of the nobility and worked out a response that would meet the particular needs of the case at hand.\footnote{Coste I, 38-39 / SV I, 35-36.}

With the passage of time, Vincent discovered the rich personality of Louise and the evolution that she was experiencing. One day Vincent was extremely surprised to read the contents of a letter written in her own hand and exclaimed: "Oh! what a tree you have appeared to be today in God's sight, since you have borne such a fruit!"\footnote{Coste I, 51-52 / SV I, 46.} According to Abelly, it was the common opinion that Louise had felt inspired to make the decision to consecrate herself to God to dedicate herself to the service of the poor. Vincent was moved to his depths by that letter. The image of the tree, although taken from the Gospel of the day, reveals an important aspect of the relationship between Vincent and Louise. She was creative, she felt driven. She was the source of initiatives and options which she perceived in her inmost self. He would observe "what God was doing in her," and he remained attentive so that what was being born would not fade away from lack of interest or nurturing. And he helped Louise so that she would allow it to come forth and grow with force. On May 6, 1629, in Montmirail, he sent her his blessing with great tenderness, so that she would channel the apostolic energy that was moving her: "Go in the name of Our Lord. I pray that His Divine Goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in your weariness, your strength in your toil, and, finally, that He may bring you back in perfect health and filled with good works."\footnote{Coste I, 73-74 / SV I, 63-64.}

Their collaboration in giving follow-up to the Confraternities of Charity was rich and effective. Both contributed with their characteristic initiatives and the result was a flourishing of groups that would meet together, trying to live the Gospel in a new way,
and approaching with love those who were suffering. The presence of Louise and Vincent had an influence on the people of those towns and villages that was spectacular. They sensed that something new was being born in the Church of France. As they brought together their qualities and their ways of doing things, it was as if goodness and wellbeing were multiplied among the people of the countryside. Their collaboration, because of its evangelical inspiration and its generosity, audacity, and zeal, was like leaven in the dough of that struggling society. Their way of living, different from traditional models, held an indescribable attraction, not only for the women and the young girls, but also for the men. It made them question themselves and led to the certainty: “I would like to serve the poor in this way.”

But where their collaboration shown with a brilliance even more charismatic, if possible, was in the foundation, animation, and consolidation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. With Louise there began a new “way of being” and “way of doing” that inspired admiration and would take its place in history. Their collaboration, driven by the Spirit, would lead to a new form of organization, of accompaniment and of governance that would embrace the power of “the Good News” that nourished these young women from the country who were totally given to God to serve Jesus Christ in the poor. A power that they would also transmit to their contemporaries. When the moment arrived for them to collaborate in this project, Vincent and Louise had matured, both at their own pace, in all the dimensions of their personalities. They had deepened their “being,” all the gifts they had received from God, in confidence, simplicity, joy, indifference and humility. They drank from the source of God’s Love. They knew each other well. They also knew the rich complementarity that they could offer to the world in which they lived. And into this world they would send those young women, of whom the people would say: “You are Daughters of Charity” and also call them, “Daughters of the love of God, or daughters called and chosen to love God.” And so began their “doing.” It was not any kind of doing. It was meaningful. It was full of the Gospel, of the experience of God, and also full of the “weakness” that could make them strong because in them was the power of love.

49 Coste IX, 601 / SV 9, 473. Conference 52 on February 24, 1653.  
50 Coste IX, 474 / SV IX, 370. Conference 41 on September 19, 1649.
Their last winter was going to be very severe. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac had lived to an advanced age. Their contemporaries considered them now to be quite elderly. Both maintained a clear mind, with a detailed memory and a normal level of awareness, sensitivity and good moods. And they accepted with serenity, as they had throughout their lives, the physical aches and pains that accompanied them.

Unusually low temperatures during the month of January increased the risk of illness in the elderly. Louise was preoccupied by the Vincent's health. Believing that he was suffering great pains because of his swollen legs and a fever, on January 4 she sent him for his consolation a holy card with the image of Jesus crowned with thorns and a medal of Our Lady of Liesse. During this time, she felt better, although she was aware that “even when I have only had to stay in bed a little while, my little aches often make me lethargic and do not allow me to do my duties.” On January 30 Vincent observed that “my legs have failed me and I can no longer go downstairs nor say Holy Mass.”

On February 4 Louise became ill with “a large swelling in her left arm, which required three incisions. The last was made the day before yesterday. As you can imagine, she is suffering a great deal; and, although her fever has disappeared, she is still not out of danger because of her age and her weakness. Everything is being done to preserve her health, but that is the work of God who, having preserved her for twenty years, contrary to all human appearances, will preserve her for as long as it will be expedient for His glory.” Vincent remained at peace because “agitation troubles the soul and is displeasing to God.” He was moved to put all that he loved in God's hands, abandoning himself with perfect confidence to what God would want.

During the following eight days her condition worsened. On the 14th of February Louise de Marillac “was at her last,” “we dare not hope she will recover,” Vincent wrote, confined to his room. That same day Antoine Portail would die. He was Vincent's first
assistant and the Director of the Daughters of Charity, his companion from the beginning, a beloved brother and a great friend. Both he and Louise received viaticum the same day.

On March 9 the fever returned and gangrene appeared in her arm. Despite all this, Louise continued to be interested in the affairs of the Company. She inquired about the care of the poor of the parish, who were very numerous, and whether food was being distributed to them in their homes. She indicated what needed to be done as though she were in perfect health.57 Vincent was concerned about the health of his loyal, intelligent, and faithful collaborator, but his strength grew weaker daily and he could not go out to visit her. When she learned that Vincent was unable to leave the bed, “she asked him for a few words of consolation written in his own hand.” We would like to have known Vincent’s sentiments when he heard the plea of “his very humble daughter.” And the disposition of his heart when he made the decision not to send her anything written (was he really able to write then?). But the movement of his affectivity and his soul, his emotions, have remained hidden from our curiosity. Any interpretation of this could only be subjective. We can only suppose that a priest or brother of the Congregation of the Mission, went down the stairs quickly, crossed the street, and with prudence, entered the room where Louise was waiting for the end of her life. And he said in a soft voice, perhaps wanting to show her the great affection that accompanied his mission, a few brief words that he had heard from Vincent which ended this way: “You are going ahead of me; I hope to see you very soon in heaven.”58

And so began March 15, the Monday of Holy Week. Her Daughters of Charity surrounded her. The Duchess of Ventadour, a great friend of hers, had been with her through the night. Around 11:30 in the morning she showed signs of entering on her final journey. “The presence of her spirit was palpable before her final agony.”59 A lighted candle, words of blessing, prayers, restrained emotions, sobs. It was the supreme act of “handing over and abandoning her soul, in the hands of God, her creator and her ultimate end, to freely leave her body to the earth, in hope of the resurrection.”60 The pre-

60 SANTA LUISA DE MARILLAC, Correspondencia y escritos, Ed. CEME, Salamanca, Testament, p. 832.
sence of the mystery overwhelmed them all. And it even reached through the absence of "the one whom your heart loves so dearly in Our Lord." ⁶¹

Vincent had to make a decision. And the next day he formulated it this way: "She will be buried tomorrow in Saint-Laurent Church, beside our dear deceased Sisters and with only the same services that were held at the funerals of each of them." ⁶² And this was what was done on the morning of March 17. According to her expressed wish, to mark the place of burial there was placed a wooden cross with a crucifix and a sign at the foot of the cross with the inscription: "Spes Unica."

Louise had written in her testament: "I leave it (the place of my burial) entirely up to the disposition of Divine Providence, by means of the direction of Monsieur Vincent, whom I beg to remember that I have manifested to him the great desire I have to be placed along the wall underneath the Church of Saint-Lazare (in the patio that looks like a small cemetery there have been discovered dead peoples' bones). I continue to desire this to the extent that I am able, and I ask it of his charity for the love of God."

Vincent, who was progressively losing strength, was finally able to be at the two conferences on the virtues of Louise and at the election of the superiors. "What have you seen in the thirty eight years that you have known her? What have you seen in her? The least movement of one atom of the flesh was insufferable to her. She was a pure soul in all things, pure in her youth, pure in her marriage, pure in her widowhood." ⁶³ He named Marguerite Chetif as her successor.

Meanwhile several Cardinals wrote to him from Rome, inquiring about his health with special affection,⁶⁴ and communicating to him the dispensation from the Divine Office that the Pope had granted him, and asking God to pour out on him His choicest blessings.

On September 27 in the same year, 1660, at 4:45 in the morning, he surrendered his beautiful soul into the hands of his Lord. He died in his chair, completely dressed, near the fire, seated as he was, more majestic, more beautiful and venerable than ever.⁶⁵

Translation: GILBERT R. WALKER, C.M.

⁶¹ COSTE I, 62-64 / SV I, 54-56.
INTRODUCTION

John Paul II, at the end of the Great Jubilee of 2000, in his apostolic letter *Novo millennio eunte,* invited the Church to “begin again from Christ.” He thanked the Lord for all that he “had done in all the centuries, especially in the century we have just left behind, assuring the Church of a great band of saints and martyrs.” The faces of the saints and the martyrs represent the face of Christ; these are the riches, the heritage of the Church. “For much has been done, on the occasion of the Holy Year, to collect the precious memories of the witnesses of the faith in the 20th century.... It is a heritage that we should not lose, but that we commit to a perpetual debt of gratitude and to a renewed purpose of imitation.” The task of evangelization, noted the Pope, is surely one of the priorities of the Church at the beginning of the new millennium. A new evangelization is necessary in this new culture of globalization, to carry the face of Christ, the evangelical proclamation into the new socio-cultural context. But in this new hoped-for “missionary spirit,” John Paul II says that “the brilliant example of so many witnesses of the faith that the Jubilee had called to mind... sustain us and direct us. The Church has always found, in her martyrs, a seed of life. *Sanguis martyrum – semen christianorum.*”

In the post-conciliar debate, H.U. von Balthasar made the observation that a risk inherent to the so-called opening of the Church to the world is that of devaluing martyrdom. Instead, it would be
necessary to propose it again with greater strength for the future of the Church. In his work "Cordula" he demonstrates that martyrdom is truly, even today, "something important" for the authentic Christian.

This removal of martyrdom from the spiritual horizon of the Christian and from theology was well noticed by John Paul II who continually exhorted the Christian community to reintroduce some figures of witnesses, so that martyrdom might never be forgotten.

In the thinking of St. Vincent, on which this present work focuses in a particular way, emerges something unique, the idea of martyrdom for charity. While in tradition martyrdom is associated with persecution and death, St. Vincent associates suffering in the name of Christ with the ideal of the service of charity. We find in his thinking the recovery of the profound nature of martyrdom expressed by St. Thomas: "Martyrdom, among all the virtuous acts, demonstrates in the highest degree the perfection of charity." In reality, the essence of martyrdom is the following of Christ in that supreme act in which he freely offered his own life for ours (Jn 15:13). The originality of St. Vincent stands in paralleling the placing of one's life at the complete disposition of the brothers in charity with the same attitude of the Christian martyr, on the basis of the identification of the poor person with Christ (Mt 25:40). To serve the poor is to love Christ. To give one's life for the poor is to give one's life for Christ.

To be precise, in Vincentian writings we find the term "martyr for charity" only once. St. Vincent refers to a Daughter of Charity, Sr. Mary Joseph, who died at Estampes. Even though she was at the point of death, seeing a poor person in need of a blood-letting, she gathered up her remaining strength, got up from bed, helped the poor person, and immediately dropped dead. "This brave, dear daughter can be called a martyr for charity. Do you believe that only those who shed their blood for the faith are martyrs?... Some brave, dear daughters, although they do not die, put their own lives at risk for the love of God; and many of them have finished their lives at the service of the poor: this is martyrdom!"

Even though this formulation is expressed only one time, the concept of martyrdom for charity often returns. The willingness for martyrdom is part of the spirit of the Company: "May it please God,
my brothers — he comments when he comes to know the sufferings of the missionaries in the Barbary Coast — that all those who enter into the Company, do so with the thought of martyrdom; moreover, with the desire of martyrdom by consecrating oneself totally to the service of God. May they often ask Our Lord for the grace and the disposition to be ready to give their lives for the glory and the salvation of the neighbor: everyone, whether they are brothers, or priests, or clerics — in brief, the whole Company."

Thus, martyrdom is not reduced to the final resolution of death for Christ. It happens first in one’s spirit and desire. “God asks our good and authentic disposition to embrace all the occasions to serve Him, even to risk our own lives, and also to have and keep the desire for martyrdom which is pleasing to God, as if we had actually undergone it.”

1. MARTYRS AND WITNESSES OF CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES

The theme of martyrdom is tied closely to that of witness, and we have to refer to it constantly to understand its original meaning. When we speak of martyrdom our thoughts run immediately to torture and suffering, of which the Gospels and the Acts of the martyrs speak to us. Instead, as the etymology of the word clearly says, *martyrdom* has a priority value as the witness to the truth. Therefore, we search along the line of what Christ and his followers did to arrive at a theology of martyrdom. One cannot develop this theology speculatively, but rather historically, by contemplating the Jesus event. “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17). Jesus cannot be applied to other categories of thought derived from other models or other historical events. One must go to him, “the faithful witness... the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last” (Rev 1:5.8.17). The culmination of the truth is in the glory of his cross. “They shall look on him whom they have pierced,” says John, telling forcefully the historical truth of the passion and evoking the ancient prophet, “they look on me whom they have pierced” (cf. Zech 12:10). And this is the parousia: “Here are the clouds and every eye will see even those who pierced Him” (Revelation 1:7).

A martyr is one who so identifies himself with the truth which he lives, that he cannot even conceive the possibility of living while betraying the truth. If he were to do so, he would lose his true and

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5 SV XI, 402 / SV XI, 357.
eternal life, not fearing those who can kill the body but do not have the power to kill the soul (cf. Mt 10:28). Only a transcendent truth can be so identified with one’s life: God; and indeed the last and final revelation is this: “The Word was God.... Without him nothing was made that exists. In him was life and the life was the light of men.... He came into the world, the true light that enlightens every man.... To all who received him he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:1.3 s.; 9:12). We can learn the word martyrdom/martyrs from the New Testament to designate the witness of a fact. Thus, martyr is a legal term, even a procedural one, meaning witness. In itself the term is equivalent to the proclamation, but there are several witnesses who refer to a particular form of witness, paid for with one’s life.

Even in the Gospels there are two ways to express their discipleship demanded by Jesus to the cross. Luke takes the position that a disciple should be faithful in bearing the cross daily until the end of his life, as does the Apostle John. Mark and Matthew, on the other hand, designate a perfect following of the teacher as one who sheds his blood, as happened with the other apostles.

The term martyr in the Church was initially meant to be a witness to Christ by word and life. In this sense the apostles are qualified witnesses on whom the Church is to rest, witnesses who offered up their own lives.

The Greek word for witness goes into the Latin translation meaning a particular form of witness, the witness who shed his blood for the faith. Martyr is the one who gave testimony for Christ and his doctrine with the sacrifice of life. This “exclusive” meaning is affirmed in the tradition of the Church as early as the second and third centuries. Towards the second half of the second century under pressure from the authorities, Christians are obliged to confess their faith. Their confession, like that of Polycarp, “Jesus is Lord and not the emperor,” was similar to the profession of faith at baptism. It was worthy of faith and the court “believed.” The Christian became a privileged “witness” because his death sealed and authenticated the faith by which he lived. The death that followed the process of confession was the result of a Christian’s being a Christian and not because of a crime. In other words: if they were not Christians they would not have been convicted.

The cause of death is therefore faith in the person of Christ. The theological reason for the glorification of the martyrs demonstrated by the Gospel of Mark 8:35: “Whoever, in fact, loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it.” The martyr confesses faith in Jesus Christ and gives his life for him. He thus shows that the greatest love is to give one’s life. “From this we know what love is,
for he gave his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn 3:16).

In an editorial, the Civiltà Cattolica calls for a rethinking of martyrdom, showing that the cause of it is not only faith, but also the love of justice, purity and the defense of the poor. Moreover, martyrdom requires clear and explicit reference to Jesus and the Gospel; death must not be sought or provoked, but undergone without resistance, while forgiving one’s executioners.

So they are considered martyrs in the strict sense and in the full sense of the Catholic Church those who suffered in any way unto death or were killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God became man, who died, who rose and who lives today in the Church. Thus, these classes of people are martyrs because they died because of faith in Christ: that is, out of hatred for the faith (in odium fidei); or for not renouncing their faith, or because of a single article of faith (propter fidem); or simply because of being Christians, followers of Jesus Christ (propter Christum).

The condition for being considered a martyr is non-resistance: that one has been made to die without any resistance by using weapons. He who is killed in battle, even though he fought to defend the faith, is not a martyr in the true sense. The martyr in the strict sense is the one who dies or is killed because of his faith in Christ, without resistance. Anyway, the saying applies to the martyrdom of St. Augustine "martyres non facit poena, sed question" (Enarr. in Ps 34, 2:12): that is "it is not the death penalty that makes the martyr, but the reason for which he is killed").

It is on this point that Christian thinking in recent decades has revisited the common doctrine of the Church on martyrdom: it sees that faith is closely linked with the Christian values of charity, justice, chastity, defense of the oppressed, of the poor who are so persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and killed for having committed an act of eminent charity — such is the case of the Franciscan Maximilian Kolbe, who offered to die to save a family man — such a one is a martyr for charity, who voluntarily exposes himself to the risk of death so as not to abandon the humble and helpless. He is a martyr of justice who is killed for defending people in danger of death or people oppressed and exploited, deprived of their essential rights. He is also a martyr of justice who is killed because he raises his voice against social injustice, faced by innocent people unable to defend themselves and assert their rights to live as a human person. She is a martyr of Christian chastity who is killed because she refuses

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to submit to an attempted rape. Christian martyrdom exists where the cause of death inflicted on a believing person who has made the Gospel his rule of life; it is actually an affirmation of an essential norm of the Gospel, whether it is charity, pushed to the point of giving up one’s life for one’s own brothers, or the defense of an evangelical value. What is important, speaking of martyrdom, is the reference, clear and explicit, to the person of Jesus and the teachings of the Gospel on the one hand, and on the other, that death should be neither sought nor provoked, but undergone without resistance or opposition and in a spirit of forgiveness towards those who inflict punishment unjustly.

In conclusion, martyrdom is always and only a matter of religion which makes explicit reference to faith in Jesus Christ and the values of his Gospel; the Christian martyr is always a witness of Christ and his Gospel in a conscious and explicit way.

What drives the Christian to sacrifice his own life is the witness of love given by Christ. “Therefore, martyrdom, by which the pupil is made like the Master who freely accepted death for the salvation of the world, and who responds by the shedding of blood is esteemed by the church as an outstanding gift and as the supreme test of charity” (LG 42). This definition appears to reconcile the specificity of martyrdom as “an outstanding gift” of the spirit and as “the supreme test of charity.” But both the one and the other as gifts and proofs of love, are given in the Church and to the Church, so it can grow into the image of Christ, who is its Head.

Vatican II opens the way for a broader interpretation of the martyrdom, under the form of the “gift of life through love,” the sign of its martyr. The conciliar text does not speak either of the profession of faith, nor of martyrdom suffered out of hatred for the faith. Certainly it supposes them, but it prefers to orient itself to the sign of love, as a more globalizing and universalizing experience of martyrdom.

“If one stresses love, more than faith, then you can bring out both the love of Christ, which in its singularity is represented by the death of the martyr, as well as the credibility of this love.... In other words, if the emphasis is on love that leads to the witness of the martyr, it is easier to incorporate into the definition of martyrdom not only witness for the profession of faith, but also the testimony of any form of justice that is minimum of Christian love.”

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11 Cfr. AA.VV., Portare Cristo all’uomo. II Testimonianza [Carrying Christ to Man. II Testimony], in “Studia Urbaniana 23,” Roma 1985, 761.
2. CHARITY

Faith without works is dead. The letter of James calls the Christian communities to have a faith rich in works. Faith manifests itself in charity and it should tend toward charity. This was the testimony of Christ and his disciples. The Church continues to express its faith in its Lord through love: love of God and love of neighbor.

At the beginning, and at the heart of Christian charity, is Christ. Christ is, at the same time, the model, the reason, the guide and support, the beginning and the end of charity itself. It is for his faith in Christ and for his deep communion with him that the Christian is able to love people as Christ Himself loved them and loves them still.

Man's journey towards God, therefore, necessarily passes through love for men. "The love of neighbor is a way to meet with God, and closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God." And that is what St. Augustine expressed with no hesitation in his commentary on the conclusion of the letter of St. John:

"What then? Whoever loves his brother also loves God? If he loves God, necessarily he loves Love. Can one, in fact, love your brother and not love love? Necessarily, we love love. Now, if you love love, you love God, because 'God is Love'. If God is love, he who loves love, loves God. Love your brother and then rest in peace." 

The supreme purpose of Christ's charity is to give life, eternal life. To communicate to men that eternal life he gives them food. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. Anyone who eats of this bread will live forever. The bread that I give is my flesh for the life of the world.... He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day" (Jn 6:51-54). In addition, all the corporal and spiritual works of mercy of Jesus work together to contribute to one and the same goal: to give life to men and merge them into communion with the Father. "That all may be one as You, Father, in me and I in you, that they also be in us.... I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them" (Jn 17:21-26).

12 BENEDICT XVI, encyclical letter Deus Caritas Est, n. 16.
13 AGOSTINO, in Epistolam B. Joannis ad Pathos, PL 35, 2052.
The whole mission of Jesus is to reveal to men the Father's love for them and unite them to the love of the Son for the Father. The rest — healings, miracles, preaching, charitable service — remains subordinate to what is essential, which is primarily the passage from hatred and from selfishness to love that makes all men one body led by Jesus Christ for the glory of the Father. Only love, love expressed through works, affective and effective love, an expression dear to the spirituality of Vincent, only this can generate love. And that is why Jesus entrusted his disciples to continue his mission and to do what he did, to be witnesses of the Father among men.

Having summoned the twelve, Jesus, Luke writes, "gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, then sent them to preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick" (Lk 9:1-2). But above all He shows them how to be witnesses of love. "I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, you also should love one another. From this all will recognize that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35); "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:12-13).

It is thus lived through a journey in love and service towards our brothers in their needs, both spiritual and material, willing to sacrifice even their lives for them, that the disciples of Jesus, his followers go to establish the kingdom of God among men.

Certainly this is philanthropy, a love for people, but a divine philanthropy: it is with God, as God, in God that the Christian loves his brothers, men. To love them, leaving God out or marginalized, certainly, would be to love them less; it would betray his vocation to happiness and bliss of which God alone is the source and purpose. Striving to love the brothers with God, as God loves them, the love of Christ gives a supernatural character, a transcendental purpose, trying to make more humane conditions for human life, never forgetting that man lives not only by material food, but that he thirsts for God.

To love is to will the good of those who are loved, is to work for their progress, their perfection, their own happiness. It is an insufficient love who wishes to another only the satisfaction of the biological dimension. "The man over the man," said Pascal. The Christian love of man is that which undertakes to make available to one's brother, a bliss that participates in the same God.

That is the meaning of this love that the text of the Gospels called agape in Greek and that the Latin Vulgate translates Charitas, charity. It is a love that is open to a universal concern, a love of a generous
giving of one's possessions, most importantly, making a complete donation of oneself to another and fraternal communion with all his love of the common good that is God.

To live this love, one must obviously renounce egotism or self-love, everything that involves hoarding of goods of this world and the next for one's own benefit. And that is why Jesus warns his disciples against the love of money and things. “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon” (Luke 16:13). The kingdom of God is the kingdom of charity, of unselfish love. The disciples are invited to have an undivided heart. They have only to follow the example of the master. “For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24). “Who does not take his cross behind me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it” (Mt 10:38-39).

It is impossible to love someone other than oneself without stepping out of oneself, without compromising the welfare and happiness of other brothers. At the heart of Christian love, is the sacrifice of which Christ gave us the example. He is the incarnate love of God. “In his death on the Cross we find the culmination of that turning of God outside of himself in which he gives himself to raise man up and save him.... This is love in its most radical form.”

Generosity, detachment, renunciation, sacrifice, these are the essential requirements of a genuine love of God in man and of man in God. But the essential thing is to love — that is the desire to do good to the one who is loved, to help him bravely and generously to realize his vocation, and come together to the happiness of heaven.

The gift of love saves man from himself; man opens his horizons to the broader horizon of God himself. Thus freed from himself, man is capable of looking up and directing his choices towards people, things and the world, in love. This charity has been given to us by the Father himself, and the Son is the manifestation of his love incarnate.

Such has been the witness of the martyrs for charity; they believed in love, the love that God has for every creature. They felt themselves called to love. So they went to those who most needed to be loved — the poor, the least — those to whom God revealed himself through the faces of witnesses. In this, Vincent discovered his

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14 Benedict XVI, encyclical letter, Deus Caritas Est, n. 12.
vocation, he saw in them the path to which Christ called him, and with him his Company, consisting of brothers and sisters who have given their lives in service of Christ, recognized in the poor and suffering brethren.

3. THE CONTEMPORARY MAGISTERIUM

In the Second Vatican Council, the Church sees in "martyrdom" a constitutive aspect of her essence, the never-ending love of the Son that continues to show itself and becomes alive again in the life of the Church through the witness of his followers who, like the Master, offer their lives for the salvation of the world (cf. LG 42). The testimony of the martyrs, which is a continuation of the mission of the teacher by his disciples, has always accompanied the life of the Church. The time of the martyrs is not just a memory from the past, but something always present in the history of the Church, especially in this last century. Moreover, the blood that was shed by martyrs, the witnesses to the Gospel, and the vastness and diversity of the geographical areas involved in the phenomenon indicate that the phenomenon is certainly greater than previous persecutions, including those in early centuries.

John Paul II, on the occasion of the jubilee, highlighted the testimony of the martyrs as living examples for Christians, as exciting examples of authentic Christian life. Their sacrifice is a guide for the whole community because it involves a total commitment to Christ and the Gospel without conditions or compromise of any kind, ready to get on the "cross" if necessary. Their memory, both for the past and the present, must have very special attention in the life of the Church.

"Their memory must not be lost, rather it must be recovered in a documented fashion. The names of many are not known, the names of some have been denigrated by their persecutors, who tried to add disgrace to martyrdom, the names of others have been concealed by their executioners. Christians, however, preserve the memory of a great many of them." 16

Given such a large number of people killed or persecuted for defending human rights, for free expression of their religious faith or for the witness of fidelity to their vocation, should we perhaps

16 Ibidem, 678.
admit that the martyrs are now more numerous than we thought? What does this mean for us believers? Is our church still a church of martyrs? This question which the church has asked herself is still alive, and Pope Benedict XVI, on the feast of St. Stephen, answered that the testimony of the martyrs has accompanied the life of the Church from the beginning. They have professed their faith by the gift of their own lives. That testimony is repeated in human history; it is more timely than ever in our age because to witness by word and deed to Christ, the Son of God made man, still carries with it the heroism of martyrs.

In *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican Council II considered martyrdom a perspective always open to the Church (LG 42). The Church, even before becoming the Church of martyrs is itself a martyr, because it is born, lives and is built around Christ who gives his life for mankind. What is of Christ is of His Church. It cannot but follow Him in his passion and death out of love.

The martyrs are the worthy witnesses of Christ who has died and has risen: persecuted and unjustly accused, they remained faithful to the Good Shepherd. These martyrs are witnesses not only to faith but also to justice and charity. They are authentic witnesses of the Gospel and their persecutors attempted to besmirch their name calling them spies, subversives, politicians, or secret agents either of nations or of foreign interests. So it was with Nazism and communism inside of totalitarian systems which disfigured the face of man. Martyrs were kept for interminable years in prison, accompanied by suffering, torture, harassment of any kind, and sometimes they were tortured and killed. There are many faces of men and women, gentle, non-violent, persecuted, who suffered death because they were Christian. This is a world of the weak and the vanquished. Yet, in conditions of great weakness, these Christians demonstrated a particular strength of a spiritual and moral character: they did not renounce the faith, their own convictions, the service of others, or the service of the Church, to safeguard their own lives and assure their own survival. They showed great strength even in conditions of extreme weakness and high risk.

"Wherever hatred seemed to corrupt all of life without the possibility of escape from its logic, they proved that 'love is stronger than death.' Within terrible systems of oppression which disfigured man, in the places of pain which included harsh privations, through senseless marches, exposed to cold, starvation, torture, suffering in many ways, they loudly proclaimed their adherence to Christ who died and is risen.... So many have refused to bow to the worship of the idols of the twentieth century, and were sacrificed by Communism,
Nazism, by state and race. Many others fell in the course of ethnic or tribal wars, because they had rejected a logic alien to the Gospel of Christ. Some went to their death because, like the Good Shepherd, they decided to remain with their people, despite the threats. On every continent and throughout the entire twentieth century, there were those who preferred to die rather than betray their mission. Religious men and women have lived their dedication to the shedding of blood. Men and women believers died giving their lives for the sake of others, especially the poorest and weakest. Many women have lost their lives to defend their dignity and their purity.\(^{17}\)

Martyrdom thus manifests itself not only as direct and explicit testimony of faith but also of love and justice. The term “martyr for justice” repeatedly emphasized by John Paul II, has expanded the common conception of martyrdom. Undoubtedly, in the view of John Paul II, the concept of martyrdom is extended from the classic version of martyrdom out of hatred for the faith.

Thomas Aquinas had already pointed this out. In speaking of martyrdom, as well as indicating that it is among the most perfect of human acts because of the exalted nature of the “love of charity,”\(^{18}\) he also believes that it can be found as a testimony, not just of faith, but of the other virtues, because “the works of all the virtues, since they refer to God, are somehow proof of that belief, through which we come to know God as he asks us and as these works demonstrate.”\(^{19}\)

The opportunities for martyrdom in the cause of justice and charity, but also of the other virtues in order to preserve communion with the Lord, have become frequent in the last century. John Paul II did not lose the opportunity to venerate their memory and to point out these examples for the whole Church. There was a special recalling of many martyrs for charity — missionaries and nuns, men and women, religious and lay people — who continued their charitable assistance despite grave dangers, remained with their flocks, like the Good Shepherd, and died because of violence or of infection from epidemics. They are witnesses for charity; they have given their lives to make a supreme act of charity they did not have to make: “No one has greater love than this to give his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). These are not only extreme acts of charity but also give witness to Christ and his Gospel.

\(^{17}\) Ibidem, 680.

\(^{18}\) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, q. 124, a. 3,c.

\(^{19}\) Ibidem, a. 5,c.
They are true witnesses of the Gospel; they preferred the value of the Gospel to their own interest and gain, the Gospel as unique as the precious pearl for which they sacrificed their own lives. They are the riches of the Church, in which the power of God that is revealed in the weak to shame the strong is made manifest. "Whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn 12:25).

They speak to us by their example; they are witnesses of the faith. Moreover, in hindsight, the history of the Church of the twentieth century is full of stories that express a resistance to evil unto death rooted in faith.

Finally, the Holy Father calls us to keep alive the memory of the witnesses of the twentieth century in all the Churches, exhorting us to be courageous witnesses of the Gospel of Christ for a profound renewal of Christian life.

4. THE MARTYRS FOR CHARITY IN ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

The martyrs of the 20th century are martyrs of faith, and of violence, but also of love, the love of God. Maximilian Kolbe, one of the most beautiful examples, and other martyrs of charity, died in the service of others, and have marked the life of the Church of our century.

The Church gathers up these witnesses of the love of God for man who give themselves that others may have life. But even this aspect of charity, to minister to others, to the poor and needy, finds in St. Vincent de Paul one of the best expressions in the history of the church of the "martyr for charity." It is a subject dear to Vincent, even if it is not often expressed by the word "martyrdom" (only a few exceptions, in his letters and correspondence), continually return there in its essence and meaning.

A frequent refrain in the teaching and practice of St. Vincent is the desire for martyrdom. The thought of Vincent in the writings that report his conferences to the two communities of priests and sisters would not seem at first sight, full of theological statements. Faithful to the spirit of the time, he insists on exhorting without rhetoric; his talk tends to raise the so-called motion of the affections. But the depth of theological understanding and also the sharp insight that makes him a forerunner of contemporary thought does not escape notice in the frequent pericopes about charity.

As a connoisseur of theology of the Church, we often find him emphasizing the mood with which the ministry and service of charity is exercised, so as to attribute to that service the status of mar-
tyrdom. Augustine had already found in the inner motivation of a person, and in his activity the cause for which one can speak of martyrdom. It is not the pain, suffering, the shedding of blood that makes a person “martyr”, but the deeper reasons why certain acts are done. Of St. Martin, the bishop of Tours, one of the first, who, though not being a martyr is revered as a saint, the liturgy justifies the fact with these words: “If the sword has not struck you, you have not lost the glory of martyrdom.”

St. Vincent also anticipates the thinking of contemporary theology, and the practice recently “inaugurated” by John Paul II for the canonization of “new martyrs,” not only of faith but also for charity. It is a whole life modeled on charity that must take into account the consummation of one’s existence in the act of serving the living Christ in the poor brother; thus to live in charity is to live in a permanent state of martyrdom. Vincent tells the story of Sister Marie Joseph of Etampes, Daughter of Charity, a victim of the plague, who died in service to the poor and sick and how this experience can be considered as martyrdom.

“Long ago, they told me about a sister who was near death, who saw a poor woman who needed a blood-letting; she got up from bed, bled the woman, collapsed, and died shortly afterwards.... The good girl can be called a martyr of charity. Do you believe that martyrs are only those who shed their blood for the faith? It is a martyrdom, because, although they do not die, they put themselves at risk of dying, and this for the love of God, just as many good sisters who have consumed their lives serving the poor, are martyrs. I think that if they had lived at the time of St. Jerome, he would have counted them among the martyrs.”

Those who give themselves in the service of others, for the love of Jesus Christ at the peril of their lives, can be considered martyrs. The link between vocation and witness for charity has its point of greatest glory in martyrdom, which — by etymology and definition — expresses the fullest possible witness for man. To shed one’s blood for the cause of Christ is “martyrdom;” to give one’s life to the service of the poor in whom one sees Jesus Christ is to be a “martyr for charity.” The first is in the order to faith, the second in the order of charity. To consecrate themselves to God in the service of people abandoned, is this not going to martyrdom? In this case, they are

20 Antiphon for Mary’s Canticle, memorial of St. Martin of Tours, November 11.
acts of charity, service, the gift of oneself to others, for the love of Christ. Thus the two sides of the medal are united: love of God that manifests itself in love for the poor brother in need.

The Church of the twentieth century gives us numerous pictures of "martyrs of love," that lead us to recognize the validity of the teachings of St. Vincent that to give one's life out of love of Christ for others amounts to a martyrdom.

Let me suggest three stories of "martyrs of love" of the twentieth century in which there is a certain analogy to the "Vincentian" martyrs' stories that are repeated and which continue to repeat of those who live "in a permanent state of love" an expression so dear to Vincent that he recommended to his communities: it is how to live "martyrdom."

The first relates the story of two Franciscan missionary nuns, Guilhermina and Marie Xavier, who offered themselves as volunteers in the hospital in Totoras during an outbreak of bubonic plague in Argentina in 1919. The hospital where the sisters were assigned was transformed into a sanatorium. After several days, Sister Marie Xavier fell ill, was treated by Sister Guilhermina and resumed her work. But later Sister Guilhermina got sick. Sister Mary Xavier, still recovering, cared for her fellow sister, but had a relapse, so that both became seriously ill. The superior wanted to take care of both of them, but the doctor prevented it. The two sisters did not want to put others at risk: "We offer our sacrifice to God." They put their lives at the risk of death to care for the sick. They understood that their mission was to be close to the sick. It is not the only case where this has happened, but it is a mortal risk accepted with an awareness of the risk.

The second testimony concerns the story of six sisters of the Poverelle of Bergamo, at the end of the century, in 1995, who died in the Ebola epidemic in the Congo: the cause of death was this infection. They had chosen to remain near the illnesses of the poor and, secondly, to assist their fellow sisters sick with the virus. Sister Vitara Zorza had wanted to go to Kikwit to help other sisters sick with Ebola. She said: "Why be afraid? The others are there, why cannot I go too? Right now they need me." They asked Sister Dinar Belleri during the raging epidemic, "Are you not afraid of being always in the midst of these sick people?" Her response was: "My mission is to serve the poor. What did my founder do? I am here.

22 Archivio della Commissione Nuovi Martiri [Archives of the Commission of New Martyrs], II, 2-4096 and 4097.
to follow in his footsteps.... The Eternal Father will help me.” Sister Annelvira Ossoli was called the “lady of life,” because as midwife she had overseen the birth of thousands of children; as Sister Provincial she watched over the sisters who were sick. Sister Floralba Rondi was the eldest of six sisters: she was seventy years and had spent forty three of them in Africa.²³

Both stories show how the proximity to the poor is more important than protecting oneself. They died for love of the sick. They show that for Christians the protection of their life is not an absolute value, if, to avoid any risk, you must pay the price for abandoning those in need. This kind of martyr is not always easy to recognize, but which is taken with great awareness, knowing that the commitment to the sick can endanger one’s health or one’s life. One thing is certain — to practice charity, to be at the service of others, puts one’s own life at risk.

A final example of a martyr of charity we know, is that of Maximilian Kolbe, for whom the security of his own life at all costs was not the supreme value, and whose life was not worth more than the other’s. Maximilian Kolbe, canonized by John Paul II, is an example of a martyr of charity in a Nazi extermination camp and in an environment dominated by the terrible problem of survival under extreme conditions. For the pope, Father Maximilian Kolbe is a “martyr of love:” “The death he underwent, in the place of a brother, is the act of a heroic man.”

John Paul II said “... he being a prisoner in the camp, vindicated in the place of death the right to life of an innocent man, one of the four million....” Father Kolbe declared, according to the pope, “the willingness to go to death in his place because he was a father and his life was necessary to his loved ones.”²⁴ Maximilian Kolbe lived his martyrdom in the terrible machinery of the Nazi concentration camp that destroys human personality and existence.

A few days after the assassination of Father Alfonso Navarro Oviedo,²⁵ who was killed along with the young Luis Alfredo Torres in the parish house at the time of this act of aggression, Monsignor Romero, commenting on the situation of persecution in which the Church and Christians were called to live said:

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²³ ACNM, I/51 - from 1427 to 1432.
²⁵ Alfonso Navarro Oviedo had been killed on May 11, 1977: cf. ACNM, II/16 5660.
“Not everyone, says the Second Vatican Council, will have the honor of giving their physical blood, of being killed for their faith, but God asks all those who believe in him the spirit of martyrdom, that is, all must be willing to die for our faith; even if the Lord does not grant us this honor, we do, we are available so that when our time comes to give an account of ourselves, we can say: `Lord, I was willing to give my life for you. And I gave it.’ Because to give one’s life is not only to die; to give one’s life is to have the spirit of martyrdom in doing our duty, in silence, in prayer, in the honest fulfillment of duty in the silence of everyday life: giving life little by little.”

If martyrdom, in the order of faith, is a privileged fact, fruit of the absolute gratuity of grace, martyrdom in the order of charity is accessible to all who have been constituted in that state, the “state of charity.” Therefore, it is the love of Christ which invests a person in a special vocation, and establishes the person in love. The service of Christ in the poor becomes a way of transforming the love of Christ: it is “operative” love translated into works.

Returning to St. Vincent, in this last part of this presentation we see some situations in which he has proposed to himself and to his Company that we live in this “state of charity;” in imitation of a “martyr” par excellence. We are dealing with the martyrdom of charity which — as St. Vincent sustains — can be lived in an unbloody manner as well, through the complete absorption of oneself in the works of charity. Among the poor are the sick, abandoned babies, delinquents, convicts, soldiers who have been wounded in battle, children without education in general, and without religious instruction in particular, populations struck by natural disasters, epidemics, and wars. Vincent will continue to repeat and teach that service to the neighbor must be preferred to everything: “There must not be delays in that which concerns the service of the poor.”

The motivation is simple: “Charity is superior to all rules, and all rules must bow before it. She is a grand lady; we must do what she commands.”

With regard to vocations that would dedicate themselves to serve the church, Vincent wanted from those who were called to the Congregation of the Mission heroic vocations: “May God will, gentlemen and dear brothers, that all who apply to be admitted to the company have the thought of martyrdom, the desire to suffer martyrdom, and to consecrate themselves entirely to God’s service,

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26 SV IX, 215 / SV IX, 171.
both in distant lands, and here, wherever it pleases God to use our poor company." The readiness for martyrdom, the giving of oneself for others, the call for a good missionary is synthesized in one of the most beautiful sections composed by Vincent:

"Whoever wants to live in a community must be willing and determined to live as an alien on Earth, to live only for Jesus Christ, to change his ways, to mortify his passions, to seek God alone, to submit to all, to convince himself that he came to serve and not to command, to suffer and not to live comfortably, to work and not to live in idleness and indolence. He must know that he will be tested like gold in the crucible that he cannot persevere without humbling himself before God and, finally, that the real way to be happy is to nurture the desire and the thought of martyrdom." 29

The theme of martyrdom in Vincent recurs in all his activities; it is a component of his spirituality. In his conferences to prospective candidate priests and sisters, he does not miss an opportunity to point out that martyrdom is an essential feature for those who want to serve the church and the poor. The spirit of martyrdom has accompanied the new community to achieve this desire of Vincent: "Inflame the hearts of men to do what the Son of God did, he who came to bring fire in the world to ignite it with his love.... Thus, it is true that I am sent not only to love God, but to make him loved. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not also love him." 30

In the sending of missionaries for the evangelization of Ireland, in a tough environment because of the presence of Protestants, repression raged especially against priests. Being a priest meant death. The bishop managed to escape disguised as a soldier and so did the missionaries, although at first Vincent thought they had died.

In the letter he had written to Father Bryan, Vincent had thought the worst and had tried to prepare them for martyrdom, exalting the dispositions for it so they could face it:

"We were greatly edified in your letter, seeing in it two wonderful effects of the grace of God. The first is that you have

29 L. ABELLY, La vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Vincent de Paul [The Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul], 3 vols., Paris 1664, part 1, ch. 34, 162.
30 SV XII, 262 / SV XII, –; conference of May 30, 1659.
all offered yourselves up completely to God by not abandoning at any cost the country where you are, despite all the dangers, ready for death rather than failing to assist the neighbor and the other is that you have taken such care to protect your confreres by sending them back to France, safe from all danger. The spirit of martyrdom prompted you to the first, and prudence made you do the second; both are derived from the example of Our Lord, who when he was going to face the torments of death for the salvation of men wanted to protect and save his disciples, saying, 'Let them go and do not touch them.' So you did as a true son of a most adorable Father, to whom I give great thanks to have produced in you great acts of supreme charity which is the sum of all virtues. I pray to God that he fill you with his grace, so that you practice virtue at all times in all, while you share it with those who may lack it. As the other priests who are with you have the intention to remain there whatever the peril, we judge that we should let them stay. Do we know the designs of God for them? Certainly He has not given them in vain a resolve so holy. Oh My God! How inscrutable your judgments!... They are all meant to gather up souls well prepared and assemble the good seed in your eternal barns. We adore your paths, O Lord.” 31

Fortunately, only one of the missionaries suffered martyrdom, accepted in advance by Vincent de Paul with a total submission to divine will.

Fathers Bryan and Barry were able to escape, and managed to reach France, after various vicissitudes, in 1652. But the youngest of the group, Thaddeus Lee, not yet a priest, at first had escaped from Limerick, but was discovered by the English in his native village, where he had fled. There he was brutally murdered before the eyes of his mother. The executioners cut off his hands and feet, then smashed his head. The Congregation of the Mission has in him its first martyr. 32

Some missionaries, Fathers Duggan and White, having reentered Ireland, to whom was added the following year the Scot Thomas Lumdsen in 1653, got themselves passage to Hebrides and Scotland, disguised as merchants. Fr. Lumdsen traveled for several years the districts in the far north of Scotland, before moving to the Orkney islands. He wrote little, for fear that his letters would fall into the hands of the authorities. His apostolic successes and those of other missionaries of the Propagation of the Faith awakened the jealousy

31 SV IV, 15 / SV IV, 17-19.
32 SV IV, 343, 481-484 / SV IV, 342, 466-469.
of the Protestant ministers. Cromwell, “informed that many Scots, especially in the northern provinces, went to popery” ordered “further research, especially against the priests, who were to be imprisoned and punished under the laws of the kingdom.” 33

One of the first victims of those laws was Fr. White. In 1655 he was arrested, along with a Jesuit priest and a diocesan priest and was thrown in jail in Aberdeen and then in Edinburgh. When the news arrived in France, Vincent saw the rise of a new martyr and recommended that the community pray for him.

“Let us commend to God our good Monsieur le Blanc (White), who, working in the mountains of Scotland, was taken prisoner, along with a Jesuit priest, by the English heretics. They were conducted at Aberdeen, where Fr. Lumsden is located, who will not fail to see him and assist him. There are many Catholics in this country who visit and comfort the poor priests who are suffering. Here is that good missionary on the way to martyrdom. I do not know if we are to rejoice or grieve, because, first, God is honored by the conditions under which he is imprisoned, for the sake of His name, and the company would be very lucky if God deemed it worthy of having a martyr, and he himself happy to suffer for the name of God, offering himself as he does for all that God wishes for his person and his life.... All this fills us, in God, with joy and gratitude. But on the other hand, it is our confrere who suffers; therefore should we not suffer with him? As for me, I confess that, from a natural standpoint, I am very distressed, and feel a special pain; but with the spirit, I believe that we bless God, as having given us a special grace.” 34

White did not shed his blood. After several months he was released, with threats of death were he to be found surprised while preaching and saying Mass, criminal actions formally sanctioned with capital punishment by English law. He fled, once free, into the mountains, where he continued his work of evangelization, until his death in 1679.

The mission of Scotland, adds a particular facet to the missionary work of evangelization. Lost in the wilderness and rugged headlands of Scotland, those missionaries evangelized the poor in the most remote and abandoned places. In disguise, persecuted from place to place, hiding in the castles of the nobles or in the huts of fishermen,
they made possible the survival of Catholicism in a country. If they did not grasp the palm of martyrdom, they lived and have offered themselves for the evangelization of the poor and in charity to help people of the mountainous region.

**Poland also had its martyrs** who fell as victims for charity. Maria Luisa Gonzaga, Lady of Charity, having become queen of Poland, wished to have in her kingdom Vincentian works: missionaries and the Daughters of Charity. Vincent accepted the request and sent the first group of missionaries. There were five, leading the group was Father Lambert aux Couteaux.

They were welcomed in Krakow, where there was a battle against a ferocious outbreak of plague. The missionaries were prodigious in the aid of the sick. Shortly after news came that the epidemic had spread to Warsaw. Fr. Lambert, with his fellow priests, were prodigious in the service of those who had the plague, a service laborious and risky because the city lacked any sanitary and hygienic equipment. Fr. Lambert fell victim to his untiring zeal. He died of plague January 31, 1653. The queen was upset by his death, and in a long letter written to Vincent, she said, among other things: “If you do not send me another Fr. Lambert, I do not know what to do.”

The choice fell on Charles Ozenne, along with some clerics and religious of the Visitation; after various vicissitudes they came to Poland in mid-January 1654, in time to minister to those who had the plague.

Things began to go well in missionary work: preaching, missions, seminary. The war soon upset the most optimistic hopes. Poland was attacked simultaneously by Russia and Sweden. War and hunger followed the plague.

The war had ups and downs and ended in October 1657, with the recapture of Warsaw and the expulsion of the Swedes. The situation had created an opportunity for the missionaries to engage in assistance to the sick, to soldiers and those who had suffered damage. Faced with so many disasters, speaking of the fate of Fathers Desdames and Duperroy, Vincent said to the community: “Neither guns, nor fire, nor plunder, nor the plague or other hardships and dangers in which they found themselves have made them give up their place, namely the place in which Providence had put them, preferring to risk their lives rather than betray the practice of mercy.” In this practice, they were prodigious, meeting the most

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urgent needs left by war and plague. The missionaries in Poland and elsewhere were an example of "martyrs of love;" they chose to live among those who had the plague, the armies at war, in the midst of famine, knowing they exposed their lives to disease and death. Father Ozenne paid the highest tribute; he died August 14, 1654, because of fever taken from the plague.

Even the convicts were to Vincent one of the many categories of people to help. Nobody should be excluded from the benefits of the love of God working through the Christian charity of his children, as Vincent explained to the missionaries. "Since the virtue of mercy has several operations, he led the company to assist the poor in different ways, as attested by the service that was done for the convicts and the slaves on galleys of Barbary." 37

The missionaries had been trained in the school of Vincent, imbued with the spirit of selflessness and service. Soon there were the first martyrs of charity. Two years after the foundation of the house of Marseilles, Fr. Louis Robiche died of disease contracted while attending the convicts. He was thirty five years old. His great love for the convicts earned him the admiration of Marseilles, who during his funeral, Vincent writes, there was such a crowd that tried to see him and touch him that there were scenes of hysteria. A man grabbed a pillow with his teeth to take a piece stained with the blood of Fr. Robiche. There was someone who scraped the catafalque on which he was placed, to pick up the candle wax from the funeral.

After reporting these manifestations of popular devotion and affection, Vincent concluded: "The voice of the people (which is the voice of God) calls him blessed because he died, so to speak, a martyr; being exposed and having lost his life for the love of Jesus Christ, working for the corporal and spiritual health of the sick poor who had disease that usually leads to death and that he knew well to be contagious." 38

Fr. Robiche was not the only one. In 1651, Fr. Brunet, "a good worker of the Lord, a great friend of the poor, luminary of the company," and Mr. Sirmian de la Costa, "founder and patron of the hospital in Marseilles,39 died in similar circumstances, victims of the plague. They too are in addition to the countless martyrs of charity."

With the entry of France into the Thirty Years War and the Fronde, conditions for survival of the poor became desperate:

37 SV VIII, 238 / SV VIII, 277.
38 SV II, 517-521 / SV II, 570.
the population was decimated by famine and epidemics. The government, bled dry by the effort to fund the war, failed to provide any help to the devastated provinces (Lorraine, Picardy, Champagne, Ile-de-France). Vincent organized the assistance, and was involved in the forefront with his sons and daughters who had absorbed his spirit. Organized charities saw missionaries in the frontline, the Daughters of Charity supported by volunteers who succeeded in distributing food, clothing, medicine, distributing tools and seeds for cultivating a small piece of land for their livelihoods. The burial of the dead was also necessary; this was an act of mercy and at the same time it eliminated outbreaks of infection. The Daughters of Charity, at the request of the queen herself, were sent to the areas devastated by war to treat the wounded and provide health care to the poor in military hospitals. Even here Vincent, through his sons and his daughters, wrote pages of heroic service and giving. In these areas decimated by the war the work was backbreaking, and missionaries were not spared. The poor and the sick were in a state of extreme need. At Etampes, the situation was worse than elsewhere because of the repeated sieges which left behind many dead caused by epidemics. The streets were full of corpses of men and animals. Missionaries on the recommendation of Vincent cleaned up the city, giving Christian burial to the dead. In July 1652 Fr. David died, a victim of the epidemic. He was twenty-five years old and one year a priest. Fr. David was the first in a series of "martyrs of charity." He was not killed by any persecutor, but suffered a death which could have been avoided if the service to the Gospel had not pushed him to live among those suffering from the plague.

His substitute, Fr. De la Fosse, returned to Saint Lazare, the mother house of the Mission, on a litter, after one month of work. Fortunately, his life was saved. In September, 1653, all the missionaries at Etampes were sick. Two of these, Fr. Wateblad and Dechamps, died.40

To assist the poor in the devastated regions, neither resources nor efforts were spared. In the most critical moments of the Fronde, Saint Lazare remained almost deserted. All missionaries were in the disaster zone, and many did not return. They are among the ranks of heroes, and as Vincent said of those who died "with weapons in hand, like martyrs of charity."41

In the summer of 1656, the plague broke out in Genoa with devastating fury. The sick were piled into insufficient hospital wards

or died in the street without any help. Food placed in the square was left abandoned because no one came to pick it up. Between four thousand and five thousand died each week. The city became a vast and silent sanatorium. Writing to Stephen Blatiron, superior of the house of Genoa, on December 1, 1656, Vincent recommended prudence. The house in Genoa, was transformed into a hospital, missionaries became nurses, offering their assistance to the dying and the sick. The confrere Luke Arimondo offered to assist the plague victims and died of plague in Genoa November 4, 1656. He was the first to succumb. Twelve days after he had moved in Lazzaretto Consolata, he fell sick and died three days later. Fr. Blatiron took the contagion while administering the last sacrament to three plague victims. After a short illness, he died. The other missionaries, took the infection and died in the summer of 1657. Seven priests and a brother died in assisting the sick. Vincent when he learned the terrible news, despite the pain, accepted it in a spirit of faith.

In October 1656, the plague also infected the city of Rome, where the missionaries had taken the direction of the College of Propaganda Fide with the intention to adjoining a seminary to it. Missionaries offered themselves to assist the plague victims and the sick.

St. Vincent carried, together with his confreres, the weight of the cross of so many trials. He was concerned about their health; he tried to give them advice to facilitate their ministry, and suffered in the knowledge that they were not very numerous and sometimes alone before a mission so big. Finally, he accepted in faith before God's plans when he learned of the brutal and too early death of his young missionaries.

The service of charity finds a wonderful achievement in the Daughters of Charity, “country girls” gathered by Vincent with the help of Louise de Marillac in the service of the poor, “our lords and masters.” Service held the first place, because their service was “to serve our Lord in the poor, and the Lord, on the day of judgment, will hold as done to himself the services rendered to them.” One of the images which Vincent used very often in his conferences and meditations, proposing it as a model of service and charity for the whole company, was Margaret Naseau (1594-1633). She was considered the first Daughter of Charity, and at her school other

42 SV VI, 137 s. / SV VI, 157 s.
43 Cf. SV VI, 152 s., 157 / SV VI, 172 s., 177.
44 SV V, 643 / SV V, 640; SV VI, 151, 163 / SV VI, 171-172, 182-183.
45 L. MEZZADRI - M. PÉREZ FLORES, La regola delle Figlie della Carità di san Vincenzo de Paoli [The Rule of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul], Milano 1986, 137.
young people were inspired to help the poor, forming that network of solidarity and self-giving love, the image of the Father who gives his life for love.

The willingness to offer his life in service of others recurs often in conferences to the Daughters of Charity: serving the poor was to be completed at the risk of their lives:

"God permits that we gather today, on the feast of St. Rocco, one of the saints that you must love more, since he spent his life in the exercise of charity, to the point of catching the plague from the people he served who suffered from it for the love of God.... It is just this love taught by the Holy Spirit with the words: 'There can be no greater love than to lose his own soul — that is, his life — for love of neighbor' (cf. Jn 15:13)."

The vocation to service is the guarantee that God still loves the world and the poor in his sons and his daughters. The Daughters of Charity are the shining face of God toward man. The poor see in a Daughter of Charity the proof of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Her vocation is therefore "the greatest there is in the church of God." This grandeur does not come, as, for example, that of priests, from functions or privileges beyond those of any other faithful, but the greatness of the vocation of a Daughter of Charity is in being united to Christ; they are his spouses to whom he himself has asked for love. But let us hear what Vincent says about this:

"A holy father says that whoever gives himself to God by serving others and suffers willingly whatever difficulty he meets, is a martyr. Have martyrs suffered more than they? Certainly not, because having one's head cut off is an evil that soon passes. Even if they endured painful torments, they were not, however, long-term, because they came to an end with death. But the young women who give themselves to God in your Company, they do for life, sometimes, among the sick full of infection and wounds, and often with repugnant tumors, sometimes with poor children who need to have everything done for them, or the poor convicts weighed down with chains and pain; and place themselves under the direction of people who do not know what is needed, to be in all these offices under their obedience.... If we were to see on earth the place where a martyr had passed, we would approach it with respect and kiss the earth with great reverence; would we disparage our sisters whom God preserves and helps live their martyrdom? O my dear daughters, let us hold them in high esteem, let us

46 SV IX, 40 / SV IX, 34.
maintain our esteem for them, whatever happens, and let us consider them martyrs of Jesus Christ, because they serve our neighbor for his sake.” 47

The privilege and position of the Daughters of Charity is to “give life.” It is the most radical ministry, similar to that of the martyrs, “it is certain that your life is shortened by the work that you have, consequently, you are martyrs.” 48 And this desire for Vincent, to have people called to a heroic vocation, is not lacking in the company of the Daughters of Charity, people who have lived martyrdom; they have offered their lives to proclaim the Gospel in service to others. They, along with many brothers, have inflamed France and the whole world with that zeal, that “fire” of love that has warmed suffering humanity and the abandoned.

“Being in service” has been a constant in the early life of the community: the martyrs of charity who have not been spared themselves in bringing relief to people’s needs through the evangelization of the poor “in word and deed” by paying in person, offering themselves as a gift to others on the model of the Master. From this participation in the sacrifice of Christ — in the words of St. Paul: I complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ — the spirit of martyrdom can and must, according to Vincent — be nourished in persons and in the community. It is the sublimation and the perfection of the cross; it is not the offer of suffering, but the offer of life, a gesture of love, but love in its ultimate fulfillment. Vincent will never stop speaking of martyrdom, to propose it, and to encourage others toward it. In France, Ireland, Poland, Italy... even in Madagascar, despite the long and tragic rosary of suffering, Vincent remained faithful to the idea of martyrdom against everything and everyone, so that the missionaries would still be willing to participate in the martyrdom of Jesus, becoming completely consumed by love:

“If God were to permit them to be reduced to the need to serve, to live, as vicars in the villages, or even any of them were forced to beg for bread or lie in the bushes, all torn and numb with cold, and were asked: Poor priest of the Mission, who would have reduced you to this state? What happiness, gentlemen, to say: Charity!” 49

Translation: ROBERT J. STONE, C.M.

47 SV IX, 270 / SV IX, 214.
48 SV IX, 460 / SV IX, 362.
Vincentian Bibliography for the Year of the Priest
(Jun 2009 - Jun 2010)

1. Bibliography published in Vincentiana, in English, Spanish and French


WYPYCH, Stanislaw, C.M.: St. Vincent de Paul, Formator of the Priest. VINCENTIANA, 44th Year, N. 3, May-June 2000, pp. 229-238.

QUEVEDO PATARROYO, Álvaro, C.M.: St. Vincent, Priest of Charity at the Service of the Poor. VINCENTIANA, 44th Year, N. 3, May-June 2000, pp. 239-249.


2. Bibliography published in Vincentiana, in only one language


BRAGA, Carlo, C.M.: Renewal of Forms of Service to the Clergy. VINCENTIANA, 27th Year, N. 2, March-April 1983, pp. 154-165.


VAN LINDEN, Philip, C.M.: Ongoing Formation “pro clero.” VINCENTIANA, 37th Year, N. 1/2 January-April 1993, pp. 76-79.
3. A New Biography of St. Vincent for the 350th anniversary


To mark the 350th anniversary of the death of St. Vincent, Luigi Mezzadri, C.M., presents this new biography of the Saint of Charity. The book has 350 pages. The first 250 are devoted to describing the life of the saint, the institutions he created and the radiance of his charism of charity to people in the areas of action with which he was in contact and geographic locations to which he sent his aides. It is short and easy reading that is in no way tiresome. Page 275 starts the second part, very interesting because it does not leave this anniversary in the past. It forces Vincentian readers to cultivate in their own lives the authentic values that Saint Vincent lived as a grace and that continue to be a true spirituality of the will of God, shaped by the Spirit and identified with the Evangelizer of Christ’s poor. It will thus not be a mere repetition of past actions, but boldly creative and true to the Vincentian spirit in true Christian freedom. It is a particularly useful book for the Vincentian Family which, hopefully, each will soon be able to be read in their own language.
In the next issue

The Association of the Miraculous Medal