

THE LIFE OF THE VENERABLE
SERVANT OF GOD
VINCENT DE PAUL
FOUNDER AND FIRST SUPERIOR GENERAL
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION.
DIVIDED INTO THREE BOOKS.

BY
LOUIS ABELLY, BISHOP OF RODEZ

BOOK ONE

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Materials for an introduction

Weights and Measures

These have been left in French to preserve the flavor of the original, and to avoid, particularly dealing with money, having to change currency rates. Note, too, that weights and measures were not uniform throughout France; consequently, these descriptions are often valid only for the Paris region.

Chopine: liquid measure, containing about one pint

Denier: money, a half-*sou*

Ecu: money, also translated as "crown"; 60 *sous* or 3 *livres*

League: distance, about 2 1/2 miles, 4 kilometers

Livre: money, an old name for a *franc*; 20 *sous*

Muid: liquid measure, containing about 59 gallons

Piastre: money, a coin of Italian or Spanish origin, widely used internationally; in the near east and north Africa, 100 *piastres* were worth 1 *livre*

Pistole: money, 10 *livres*

Setier: liquid measure containing 2 gallons; in Paris, a *demi-setier* contained a half-pint

Sou: also spelled *sol*; money, 1/20 of a *livre*

Quotations and Citations

Only direct quotations from the Scriptures have been cited. Indirect quotations, allusions or passing references are left as they are. Citations from the Psalms are given according to modern numbering, but the text remains that of the old psalter as quoted by Abelly.

All other quotations have been cross referenced to the edition of Coste. Those not attributed to some source (a speaker or writer) or not otherwise identified are presumed to appear only in Abelly. More research needs to be done on the sources used by Abelly.

French officials and specific institutions

College: a boarding high school

Lieutenant: (lieutenant criminel), an official with powers to pursue and arrest criminals

Madame la Presidente: the wife of the president

Official: an ecclesiastical judge

Parlement: a judicial body, not a legislature

President: a presiding judge in the parlements

Translation issues

The terms "Mission" and "Missionaries" often, but not always, refer to members of the Congregation of the Mission. When the reference is clear, the terms are capitalized. Often, however, the reference is not clear.

Use of Monsieur instead of Father: used for secular clergy regularly in France, and retained here to give some flavor of the original text

Use of Moslem instead of Turk: Turk was a general word in French for Moslem, particularly in North Africa, where there were many ethnic Turks at work in the imperial Ottoman government. At present, the religious term Moslem matches the reality better than Turk.

Personal names in French or other languages are generally retained in the original language, unless the English version of the name is normally in use as such in English. For bibliographical references in footnotes, the original forms have been maintained. However, the use of accents in French names has been retained only for references to book titles. All others have been eliminated. Hyphens in French given names have been eliminated.

Titles and forms of address: Noble and ecclesiastical titles have been put in English, except for Marquis/Marquise, instead of its less recognizable English Marquess and Marchioness. These titles are capitalized only when they precede the person's name. French Monseigneur for bishops has been translated as "Your Excellency," rather than "My Lord," a more British than American usage. Other ecclesiastical forms of address have been similarly simplified to modern usage.

Place names: These have been given in modern French equivalents in cases where they have been changed from the seventeenth century, such as modern Noyon for Noyons. In addition, the customary English spellings of certain places have

been retained instead of the modern French spelling: English Marseilles for French Marseille. Hyphens used in composite names have been eliminated: Saint Germain en Laye.

Second edition:

1. Additions:

Five new letters

Report of Charles Demia about Vincent's ministry at Chatillon, completed in 1665

An entire rewriting of the chapter on Prudence, Book III, ch. 16.

2. Subtractions:

All of Book II was dropped.

Translations:

This work was edited, 1891, (by J.B. Pémartin, C.M.)

German translations, 1710, 1859-60;

Italian, 1677 (by Domenico Acami), also 1700, 1734, 1753 and 1837.

The Acami edition was translated into German, 1710; Spanish, 1701, 1844, 1884, 1906; the Spanish text, in turn, was translated into Portuguese, 1738, 1850. Polish translation 1688.

Other Italian translations were done in 1847, 1912-13

Dutch, 1864, 1902.

Bibliographies:

Have full citations to Coste in English *Life*

Also: Román *Biografía*

Also: *Summarium ex processu*, etc. 1713

Also: Collet *Vie*

More notes in 1891 ed.

André Dodin, *La Légende et l'histoire. De Monsieur Depaul à saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris: O.E.I.L, 1985), a revision of part one of his doctoral dissertation for the Institut catholique de Paris. date? after 1962)

André Dodin, *Saint Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Entretiens, Documents. XV. Supplément*. Paris, 1970.

André Dodin, *Saint Vincent de Paul. Entretiens spirituels aux missionnaires*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960. ("Entretiens.")

Patristic citations are made, wherever possible, to the old edition by Migne, and abbreviated PL (*Patrologia Latina*) and PG (*Patrologia Graeca*).

Dodin notes:

a. Abelly sometimes called doctor of theology, particularly by later editors of his other numerous writings; he is even called a licentiate, but no records of these degrees exist, and he never used the titles for himself.

b. There were two printings of the 1664 version; the one we are using is the second printing (also dated 1664.) Only a few slight changes were made, and these are noted where appropriate. The second printing could not have been a thorough revision since both the first and second printings carry the same list of Errata. These errors have been corrected in this translation, as well as others pointed out by Dodin in his dissertation.

Biblical translations are generally made directly from the *New American Bible*, rather than from the text cited. The only exceptions are those occasioned by significantly different texts.

DEDICATION

TO THE QUEEN MOTHER OF THE KING

Madame,

The favorable reception Your Majesty <Ftn: Queen Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV.> always gave to Monsieur Vincent during his lifetime and the kindness with which you have honored his memory since his death gives me hope that you would accept this work which is but a sketch of the life and virtues of this great servant of God. <Ftn: After the death of Louis XIII in 1643, his wife, Anne of Austria, became regent and instituted the Council of Conscience to advise her on ecclesiastical affairs. She appointed Saint Vincent to this body. Later, Louis XIV, in his letter to Pope Clement XI supporting Vincent's beatification, testified that his mother had recognized Vincent's virtues and that she had shown this by great marks of confidence. According to Louis, at Vincent's death, his mother had exclaimed, "What a loss for the Church and for the poor!"> I have attempted to trace his career with as much fidelity as humanly possible. There is little in his life to make it striking enough to be suitable for presentation to such a great princess as yourself. But I believe that to the degree that it is simple and straightforward the more it will truly reflect its subject, and even more favorably will it be accepted by Your Majesty. You will more surely recognize Monsieur Vincent in its pages if he is presented in his everyday clothes, that is to say, in his humility, his simplicity and his usual direct speech and action. Even though Monsieur Vincent during his life had taken every care to hide the marvelous graces he had received from God, I have succeeded in allowing him to speak after his death by citing several letters I have been able to gather, reflecting those occasions when his charity overcame his natural reticence about himself.

Should Your Majesty deign to give me audience I shall have the honor of recalling several matters which will without doubt confirm his reputation. They will console you greatly, for you will recognize the great things he accomplished for God and for the building up of the kingdom of Jesus Christ during the regency. These took place not only by your authorization and support but even more so by your zeal, your concern and your generous support. What should be a source of joy for you is that all the great enterprises started by Monsieur Vincent still function, better than ever, under the wise guidance of our incomparable monarch who shines like the sun, vivifying all

parts of his kingdom, who is very mindful to use all his strength of mind and inexhaustible zeal to preserve true religion and solid piety in all parts of the kingdom.

The innocence and sanctity of him whose life we write, Madame, assure us that he is in heaven with his God. We believe that he is imploring unceasingly God's goodness to shower his blessings upon our great prince, Your Majesty and all the royal household. What particularly obliges him to this intercession is his recognition of the favors he received from your hands, and continues to receive in the person of the priests of his Congregation.

While he lived on earth, even during most perilous and difficult times, he was ever faithful to the king and devoted to his service. Since the virtues of the saints never die and especially their charity lives on, we can confidently assert that in heaven Monsieur Vincent retains this same affection and zeal to obtain from God all sorts of blessings upon the king, Your Majesty and all that you hold dear. It surely is no small consolation to know that you have a faithful servant. To put it more fittingly, you have an assured intercessor and protector, like another Jeremiah <Ftn: An allusion to the vision of Judas Maccabeus (2 Mac 15:13-16) who had seen Jeremiah in heaven praying for the people and for the holy city.> continually prostrate before the adorable majesty to pray for what he sees in the light of glory to be truly salutary for Your Majesty and helpful to the achievement of your just desires.

For myself, Madame, having been showered with favors from the king without ever having merited them, and having experienced the effects of your own good will, I recognize myself unable to thank Your Majesty enough. I beg you that I may borrow from him whose life I write, to help fulfill this duty of gratitude, and following his example and with the favor his faithful services have earned, I declare, with the greatest possible respect,

Your Majesty,

Your very humble, obedient, faithful servant, and subject,
Louis, bishop of Rodez.

FOREWORD

Dear reader, I would like to call three things to your attention before you begin to read this book.

First, since truth is the soul of history without which it does not merit the name "history," but rather of "novel" or "romance," you can be assured that it has been faithfully and exactly observed in this work. What you read has been in the public record or gathered from reliable witnesses. Some things I assert that I have seen with my own eyes, or heard with my ears, having had the good fortune of knowing and associating with Monsieur Vincent for many years. I have visited the place of his birth and spoken with his close relatives during a trip I made to Guienne nearly twenty-five years ago.

I have cited several of his letters and conferences to supplement what I learned from others. These extracts are taken from documents collected by members of his Congregation, especially during the later years of his life. <Ftn: On August 15, 1657, only three years before the death of the saint, Brother Bertrand Ducournau, his secretary, sent a long memorandum to the assistants of the house of Saint Lazare to persuade them "how important it is for the future of the company that an exact record of the Monsieur Vincent's discourses be preserved. (*Notices sur les prêtres et frères de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 1, 416.) His proposal was accepted and he himself did most of the work of preserving these precious accounts. The same care was taken by the Daughters of Charity, who had earlier begun to preserve the account of the words of their holy founder. Mathurine Guerin, one of the first Daughters of Charity, wrote that "one of the most valuable possessions of our company is the record that Mademoiselle Le Gras had made of the instructions of our last most honored father. She so loved these writings that she did not wish to be the one to write them down for fear that she might change the sense of what our blessed father had said, greatly loving his simple and naive style, without trying to polish it in any way. She often said that one day the sisters would be consoled to have the writings of the persons whom we have been privileged to hear and see. Therefore, you must have them all." <Ftn: Mathurine Guerin to Marguerite Chetif, elected superioress general at the death of Louise de Marillac. *Louise de Marillac, sa Vie, ses Vertues* 1887, 1, 250.> I do so because there is no way we can be more certain of his attitudes or his interior disposition of soul than by quoting what he actually said. On occasion charity overcame his personal humility, despite his reluctance to talk about himself. What gives even greater credence to his words is that all who knew

him were well aware that there was no trace of vanity or boasting in his makeup. On the contrary, he often sought out occasions for self-deprecation, saying and doing in the sight of others what might draw down disrespect upon himself.

Since this holy man often spoke on the spur of the moment, his conferences were more like talks of a father to his children than the studied discourses of the learned. Despite this we have decided to report them simply. The reader will thereby be the more able to recognize the depth of his soul and the virtue of this great servant of God, for his words flowed from the abundance of his heart.

The second point I call to your attention is the criticism that this work is too long. Some suggest that it would be enough to speak in general terms, and not enter into many topics better passed over in silence. It is not possible to form a correct judgment of things if they are known only superficially or in part. To see the utility and grandeur of the works of Monsieur Vincent which he did with the help of God, I have thought it necessary to speak about them at length, rather than in summary or in general.

Moreover, let the reader remember, please, that you do not have here an elocution piece or a panegyric. You have a simple recital of the life and activities of a servant of God, who had a particular concern to remain ever in the background. It would be contrary to his disposition were this life to be written with flowery language or with worldly eloquence. Style ought to imitate nature; how better to describe the virtues of a saint than to speak of them in the same spirit with which they were practiced.

Lastly, my dear reader, the third thing I would call to your attention is that I declare that I submit completely to the prudent rules established by the Apostolic See in writing about saintly persons. I base my writing solely on human testimony, and not on the authority of the church. I use the word "saint" in some places in the sense that Saint Paul uses it in referring to all the faithful. My meaning in using this word or others like it is no more than to say that this great servant of God was endowed with eminent virtue, and that he surpassed greatly the ordinary Christian man or woman in his life of holiness. <Ftn: The author wrote this in 1664. Later, the cause of the servant of God was introduced at Rome. Vincent de Paul was beatified by Benedict XIII on August 13, 1729, and was canonized by Clement XII (see the bull *Superna Jerusalem* of June 16, 1737).>

APPROBATIONS <Ftn: These approbations are reproduced above all because they are from two prelates who were friends of Saint Vincent. The bishop of Evreux was Henri Cauchon de Maupas du Tour, 1600-1680, first chaplain to Anne of Austria, and then bishop of Le Puy. In 1661 he was named bishop of Evreux. On November 23, 1660, nearly two months after the saint's death, he pronounced the funeral oration at the official memorial service sponsored by the members of the Tuesday Conferences, held at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois in Paris.>

Approbation of the Archbishop of Auch

We, Henri de la Mothe, doctor of the University of Paris and archbishop of Auch, declare that we have read the book entitled *Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, written by Monsieur Louis Abelly, bishop of Rodez. In it we have found nothing but what is edifying and which may not serve as an example for all classes of persons to imitate. Its subject and his life's work is described with such force, such sincerity and in such vivid colors that it is not necessary to have known him intimately or to have spoken with him familiarly. He can be found in this book even better than in life, for he kept himself hidden from the eyes of men, to reveal himself to God alone. We judge that this book should be published and read by everyone.

Done at Paris, this thirtieth day of August, 1664.

Henri de la Mothe [Houdancourt], archbishop of Auch.

Approbation of the Bishop of Evreux

The Church has long endured the cruelty of tyrants, but also the shame of the reproaches made by the prophets against the leaders of the people. Ezekiel complained that the flock of the Lord was dispersed for want of a shepherd. Zechariah called the negligent shepherd an idol since he was useless for guarding his flock which he abandoned in times of stress. The Fathers of the Church lamented the same deplorable evil. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, among others, while expressing his astonishment at seeing how the good shepherd patiently endured all the rigors of the seasons to assure the safety of the sheep whose guardian he was, could only grieve at the sight of the sheepfold of the Savior of the world exposed to the attack of wolves for want of true shepherds. Souls, whom he calls simply thinking sheep, instead of having true pastors are at the whim of mercenaries who abandon the sheep at the first sign of difficulty.

The Sovereign Pastor who watches over his Church has raised up for us in the person of Monsieur Vincent a faithful servant, filled with zeal for his glory and burning with love for the salvation of souls. We have only to read this story of his life,

written by the bishop of Rodez, to be convinced of this. I attest that I have read and even reread the books so filled with doctrine and piety the bishop has given the public in the past. I have studied them even in a spirit of admiration. I urge the faithful to read and meditate upon his latest work which cannot help being very useful in impressing on their hearts a true and solid devotion.

Given at Evreux on the feast of Saint Bernard, April 20, 1664.

Henri, bishop of Evreux.

EXTRACT FROM THE ROYAL PRIVILEGE

By the grace and privilege of the king, it has been permitted to Florentin Lambert, a bookseller in Paris, to print or to have printed, to sell and to distribute throughout the kingdom, a book entitled *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul, Founder and First Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission*, by Monsieur Louis Abelly, Bishop of Rodez; and to do this in the size, character and as many times as he judges it proper, for the period of twenty consecutive years. It is forbidden to all printers, booksellers and others to print, to have printed, to sell, or to distribute this book in whatever way and manner, and under whatever possible pretext, without the agreement of Lambert, or of those so entitled, under pain of confiscation of copies, arbitrary fine, expenses, damages and interest, according as it has been further specified in this privilege, granted at Paris May 19, 1664. And the twenty-second year of our reign. Signed: BARDON

Registered in the volume of the guild of printers and booksellers of this city, August 19, 1664.

E. Martin, Syndic

Printing completed for the first time, September 10, 1664.

Copies have been furnished.

BOOK ONE

The Life of Vincent de Paul

CHAPTER ONE

The Church in France at the Time of the Birth of Vincent de Paul

God's wisdom and power in guiding his Church are never so admirable as when he uses the very sufferings she endures to exercise his mercy. These turn her losses into gains, her humiliations to his glory and her sterility into his abundance. This reflects what a prophet had said earlier, that when it seems God has abandoned us, it is only to have us experience more forcefully his mercy and love. <Ftn: Isa 54:7.> When he seems to have turned away his face and forgotten us, it is to prepare us for new blessings and to favor us with his special graces.

The writings of Saint Hilary about the Arians express this thought. In their day they held truth captive in injustice: "The Church of Jesus Christ triumphs when she is struck down. She becomes best known when she is the more disfigured by calumnies. She receives the greatest help from God at the very moment she seems bereft of his protection." <Ftn: PL 10:202.>

This may be verified by a study of Church history. It speaks of this mystic vessel the Church, seemingly about to founder afloat on the stormy sea of this world, threatened by a thousand perils. She is often within a hair's breadth of disaster. Always, however, the hand of God is with her, often using the very storms or adverse winds to bring her safely to port. Not to be overwhelmed by such a vast area of consideration, it would be enough to reflect on the deplorable state of the Church in France towards the middle of the last century. This would show the Lord's paternal care, not only to preserve the Church but also to see to its growth and development. It appeared at times as though he had abandoned her. In the same way we must study the Providence of God in guiding his faithful servant, Vincent de Paul, the great things he wrought in him and by him for the benefit of his holy Church, for his service and for his greater honor and glory. The servant of God was born towards the end of the sixteenth century, when France was caught in several mighty storms. These were the heresies of Luther and Calvin, which had separated a part of the kingdom from the union all Catholics owe to the head of the Church. Soon afterwards an open rebellion took place against the authority of the king. As a holy apostle remarks, heretics

reject all submission, even the respect they owe their lawful sovereign. <Ftn: Jude 8.>

The terrible scourge of the two evils, heresy and civil war, cannot be described. These lasted many years. They left the once prosperous French nation, until recently among the most flourishing monarchies of the world, almost like a theater of the absurd, where violence and impiety played tragic roles. Churches everywhere were destroyed, altars abused, sacred objects profaned, priests slain, and above all these ills was an almost total rejection of all ecclesiastical order and discipline. In the greater part of the kingdom people were like scattered sheep, without spiritual pasturage, sacraments, instruction, or almost any other external help towards their own salvation.

When the invincible courage and wise direction of Henry the Great <Ftn: Henry IV.> of glorious memory had restored peace to France, the bishops received the opportunity to put an end to confusion and restore religion to its true place in the nation. They called various provincial councils, and the bishops applied their wise and salutary laws in their local synods. It proved no easy task to overcome the contagion of heresy and the license of the armies. In fact, the remedies proved inadequate to root out the evils of the times.

Although the authorities in the Church worked strenuously to fulfill their duties, cases of gross scandals continued among the clergy. As a result, the priesthood fell into disrepute. In some places this was so marked that members of the nobility would be ordained simply to have a considerable benefice attached to certain positions. It became a sort of insult to say that an upper-class cleric had become a priest.

Another evil developed from the lack of concern and discipline among the clergy, especially in the countryside. The poor people were not instructed in their spiritual duties, and catechizing was almost unknown. For the most part the village pastors, like the shepherds mentioned by the prophet, were content to take the wool and milk from the sheep but did little to provide decent pasturage. <Ftn: Ezek 34:3.> Everywhere Christians passed their entire lives in profound ignorance of what was required for eternal salvation. They were unaware of God's existence, the mysteries of the Holy Trinity, or the incarnation of the Son of God: things which should be known explicitly by all Christians. In what concerned the sacraments it was even worse: which ones should they receive, what dispositions they should bring to their reception, and so on. God alone knows the state of their conscience, living in such complete ignorance of what leads to salvation or what they

should know about their faith. Almost no one was available to help them in learning what they were obliged to believe.

Those living in the cities had the advantage of preaching given in the parishes and other churches. Assuredly there was greater knowledge and light there, but unfortunately the knowledge remained sterile and the light was often without warmth. Charity, which is known by its works, was practically unheard of. The spiritual works of mercy in favor of one's neighbor were little known among the laity. Alms were usually but a pittance. Even wealthy people believed they did enough in giving a small coin to a beggar. On some special occasion they considered a larger alms a major act of charity.

Such was the state of the Church in France when God, rich in mercy and mindful of the great needs of the Church in one of the main regions of the world, raised up his faithful servant Vincent de Paul, among several other great and saintly persons. Filled with his Spirit and strengthened by his grace, he began with untiring zeal to repair the damages and apply the proper remedies.

He first set himself to make sure that the Church was served by good priests who would work diligently and faithfully in the Lord's vineyard. He developed special activities for ordinands, seminaries, retreats for the clergy, spiritual conferences, and other similar enterprises to further this goal. He either founded these projects or at least promoted them with extraordinary success, as we shall see later in this book.

He combined this zeal for the reformation of the clergy with an ardent charity which moved him to provide instruction and spiritual help to souls in need. He was devoted to the poor country people more than to others, for he judged them to be the most abandoned, and he had a special tenderness for them. It is impossible to describe how hard he labored to deliver them from sin and ignorance by catechizing and helping them to make a general confession. He was not satisfied with the heroic efforts he made for their relief but elicited the support of others to help in the cause as well. His love for the poor was not satisfied until he had founded a new congregation of virtuous missionary priests. They carried on his work not only in France but in many other areas, such as Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, Poland, Italy, Barbary, and even in the tropics, on the island of Madagascar. Several of these Gospel messengers even gave their lives there in the service of charity.

Neither was Vincent de Paul satisfied to work simply for the spiritual welfare of the poor. He thought of their bodily needs as well. Having made himself poor for the love of Jesus Christ and having left all to follow him, he had no more worldly

goods to give. His heart was so much on fire with that heavenly flame which the divine Savior had come to enkindle upon the earth that he was most successful in awakening this same spirit in some well-disposed persons he encountered.

We shall see in his life some marvelous examples which will show the graces which God had poured forth on this faithful servant. Even amid the corruption of this present age he was able to arouse in many souls the spirit and charity of the first Christians. This happened although it has never been more true, as the apostle says, that everyone looks out for his own interests and not those of Jesus Christ. <Ftn: Phil 2:21.> The example and words of Vincent de Paul sufficed to remove this root of all evil from the hearts of a great number of virtuous persons. The result was that their greatest joy and satisfaction became, and remains even today, not only to give a notable share of their worldly goods to help the poor, but more remarkably to give themselves, their health, and even their lives in the most demanding tasks of Christian charity.

Paris was not the only place to benefit from his efforts in favor of an innumerable multitude of needy of men and women of all classes, ages. Because of the extreme misery accompanying wars and other public calamities, their charity extended to the remote provinces, even to the French frontier, which felt the effects of the war most severely. His practical help reached to Lorraine, the Hebrides, Barbary, and several other remote regions, as we shall see later in this book.

CHAPTER TWO

The Birth and Education of Vincent de Paul

On Easter Tuesday 1576, Vincent de Paul came into the world in the small town of Pouy <Ftn: This village is now known as Saint Vincent de Paul. A royal ordinance of December 3, 1828, authorized the change of name.> near Dax, <Ftn: The ancient diocese of Dax was suppressed by the Concordat of 1801 and attached to that of Aire.> an episcopal city in the Landes of Bordeaux near the Pyrenees. <Ftn: If one accepts the date of 1580 as the correct year for the saint's birth, his birthday was April 5, the feast of Saint Vincent Ferrer; if 1581, it was March 28. By Abelly's reckoning, it was April 24.> Within the bounds of this parish is a chapel dedicated to the Most Blessed Virgin under the title Our Lady of Buglose. <Ftn: The Blessed Virgin has been honored at this place of pilgrimage since ancient times. There was, however, no chapel at Buglose in the saint's childhood. According to legend, at the time of the Wars of Religion, the chapel was burned and the local Catholics are said to have protected the statue by hiding it in a nearby bog. Then, in 1620 a farmer came upon one of his cattle licking the mud from the statue. The pilgrimage probably dates from this year. The chapel was confided to the Congregation in 1706, where the priests established a missionary center to evangelize the surrounding districts. It did so until the French Revolution.> It ordinarily attracted a large gathering of the faithful who would offer their homage and prayers to the Mother of God. This undoubtedly was one of the reasons which led Vincent de Paul from his tenderest years to conceive and nurture a special devotion to the Queen of Heaven. He had been born in a place dedicated to her and under her special protection.

His parents were poor in worldly goods and lived from their work. His father was Jean de Paul, his mother Bertrande de Moras. <Ftn: Collet mistakenly referred to Vincent's father as Guillaume. *Vie*, I:5; this is the original edition, cited in this work.> Both lived beyond reproach, in innocence and rectitude. They owned a house and some small pieces of property they had inherited, which they developed with the help of their six children. <Ftn: This house, named Ranquine, was preserved and became a place of pilgrimage. Transferred a short distance from its original site, it has been reconstructed several times using such original materials as existed to restore it to its original appearance. In the nineteenth century, the Berceau ("cradle") was established as a pilgrimage site and a center for Vincentian works of charity.> These were four boys and two girls. Vincent

was the third oldest and, like the others, began his working career as a guardian of the family animals.

It seems as though God wished to raise upon this humble origin the building which was to become so remarkable, that is, the virtuous soul of his faithful servant. As Saint Augustine says so well, "whoever would be great before God should begin by a profound repudiation of his own self. The more he plans to raise an edifice of virtue the deeper must be the foundation of his humility." <Ftn: PL 38:441, 2.> So it happened that in his later positions of some consequence or amid the tributes to his virtue and accomplishments, Vincent de Paul usually responded that he was merely a poor peasant's son, who had watched over swine, etc. <Ftn: See also Book Three, ch. 13, sect. 1; also *CED* II:3, 171; IV:215; V:394; VIII:138; IX:81, 673; X:342; XII:432.> What a sign of real virtue to recall his humble beginnings amid recognition and praise! Saint Bernard had good reason to say that it is a rare treat to find a humble man exalted. <Ftn: In Cant. *Magna prorsus et rara virtus, humilitas honorata*. Homily on *Missus est*, or in *laudibus Virginis Mariae*; references from Brepols: 4-55-6-9-Miss-4; homily 4, parag. 9.> Few attain the degree of perfection that they seek out humiliation at the very moment honors rain down on them.

Pearls develop in an unlikely and often soiled surroundings, but even so they do not lose their brightness by being in the mire. This serves only to heighten their luster and emphasize their true worth. The vivacity of spirit with which God had endowed the young Vincent began to appear and was the more noticeable in such surroundings. His father soon realized that this child was destined for other things than pasturing animals. He planned therefore to send him to school, encouraged by his acquaintance with a prior in the neighborhood. This man was from a humble family like himself, but it was known that he supported members of his family from the revenues of a benefice he enjoyed. In his simplicity the father imagined that with a little schooling Vincent too might receive a benefice, and while serving the Church might help to support his family. The thoughts of men are not always the same as those of God, as one of the prophets reminds us, and his designs are above all our imaginings. <Ftn: Isa 55:8-9.> The father of the young Vincent thought only of the petty advantages his son might win for the family, while in God's design Vincent was to do great good for the entire Church. The parents were to be left in their lowliness and poverty, while Vincent worked solely to advance the building up the kingdom of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Apropos of this subject, Vincent years later once received a visit in Paris from a priest of his native region. He pointed

out the poor circumstances of the de Paul family and asked if Vincent could not do something for them. Vincent inquired if they lived by their own labor and in keeping with their social status. After receiving the reply, yes, they did, he thanked his visitor for his concern but recalled the case of the prior spoken of earlier. This clergyman had spent a good part of the revenues of his benefice to support his parents, but they largely dissipated this help both during the lifetime of their son and after his death. They fell into a worse state than before, for, as Vincent recalled: "In vain do they labor who build the house, if the Lord does not build it." <Ftn: Ps 127:1.> He cited this example to prove what he had often observed, that families are often ruined by the help received from their clerical relatives who gave them money at the expense of the Church. These priests did more harm than good. The money they gave was in reality the dowry of the poor, which sooner or later God would take back from them.

His refusal on this occasion to help his family did not suggest a hard heart or a lack of filial affection. It revealed only his uprightness and pure intention, the soul of all his actions. He ever walked on the straight path that leads to God, without turning aside for any consideration whatsoever. Moreover he had a tender heart for the sufferings of his neighbor and was quick to help them as much as he could. He could say with the ancient patriarch that "mercy had been born with him." <Ftn: Job 31:18.> He had a particular inclination towards this virtue even from his earliest years. It was noticed that he gave what he could to the poor. Whenever his father sent him to the mill to collect the flour, and he met a poor person along the way and had nothing else to give, he would open the sack and give the poor man handfuls of flour. We are told that his father, a good man, would not object to this. Another time, when about twelve or thirteen years old, he had saved some thirty sous from different jobs. At the time, and in the country district where money was scarce, this was regarded as no small sum. However, upon meeting a poor destitute person along the road, he felt moved with compassion and gave away every bit of his small treasure. If we pay close attention to what attracts young people, we can form a judgment about their future dispositions. In Vincent's case we can predict a great and perfect detachment from the things of this world and, by the grace of God, an eminent degree of charity.

CHAPTER THREE

Studies and Promotion to the Clerical State

The favorable disposition of soul of the young Vincent and his obvious inclination to the good moved his father to send him for schooling to the extent his meager resources would allow. In keeping with this resolution he sent him to the Franciscan fathers of Dax, at a yearly fee of sixty *livres*, according to the custom of the time. Around 1588 he began to study the elements of Latin. He progressed so well that four years later <Ftn: Coste reckons that he could not have spent more than two years in Dax. *Life* I:15. Saint Vincent said that he remained in the fields until about age fifteen (*CED* IX:81), consequently he must have begun his studies between 1592 and 1595, depending on his birth date.> Monsieur de Comet the elder, lawyer of the city of Dax and judge of Pouy, took him under his patronage on the recommendation of the Father Guardian. He developed an appreciation for him and invited him into his own home as tutor for his children. As teacher and guardian of the children, Vincent could earn enough to continue his studies without being a further charge upon his father. He spent nine years at his studies in Dax. At the end of this, his patron Monsieur de Comet, a man of merit and piety, was satisfied with the service the young Vincent had rendered to his children. He had also edified the entire family by his wise and virtuous deportment, so far beyond his years. For this reason, Monsieur de Comet thought it was time for a change. <Ftn: Monsieur de Comet (or Commet) the elder, an attorney at the Presidial Court of Dax and a judge of Pouy, together with his brother, deserves the credit for discerning the capabilities of the young Vincent. Up to the day of his departure for the University of Toulouse, Vincent allowed himself to be guided by the Comets who, to increase his slim resources, entrusted to him a tutorship in their own family. It must not be said, however, as did the Jansenist Martin de Barcos, that Saint Vincent de Paul received Holy Orders without a vocation so as not to upset his two benefactors. See Martin de Barcos, *Défense de feu Monsieur Vincent de Paul. . . contre les faux discours du livre de sa vie publiée par M. Abelly, ancien évêque de Rodez, et contre les impostures de quelques autres écrits sur ce sujet*, 1666, 87.>

The light must no longer be kept under a bushel basket but must be placed upon a candlestick to light up the entire Church. He persuaded Vincent de Paul, who respected him deeply and looked upon him as a second father, to give himself totally to God as a cleric. Therefore he received the tonsure and the four

minor orders, on September 19, 1596, at the age of twenty. <Ftn: The correct date is December 20, 1596. This ceremony was conducted by Salvat Diharse, bishop of Tarbes, in the collegiate church at Bidache in the diocese of Dax. At that time, the see of Dax was vacant. By modern chronology, Vincent was only fifteen or sixteen years old. The same bishop conferred subdiaconate and diaconate upon Vincent since Dax was still vacant at the time of the subdiaconate, and the bishop, Jean-Jacques du Sault, although appointed, had not reached his diocese at the time of the saint's ordination as a deacon. CED XIII:1-2.>

Now that he was a cleric he took God as his only portion. He left his native area never to return. With his father's blessing and with a small gift from him (the result of a sale of a pair of oxen,) he set off for Toulouse. There he would remain for seven years to study theology. He also spent some time in Spain to complete his studies at Saragossa. <Ftn: The time spent in Spain must have been brief. Roman, *Biografía* 50, n. 25.>

On February 22 and December 29, 1598, he received the orders of subdeacon and deacon, and finally, on September 23, 1600, he was ordained to the priesthood. <Ftn: The correct dates are September 19 and December 19. CED XIII:4-5. He was ordained to the priesthood by Francois de Bourdeilles, bishop of Perigueux, at Chateau-l'Eveque, one month before his death, October 24. Vincent's own bishop had not taken up residence in his diocese at that date.> Since he lived until September 27, 1660, he was a priest of the Church of Jesus Christ for more than sixty years. God alone knows his dispositions on the occasion of his ordination when he received the sacred character of the priesthood. We can judge the tree by its fruit and the cause by its effects. Thus, in view of the perfection and sanctity with which this worthy priest did his duties, we can rightly conclude that at the moment he was consecrated, our Savior Jesus Christ the Eternal Priest and Prince of Priests poured out upon him the fullness of his own priestly spirit. He was so filled with this spirit that he always spoke of the sacred character of the priesthood with great reverence, as something which could never be appreciated enough. He was moved to astonishment when he spoke of God's marvelous power. It imprinted an indelible mark upon the soul of the priest, bestowed the power to forgive sins, and with four or five words empowered him to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The priest offered this body and blood in sacrifice to the Father and gave the body of Jesus Christ as the bread of life to nourish the faithful. He was convinced of the great excellence of the priestly character and the obligation of

those who received it to lead a pure, holy, and angelic life. This was such that he was often heard later to say that, had he not already been ordained a priest, he would not deem himself worthy to become one. <Ftn: See *CED* V:568, VII:463.> The more deserving he became, the less worthy he judged himself. None deserves advancement to the first places in the nuptial feast of the Lamb so much as the one who puts himself in the lowest.

When or where he celebrated his first mass is unknown. He later was heard to say that his respect for the majesty of this holy action was so great that he trembled before celebrating. He did not have the courage to offer his first mass publicly. He preferred to offer it in a remote private chapel, attended only by another priest and a server. <Ftn: Although we do not know the date of his first mass, there is little doubt that he celebrated at least one of his first masses in the pilgrimage chapel of Our Lady of Grace near the village of Buzet-sur-Tarn. Another candidate is Our Lady of Remoulle, now destroyed, but whose altar was removed to Our Lady of Grace.>

At the instigation of Monsieur de Comet who had such a great appreciation of his reputation, the vicars-general of Dax, since the see was vacant, no sooner learned of his ordination than they invited him to accept the pastorate of the place called Tilh. <Ftn: 1600. The see was not vacant, since the bishop had been appointed in 1598.> Another candidate contested the appointment and appealed to the court of Rome. Monsieur Vincent preferred not to enter into a lawsuit over this matter. God permitted this to come about to allow him to continue his studies, which he was anxious to do. <Ftn: It appears that Saint Vincent made a journey to Rome at this time, in 1600 or 1601. *CED* I:114-15.>

By now, his father had been dead for two years, but his will provided for Vincent's education. After seeing to the welfare of the other children, the will stipulated that Vincent should be helped by the remainder of the estate. This could have given him a legitimate claim on his family, but he did not wish to burden them. He saw that he could not support himself in Toulouse, so he decided to accept a tutoring position in the village of Buzet, four leagues from the town. <Ftn: Buzet-sur-Tarn was at the time a town of some importance with a gothic church and a fortified castle. It is located some twenty kilometers northeast of Toulouse.> Some gentlemen of the region had Vincent take care of their children. Some students even came from Toulouse to be under his care and instruction, as we learn from a letter he wrote his mother. <Ftn: This letter is no longer extant.> Because of the great care he gave to the instruction and good education of the children, he was able to

return to Toulouse a short time later. With the consent of the parents, he brought the group of students back to the city, enabling him to continue his studies in theology at the university.

A public record attests that he completed his study after seven years. A document shows that in October [12] of 1604 he received the Bachelor of Theology degree from the university. This record is signed by the Augustinian priest, Esprit Larran, Doctor Regent in Theology, by his secretary Assolens, and sealed. Another document of the same month, signed by Andre Gallus, Doctor Regent and rector of the university, by the secretary Assolens, and sealed, attests to the same degree.

By this degree Vincent received authorization to explain and teach the second Book of the Sentences within the university. <Ftn: The standard theology textbook, composed by Peter Lombard, later bishop of Paris, where he died in 1160. The "sentences" or opinions of the Fathers were applied to individual theological questions. The second book deals with creation and what relates to it.> Still another document of the same year, signed and sealed by the chancellor of the university, Monsieur Coelmez, and by de Soffores, treasurer, mention the same facts. Members of his Congregation found all three of these documents among Vincent's papers after his death. The priests had been completely unaware of their existence during his lifetime. If we count up the time since he left his native place, he spent more than sixteen years in studies, first at the town of Dax and later at the University of Toulouse. <Ftn: More careful reckoning shows that the time spent in studies was less, between nine and twelve years, depending on one's starting point.>

He was not one of those puffed up by the little they know. On the contrary, he strove to hide what he had acquired. Out of an extraordinary sense of humility, he tried to persuade others that he had little education. He called himself a poor scholar of the fourth class to convey a poor impression of his education. <Ftn: See *CED* XII:135, 293. By this expression, he implied that he had not finished his secondary education.> Saying this he did not offend against the truth, for indeed he had passed through the fourth class, but it was an artifice of the virtue of humility. He maintained silence about his later studies. <Ftn: After the saint's death, his confreres found the papers for his bachelor of theology, received at the University of Toulouse, and those for the licentiate in canon law, conferred by the University of Paris. He had received this degree at least by 1624. *CED* XIII:60, n.1.> On those occasions when in the interest of truth or of charity he was forced to

speaking up and revealing that he was not ignorant of the matter at hand, he still was happiest when others judged that he had no training in formal education. He acted in this way to destroy pride, which leads most men to pass themselves off as knowing as much as anyone else or, even more, regardless of how uninformed they are.

Despite his academic background, Vincent de Paul took as his motto the words of the holy apostle: "I count all things as loss except the knowledge of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified." <Ftn: 1 Cor 2:2.> Here was his book of true learning and highest wisdom. This was the one book always open before the eyes of his soul. He drew from it knowledge and light surpassing what he might have gained from the other good and holy sources he had encountered in his years of study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Vincent de Paul is Captured by Pirates and Taken to Barbary

During all the years Vincent de Paul devoted to his studies, either in Dax or at the University of Toulouse, he acted with such modesty and wisdom that he spread the good odor of his virtues everywhere. He was esteemed and loved by all who came in contact with him. He was particularly devoted to the young students he supervised, not only teaching them well but likewise giving them a strong taste for Christian piety. His reputation in Toulouse was so well founded that his boarding school became popular. We have testimony from a long-time and dear friend, Monsieur de Saint-Martin, canon of Dax, who survived him, that at that time there was some hope that he might be made a bishop. The initiative for this came from the Duke d'Epemon, who had two close relatives among his students. <Ftn: They were the two grandnephews of the Duke d'Epemon, Jean Louis de Nogaret de la Vallette, (1554-1642) the heroic grand master of the order of Saint John of Jerusalem. The duke became powerful at court in the last years of Henry IV, and especially during the regency of Marie de Medici. He became governor of Guienne only in 1622, but often lived in his chateau at Cadillac near Bordeaux.> At the beginning of 1605 Vincent traveled to Bordeaux for reasons we do not know, but we have some right to think might have been about the bishopric. In one of the letters he wrote at this time we read, "I have undertaken a costly matter which I can hardly mention without trembling." <Ftn: CED I:1-13.>

Upon returning to Toulouse he learned that a friend who admired his virtuous life had died, leaving him the beneficiary of a will. This entailed spending some time to acquire the legacy. After looking into the matter he discovered that a man who had borrowed four or five hundred *ecus* from the dead person had fled to Marseilles to avoid paying the debt. Vincent went to Marseilles to pursue the man. He succeeded in working out a settlement of three hundred *ecus*. Since it was now July 1605, he proposed to return to Toulouse by land. A gentleman from Languedoc he had met in an inn suggested, however, that he join him in traveling by ship to Narbonne. Vincent was easily persuaded, for the weather was good and the sea voyage would greatly cut down on his travel.

According to the ordinary standards of the world, we might say this was a foolhardy decision. If we look at things with the clear light of faith, we must say, on the contrary, that it was a happy event in the accomplishment of God's designs upon him.

Let us listen to Vincent himself as he describes what happened. He did so in a letter written from Avignon after his escape from captivity, dated July 24, 1607, to Monsieur de Comet, the younger. His father had died of the plague some time before. <Ftn: This entire account of the captivity has been much debated as to its historical reliability. Abelly's account differs in numerous details from the original text.>

I set out by ship for Narbonne, to save time and money, but, to say it better, never to be there and to lose everything I had. The wind was favorable, and we should have reached Narbonne that same day (since it is but fifty leagues away) if God had not allowed three Turkish brigantines <Ftn: These ships were at that time small, decked craft, rigged with only one sail, and having eight to sixteen benches, each for a single oarsman. The oars were wide and flat. CED I:3.> patrolling the Gulf of Lyons in search of small ships coming from the fair at Beaucaire, <Ftn: Beaucaire was the central market for goods coming from the East. The fair opened each year on July 22 and brought to that city countless boats from Marseilles, Sete, Aigues-Mortes and elsewhere. At the time of their departure, the boats that were headed for the open sea formed their own escort or had themselves accompanied by galleys for protection in case of attack. The pirates from the east and from Barbary lay in wait for them, posted on watch all along the coast, no far from the mouths of the Rhone.> one of the best in Christendom, to attack us. They pressed their attack so vigorously that two or three of our party were killed, and everyone else injured. I myself was struck by an arrow, which will ever be my time-piece for the rest of my life. We were obliged to yield to the pirates. They immediately in their rage hacked our captain into a thousand pieces for having killed one of the leaders, besides four or five of their convicts. They chained us afterwards and, after having crudely dressed our wounds, continued their sweep of the gulf. They captured countless others, but after robbing them set them free if they had surrendered without a fight. Finally loaded with stolen goods, after seven or eight days they returned to Barbary, lair of the disreputable robbers unacknowledged by the Grand Turk. <Ftn: The sultan or emperor of the Ottoman empire, who resided in Turkey and ruled the far flung areas of the empire through beys and other officials.> Upon arrival

we were put up for sale, with a written report of our capture saying that we had been taken from a Spanish ship. This lie sought to prevent our being freed by the king's consul, who looked after French commercial interests there. <Ftn: Treaties of 1534, 1569, 1581, and 1604 stipulated that the Barbary pirates would respect the freedom of French trade.>

As to our sale, we were first stripped, then given a pair of shorts, a linen jacket, and a cap, and then paraded through the streets of Tunis, there to be sold. After we had been taken in chains five or six times around the city, they brought us back to the boat so that buyers could come and inspect us. They looked to see if we could eat or if we had recovered from our wounds. Next they brought us to the city square, where the buyers came just as they do for buying horses or cattle. They made us open our mouths to show our teeth, rapped our sides, checked our wounds, made us walk, trot, and run, lift boxes, and wrestle to judge each one's strength, and a thousand other indignities.

I was sold to a fisherman, but he was soon obliged to get rid of me because I found nothing so repugnant as the sea. He in turn sold me to an old doctor of alchemy, a student of quintessences. He was a kindly and reasonable man, who told me that he had been searching for the philosopher's stone for fifty years. <Ftn: Abelly here omits several details about Saint Vincent's knowledge of alchemy. The "doctor of quintessences," literally a Spagyrite, explained the organic changes of the human body in health and in sickness as the chemists of their day explained those of the inorganic realms. Paracelsus invented the word, and founded this school of thought in the sixteenth century.> He liked me very much and taught me some of the secrets of alchemy and then his religious beliefs. He used all his efforts to convert me, promising to enrich me and to teach me all he knew. God inspired in me a sure hope that I would be freed because of my earnest prayers and the care of the Virgin Mary, by whose intercession I firmly believe I was restored to liberty. The hope and even firm belief that I had of seeing you again, Monsieur, made me pay close attention to my owner's instruction about how to cure the plague, for every day I saw the marvelous cures he wrought. He taught me all this and even had me prepare

and administer the medications. How many times I wished that I had been captured and enslaved before the death of your brother! In that case I feel that I would have learned the secrets of this disease, and he would have escaped death at its cruel hands.

I was with this aged man from September 1605 to the middle of August 1606, when he was captured and taken for the service of the sultan. This did not happen, however, since he died on the way. I was left to his nephew, a man who attributed human form to God. He resold me soon after his uncle's death. He had heard that the ambassador to the Turks, Monsieur de Breves, was on his way with letters from the Great Sultan <Ftn: Ahmed I, died 1617.> to free the Christian slaves. <Ftn: Francois Savary, marquis de Breves, was one of the most able negotiators in the reigns of Henry IV and Louis XIII. His arrival was the result of a treaty advantageous to France, signed with the Great Sultan, May 20, 1604. He left with only seventy-two slaves.>

A renegade from Nice in Savoy bought me. <Ftn: Renegades were numerous, recruited from among slaves or from foreigners who had come to Barbary to escape their creditors. Those who embraced Islam were freed of all debts. Converted slaves had more freedom than others and were treated less harshly. The most fearsome captains were almost all renegades. Once they had made their fortunes, they enjoyed them in sumptuous palaces. It appears from seventeenth-century spelling that "Nice" may refer to Nocy or Annecy.> He took me to his farm which he held as a tenant farmer to the great lord, for there no one owns anything. Everything belongs to the Sultan. His farm was in the mountains, in an extremely hot and dry country. One of his three wives was a Greek Christian, but orthodox. A second was a Moslem. She turned out to be the instrument of God's immense mercy to recall her husband from apostasy and return him to the bosom of the Church and to rescue me from my slavery.

She was curious to know how we Christians lived. She came every day to the fields where I was digging to speak with me. Once she asked me to sing one of our hymns in praise of our God. The memory of *Quomodo cantabimus in terra aliena* ["How will we sing in a foreign land?"] of the children of Israel captive in Babylon brought tears to my eyes, so I began to sing

the Psalm *Super flumina Babylonis* ["at the rivers of Babylon"], <Ftn: Ps 137:1-4.> and then the *Salve Regina* ["Hail Holy Queen"] and several other songs. She was so pleased, it was astonishing. She spoke in the evening to her husband. She told him that he was wrong to leave such a religion as I had explained in telling her of our God and in singing several hymns for her. She said that she had felt such pleasure in my account that she believed that the paradise of her fathers could not be as glorious or accompanied with such joy as she had experienced when she heard me praise the Lord. She thought there was something marvelous in all this.

This woman, like another Caiaphas or Balaam's ass, was so persuasive in her speech that the next day her husband told me that he was awaiting an opportunity to sail to France with some merchandise. <Ftn: The original text is more vivid: "This other Caiaphas or Balaam's ass. . . ."> He said also that in a few days a remedy to my situation would make me praise God. These few days lasted ten months, during which he sustained my hopes until finally we sailed in a small skiff, landing on June 28 at Aigues-Mortes and later at Avignon. Here the vice-legate <Ftn: Pietro Francesco Montorio (or Montoro), 1558-1643.> publicly received the recantation of the renegade. With tears in his eyes and a sob in his voice, he was reconciled to God in the Church of Saint Peter, to the honor of God and the edification of all present. The vice-legate kept us both with him for some time. Then he directed us to Rome, where he promised to come as soon as his own successor <Ftn: Joseph Ferreri, archbishop of Urbino.> arrived in Avignon. He promised the penitent that he would help him to enter the austere order of the *Fate ben Fratelli*. He did so some time later. <Ftn: The "Do-good Brothers," a popular name in Italy for the Brothers of Saint John of God, taken from the formula, "Do good," used by the founder and the brothers to beg alms.>

Up to now we have been quoting the words of Monsieur Vincent in a letter written from Avignon. A gentleman of Dax, <Ftn: Cesar Saint-Martin d'Agès.> nephew of Monsieur de Saint-Martin, found it by chance in 1658, fifty years after it had been penned. He gave it to his uncle Saint-Martin, and he sent a copy to Monsieur Vincent. He thought that he would be glad to read of his former adventures and in his old age see his younger

self. As soon as Vincent read the letter he threw it into the fire. Soon after he wrote to thank Monsieur de Saint-Martin for having sent the copy but asked if he would send the original as well. Later, only six months before his death, he sent another and more urgent appeal for the original. <Ftn: *CED VIII:271-72.*> His secretary slipped in a note with this appeal. <Ftn: Brother Bertrand Ducournau. For this letter, *CED VIII:513-15.*> He suggested that Monsieur Vincent would probably burn the original as he had the copy. He further suggested that Monsieur de Saint-Martin send the original but addressed to someone other than Monsieur Vincent to keep it from being lost. He did so, sending it to a priest of the Congregation who at the time was superior of the seminary connected with the College des Bons Enfants at Paris. This letter was thus preserved without Monsieur Vincent ever having found out the pious deception. Otherwise we would certainly never have found out about these days of his slavery. This servant of God made strenuous efforts to conceal the graces and gifts he had received from God and all that he had accomplished for his glory and in his service. All who knew him well recognized this trait in him, and it is hard to believe to what lengths he would go to avoid honor. So true is this that in this present book we can read only what his humility was unsuccessful in hiding from sight. If on some special occasions his charity obliged him to reveal some small detail of his past, he did so with extreme reluctance. Even afterwards he would beg pardon of his audience for having spoken of himself. When it was possible to speak in the third person without obviously referring to himself, he did so adroitly.

Besides all the facets of his stay among the infidels, such as his constancy and firmness in professing the faith of Jesus Christ, his perfect confidence in the divine Goodness in the midst of total abandonment by others, his fidelity to his self-imposed regime of pious exercises, his devotion to the most holy Virgin among the impious of Barbary, his gift of touching the hardest hearts and inspiring respect and affection for our holy religion in the minds of those deeply opposed, and for his other virtues and gifts of God which appeared during his forced exile, all of which we leave for readers to reflect on to their own edification, two particular points remain which merit our closest attention.

The first is Monsieur Vincent's extraordinary virtue which moved him to suppress all knowledge he had acquired from the doctor of alchemy of the secrets of nature and art during his year as his slave. We are aware of how much he picked up from the letter to Monsieur de Comet, quoted above, which even then is only an extract of the full letter. The same information is

contained in a second letter he wrote after arriving in Rome. <Ftn: Dated February 20, 1608; *CED* I:13-17. His arrival in Rome was October 30, 1607.> Had he wished he could doubtless have found many opportunities to use his skill, for many unusual types were to be found in that great city. He could have gained great personal advantage from making use of his knowledge when he was in great financial need, but he felt it unworthy of a priest of Jesus Christ. Not only did he not use this art, but even more remarkably, after his return to France from Rome he was never heard to say a single word about this, either to those of his own Congregation or to any of his closest friends. Furthermore, he never spoke about any of the events of his forced stay in Barbary. He had hundreds and hundreds of occasions to do so, since he had taken on the care of the slaves. He was heard to speak about some of the more humiliating events of his life, but nothing of his stay in Tunis, for in some way these events would turn to his own praise.

The second thing to consider in the slavery of Monsieur Vincent is his spirit of compassion towards the poor Christians whom he saw languishing miserably in irons under the barbarian yoke, bereft of consolation or help, either bodily or spiritual. They were subject to great cruelty, unbearable forced labor, and what is worse, exposed to the danger of losing their faith and their salvation. God so willed it to engrave this sorrowful sight on his soul that one day, in other circumstances, he might help these poor abandoned slaves. He was later able to do this by sending some of his missionaries to Tunis and Algiers. They were to comfort, strengthen, and encourage them, to administer the sacraments, and to provide all sorts of services and help to both body and soul, and to help them experience to some degree in their pains and in their irons the infinite care and mercy of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

Monsieur Vincent's Return to France; His First Stay in Paris

Monsieur Vincent stayed in Rome until the end of 1608 at the kindness of the vice-legate, who gave him board and lodging. He wrote thirty years later to one of the priests of the Congregation in Rome: <Ftn: Francis du Coudray. Letter dated July 20, 1631. In this letter he wrote "thirty years ago, when I was in Rome." These words indicate that the saint's first trip to Rome took place around 1600 after his ordination, on the occasion of the jubilee year. See also references in his conferences to the Daughters of Charity of his having seen Clement VIII, who died March 5, 1606. Conferences of May 30 1647 (*CED IX:316-17*), and of September 19, 1649 (*CED IX:468*).> "I was pleased to find myself in the city, the center of Christianity, the home of the head of the Church militant, burial place of Saints Peter and Paul and so many other martyrs and saintly persons who shed their blood and spent their lives for Jesus Christ. I felt privileged to walk where so many great saints had trod before me. This grace moved me to tears."

These sentiments of spiritual consolation did not diminish his love of learning. The pains and troubles he had experienced did not interfere with his efforts to refresh the theological learning he had acquired at the University of Toulouse. While in Rome the vice-legate introduced him to Cardinal d'Ossat. The cardinal met with Monsieur Vincent several times, and came to have a positive opinion about the qualities of Monsieur Vincent. He so impressed the cardinal that he selected him to bear a secret communication to King Henry IV, which did not permit of taking the risk of a written letter. He could find no one more trustworthy than Monsieur Vincent to deliver the message verbally to the king. The cardinal had complete trust in his fidelity and discretion.<Ftn: This mission probably never took place, as the cardinal died March 13, 1604, four years before Vincent's move to Paris. In his second edition of 1667, Abelly rewrote this passage as follows: "During his stay in Rome, the vice legate discovered more and more the excellent qualities of his spirit, and he had him [Monsieur Vincent] introduced to several highly-placed persons, from whose favor he could in the future receive considerable worldly advancement. He also gave him [Monsieur Vincent] the opportunity, when he returned to Paris, to see King Henry IV on a secret matter which had been confided to him.">

On this occasion Monsieur Vincent showed once more his solid virtue and righteous spirit. He looked to God alone and

had no other objective but to please him alone and to render him his faithful and pleasing service. Once he had arrived in Paris, he had an open door to the monarch, known to be an excellent judge of character. In this circumstance Monsieur Vincent's prospects looked promising in a worldly sense, but he thought little of a situation that some others would have taken every possible step to bring about. Monsieur Vincent, in contrast, feared that the favor of an earthly king would obstruct the graces of the King of Heaven, to whose service he was absolutely committed. He resolved never to appear in court again. Once he had acquitted himself of his commission he withdrew, all the while keeping in his heart a sincere regard and resolve to obey and remain faithful to his prince. He left court and set about leading a truly clerical life, devoting himself completely to fulfilling the demands of his calling.

His first lodgings in Paris were in the faubourg Saint Germain, where he met some of the chief officers of the late Queen Marguerite. <Ftn: Marguerite de Valois, whose marriage to Henry IV the pope declared null. She died in 1615. Henry IV then married Marie de Medici. His name as one of her chaplains appears first in a document dated May 17, 1610, CED XIII:8.> Among these was Monsieur Dufresne, <Ftn: Charles Dufresne, Lord of Villeneuve.> secretary of Her Majesty, with whom he formed a close friendship because of the virtue and good qualities Monsieur Vincent saw in him. These qualities gained the notice of the de Gondi house, where Monsieur Dufresne became secretary. He later became steward of Emmanuel de Gondi, count of Joigny and general of the galleys of France. He said of Monsieur Vincent: "At that time Monsieur Vincent seemed humble, charitable and prudent, doing good to everyone. He was no trouble to anyone, circumspect in his words, ready to listen to others and never interrupting. He often visited the sick poor in the charity hospital, serving them and speaking with them."

During this first stay in Paris a curious incident occurred which God allowed to prove Monsieur Vincent's virtue. It became known only after his death, through the testimony of Monsieur de Saint-Martin, canon of Dax, who gave the following account. In 1609, while still living in the faubourg Saint Germain, he shared a room with a judge from the town of Sore, a village of the Landes, in the Bordeaux district. Monsieur Vincent was falsely accused of having stolen four hundred *ecus* from the judge.

The judge rose early one morning to take care of some business in the city but forgot to lock the cupboard where he had left his money. Monsieur Vincent remained in bed, indisposed, awaiting some medicine to be sent to him. Meanwhile,

the boy from the apothecary shop brought the medicine and, while looking for a glass, found the money in the cupboard. Without saying a word, of course, he put it in his pocket and left, verifying this maxim: opportunity makes the thief.

When the judge returned he was surprised not to find his money. Monsieur Vincent did not know what he was talking about except that he had not taken it nor seen anyone else take it. The judge furiously demanded restitution for his loss. He forced Monsieur Vincent to leave the apartment and spoke against him everywhere as a thief and a liar to anyone who knew him or had any contact with him. He knew that Monsieur Vincent was in the habit of consulting Father [Pierre] de Berulle. <Ftn: Saint Vincent must have met de Berulle in 1609 or 1610.> He was then superior general of the Congregation of the Priests of the Oratory and later became cardinal of the Holy Roman Church. The judge took the occasion one day to find Monsieur Vincent in Father de Berulle's company, together with several other distinguished guests. He publicly berated Monsieur Vincent, calling him a thief and formally serving a writ upon him, requiring him under threat of excommunication to testify before an ecclesiastical court. The man of God showed no resentment at this affront, took no great pains to justify himself, but said calmly, God knows the truth. Monsieur Vincent preserved his composure under this shameful attack, much to the edification of those present, who were struck by his self-control and humility.

But what was the outcome of this shabby affair? God allowed the boy who had stolen the money to be arrested some years later in Bordeaux for another crime. He came from that area and was known to the judge spoken of earlier. Stricken by remorse, the thief asked the judge to visit him in prison, where he admitted that he had taken the judge's money. He promised to make restitution, hoping that God would not punish him for this miserable crime. On the one hand, the judge was glad to get his money back, which he never expected to see again. On the other, however, he was chagrined to realize that he had calumniated such a worthy cleric as Monsieur Vincent. He immediately wrote to Monsieur Vincent, seeking pardon for his actions and asking him to send the pardon by letter. He went on to say, however, that if Monsieur Vincent refused to grant his request he would come to Paris in person. He would throw himself on his knees at the priest's feet and beg forgiveness with a rope around his neck.

We find a confirmation of this story in the report of a conference Monsieur Vincent gave at Saint Lazare on the question of how best to give and receive corrections. Among his

recommendations he referred to this episode in the third person, and not as something which had happened to him personally.

What he said in that conference is well worth considering. "If we are not guilty of the fault of which we are accused, remember that we have many other failings for which we should be ashamed. We should not attempt to justify ourselves, much less feel angry or resentful towards our accuser." He added:

I know of someone accused of having stolen some money from a friend. He replied simply that he had not taken it, but his friend continued to berate him. He then turned the other cheek, saying to God, "What shall I do, my God? You know the truth." With full confidence in God, then, he refused to reply further to the charges against him which went so far as a summons before the ecclesiastical court for stealing. By God's good pleasure, six years later, at a distance of one hundred and twenty leagues from here, the thief who took the money was found. See how God cares for those who abandon themselves to his Providence! The man admitted the evil he had done in his anger and calumny toward his former friend, and wrote to ask pardon. He said he was so sorry for his actions that he would gladly come in person to ask forgiveness on his knees. We must recognize, gentlemen and my brothers, that we are capable of all kinds of evil. We must leave to God the question of revealing the secrets of consciences. <Ftn: CED XI:337.>

CHAPTER SIX

Monsieur Vincent Appointed Pastor of Clichy Where he Serves as a Good Shepherd

Although Monsieur Vincent had resolved to devote himself completely to God and his service in the clerical state, false accusations served only as a goad for further progress. The good use he made of them drew down upon him new graces to help him still more to fulfill his good resolution. He realized that living among lay people, as he was obliged to do upon first coming to Paris, was not conducive to carrying out his God-given desire for the life of a clergyman. His reputation for virtue gave him an entree to the fathers of the Oratory, who kindly received him into their house. He had no intention of joining the community, as he himself later said. He wanted only to shut off social engagements and give himself a better opportunity to discern and follow God's designs for him. He was well aware that we are all blind in our own affairs. He knew, too, that the best way to know God's will is to have a visible guardian angel to lead us, that is, a wise and virtuous spiritual director to serve as a guide. As a result, he decided to choose such a person for himself. He selected the person who led this saintly community of the Oratory with such wisdom and blessings, Father de Berulle, <Ftn: Pierre de Berulle, 1575-1629, founder of the Oratory of France, and later named a cardinal by Pope Urban VIII. Despite his early support of Saint Vincent, he tried to prevent the approval of the Congregation of the Mission by the Roman Curia.> whose memory as we have already shown is held in the highest veneration. Monsieur Vincent opened his heart to him. This quickly made his guide, one of the most enlightened men of the century, see him as one destined by God for great deeds. He reportedly told Monsieur Vincent at that time that God would use him for a great service to the Church by establishing a new religious community of priests. They would have God's blessing upon them and produce much fruit. <Ftn: This testimony was given by De la Tour, the sixth general of the Oratory, in his letter to Clement XI supporting the canonization of Vincent de Paul.>

Monsieur Vincent remained around two years in this retreat, until Father Bourgoing, <Ftn: Francois Bourgoing, third superior general of the Oratory of France.> pastor of Clichy, decided to resign his charge and enter the Congregation of the Oratory. <Ftn: The foundation of the Oratory took place after Bourgoing's resignation.> As it turned out, he later was to become the superior general of this community. Father de Berulle prevailed

upon Monsieur Vincent to accept the care of the parish and begin his active work in the Lord's vineyard. By a spirit of obedience Monsieur Vincent accepted this post. <Ftn: May 2, 1612. *CED* XIII:17-18.> He was pleased to take on the humble position of pastor of a simple country place in preference to some of the more honorable opportunities available to him. Some two or three years earlier, the king, upon recommendation of Cardinal d'Ossat, <Ftn: Arnauld d'Ossat, who had negotiated the reconciliation of Henry IV with the Holy See.> had offered him the abbey of Saint Leonard de Chaume in the diocese of Maillezais, now La Rochelle. <Ftn: Saint Vincent held this abbey from June 10, 1610 to November 4, 1616. *CED* XIII:8-13.> In addition, Queen Marguerite had heard of his reputation for holiness and took him as her ordinary chaplain and added him to her official family. This humble servant of God preferred to renounce these honors. He chose rather, in imitation of the prophet, to live humbly in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of sinners. <Ftn: Ps 84:11.>

Once he had taken possession of his parish of Clichy <Ftn: Then a little parish located outside the city gates of Paris. *CED* XIII:41-43.> as pastor of the flock the Providence of God had confided to his care, he resolved to fulfill faithfully and carefully all the duties of this office. He strove to follow the norms of the sacred canons and in particular the directions of the last general council. As a good shepherd he made it his first care to know his flock, then to provide good pasturage for their souls, turning to God by prayer and sacrifice for the graces they needed. He broke the bread of truth for them by his sermons and his religious instruction. He led them to the fountain of grace by offering the sacraments and in every way possible offered them his help and consolation. This charitable pastor was ever occupied in advancing the welfare of his flock. He would visit the sick, console the sorrowing, help the poor, reconcile enemies, preserve peace and harmony in families, recall the lax to their duty, encourage the good, and in sum make himself all to all to gain all to Jesus Christ. Above all else his own example and his life of virtue was a constant sermon. This had such an effect that not only the people of Clichy but even some people from Paris with houses in the area respected him and regarded him as a saint. The neighboring pastors also developed an esteem and sense of confidence in him. They sought out his company to hear from him how best to fulfill their own functions and to carry out their duty as pastors. <Ftn: For the saint's testimony as to the happiness of his stay at Clichy, see *CED* IX:646.>

On one occasion he had to absent himself briefly from Clichy for some other duty. His assistant wrote to give an account of the parish, and then added, among other things, "The pastors of the neighboring areas anxiously desire your return. The people are equally anxious to have you come back. Hurry then, to take the lead of the flock you have set on the right path, for all await your presence."

A doctor of the University of Paris, a religious of a celebrated order who occasionally preached at Clichy, gave this testimony.

I rejoice that at the beginning of this happy institution of the Mission, I often heard the confession in the little town of Clichy of the one chosen by God to begin that small spring which has since watered the garden of the Church. It has turned into a flood, a thousand times more fruitful than the mighty Nile in this spiritual Egypt. While he laid the foundations of such a great, holy, and sanctifying work, I offered to preach to these good people of Clichy, whose pastor he was. I found them living like angels, so much so that I felt as though I was attempting to bring a candle to the sun.

The praise of this doctor for the flock shows the vigilance and zeal of their pastor and his care for their instruction and their formation in the virtues and other practices of a truly Christian life.

At the beginning of his tenure as pastor he found the church itself in poor condition and the vestments and sacred ornaments unsuitable for divine service. He carried out a plan for restoration. <Ftn: This section of the church still stands.> It was completed, it must be said, not at his own expense or even at the expense of the parishioners. He himself was poor and gave all his assets to those in need, and the people were not too well off either. Some of his friends in Paris helped him. They were glad to help him carry out his plans.

He saw to the establishment of the Confraternity of the Rosary in the parish as well, so that by the time he left he had rebuilt and refurbished the church, leaving it in a very good condition. <Ftn: This confraternity required its members to give alms, and the saint's experience of this could well have influenced his foundation of the Confraternity of Charity in Chatillon.> Besides, he left it purely and simply, without taking anything for himself, in the hands of a worthy successor, Monsieur [Jean] Souillard. <Ftn: Monsieur Vincent did not give up the parish completely for another nine years, in 1626, all the time receiving a pension from his successor. The record of

the pastoral visitation by the archbishop, dated October 9, 1624, lists Master Vincent Pol [*sic*] as pastor. (See *Annales CM* 94 (1929):729-30.)> Among his other parochial duties, the new pastor instructed several young clerics sent to him by Monsieur Vincent and prepared them to be faithful servants of the Church.

CHAPTER SEVEN

His Associations with the de Gondi House

Around 1613 Father de Berulle suggested that Monsieur Vincent accept the position of tutor to the children of Emmanuel de Gondi, count of Joigny and general of the galleys of France, <Ftn: Philip Emmanuel de Gondi had distinguished himself by his intrigues during the Fronde. When he became a widower, he joined the Congregation of the Oratory. He died in Joigny, June 29, 1662.> and of his wife, Dame Francoise Marguerite de Silly, a woman of excellent reputation. <Ftn: 1580-1625.> She was all the more praiseworthy because at that time piety was a rare possession among members of the court. The choice of Monsieur Vincent for this position was no small proof of the judgment of the first superior general of the Oratory about his merit and his good qualities of mind, for he was going to one of the most pious and most illustrious houses of the kingdom. Three young princes of great promise were confided to his care and instruction. The oldest was the duke and peer of the realm. The second later became a cardinal in the Church. The third, gifted in mind and body, God called prematurely from this world at the age of ten or eleven years to receive in heaven a more wonderful inheritance than he would have received on earth. <Ftn: The eldest son was Pierre de Gondi, who became the Duke de Retz, and succeeded his father as the captain general of the galleys. The middle son was Jean-Francois, later the second Cardinal de Retz, and the youngest, Henri, who died in a hunting accident.>

Monsieur Vincent spent twelve years in this illustrious household. <Ftn: His first stay can be dated from September 1613 to July 1617, when he left for Chatillon-les-Dombes. Abelly is probably counting the period from 1613 to March 1, 1624, when Monsieur Vincent was named the principal of the College des Bons Enfants.> He conducted himself with such wisdom, moderation, and reserve that he won the esteem and affection of all with whom he came in contact. He never came into the presence of the general or of Madame unless sent for. He did not meddle in anything not directly connected with his responsibility. Outside the time devoted to the care or instruction of the three princes, he lived in this busy house as in a Carthusian monastery. He went to his room as though it were a cell and did not come out unless called for or unless charity dictated that he do otherwise. He adopted the maxim that the only way to appear in public amid the moral dangers so prevalent in the great city of Paris without danger to his soul was to remain in retirement and silence unless called upon by charity to go out or to speak. When called

to offer some service to the neighbor for the good of his soul, however, he voluntarily left his cloister. On these occasions he acted with great charity to do for them all the good he could. He settled disputes and dissensions, promoted union and concord among the house servants, visited them in their rooms when they fell ill and provided the most minute services for them on these occasions. When the major feasts of the Church approached he gathered the domestic help for religious instruction, especially in regard to the reception of the sacraments. He used to slip in topics of some significance at table to forestall useless conversations. When Monsieur or Madame would go with their children to their holdings in Joigny, Montmirail, Villepreux, or elsewhere, his singular pleasure was to use his free time in providing religious instruction for the peasants. He would preach to the people, give exhortations, or administer the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of penance, with the bishop's approval and with the agreement of the local pastors.

His manner of acting was so prudent and virtuous that he soon gained the affection of all who came in contact with him. Madame especially was so taken with his modesty, discretion, and charity that after one or two years in her service she decided to have him as her spiritual director. She requested Father de Berulle to intercede for her to have this wise and virtuous priest direct her conscience and offer advice in her Christian living. Out of respect for his own spiritual guide whom he held in such veneration, Monsieur Vincent accepted this new responsibility but with much confusion, caused by his own humility of spirit.

This virtuous lady deeply loved promoting goodness in her family and in her subjects, and was moved at the grace of God which had given her a priest who was all she could hope for as a spiritual guide. Besides the other sterling qualities she recognized in him, his wisdom and charity were so evident that she could in all confidence place herself under his direction.

To understand better Monsieur Vincent's way of acting during the time he was committed to this illustrious house we must allow him to speak for himself. He did so on two occasions. On the first he used the third person in a conference he gave to some clergymen assembled at Saint Lazare when he spoke of the manner of best fulfilling the office of chaplain in noble houses. He said, among other things:

I know a person who gained much for himself and others as well in the service of a noble lord by looking upon him always as though he were Jesus Christ himself, and seeing the holy Virgin in his wife. This resulted in his retaining always a reserve and a

modesty in all his words and actions. This earned the affection of the lord and his lady, and even the domestics, and provided the basis for much good that was done in the family.

The second time he spoke more openly to a young Parisian lawyer, a man both learned and pious, who was considering joining the house of Retz as steward. <Ftn: Martin Husson joined the household in 1650 for Pierre de Gondi. Husson later became consul in Tunis. On his return to France, he accepted a position in the household of the duchess d'Aiguillon. He died in December 1695.> This young man requested advice on how one could maintain his religious disposition amid the inevitable distractions and countless business matters his position would entail. Monsieur Vincent replied that since he had lived in that sort of situation he could speak. "God had given me the grace to recognize in the person of Monsieur de Gondi, general of the galleys, our Savior himself, and in the person of Madame, the Blessed Mother. I recognized in the officials, servants, domestics and others of the household the disciples and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is how Monsieur Vincent kept himself constantly united to Jesus Christ. He honored him in creatures as true reflections of the divine, and guided all his activities, both internal and external, by this view. From reading and meditating on this mystic book, ever open before his eyes, he drew the lessons of virtue which marked his life.

Despite the great respect he had for the general of the galleys he was able to speak openly to him when the good of his soul seemed to demand it. Even then he was a model of moderation and circumspection. His zeal for promoting the good and his horror for the least hint of evil, either in himself or in others, was tempered by prudence. If he was strong he was also discreet. As an example of this trait we can cite the case that arose on one occasion when the master of the house planned to fight a duel, in keeping with the damnable custom of the time. Our great monarch, like a Christian Hercules, has happily in his earliest years with a single blow cut the tentacles of this Hydra. <Ftn: Under the influence of Vincent de Paul and Jean Jacques Olier, Anne of Austria influenced her son, Louis XIV, to issue an edict banning duels. See also *CED* V:618-20, a request to the pope on the same issue.> He said once in a conference given to some clergy at Saint Lazare, <Ftn: September 24, 1643.> speaking in the third person:

I knew a chaplain once who became aware that his lord was about to fight a duel. After celebrating mass, he went to the lord who had remained kneeling in

the chapel and said to him, "Monsieur, allow me, if you will, just a word. I am aware that you plan to fight a duel. I declare to you on the part of the Lord whom I have just worshiped and you have just adored in the holy mass, that if you do not renounce this evil design the Lord will carry out his justice towards you and all your posterity." The chaplain said this and left. You will notice, my friends, the opportune moment he seized and the words he used, which you must imitate in like circumstances. <Ftn: *CED* XI:25-28. On February 28, 1614, Saint Vincent was named the pastor of Gamaches in the archdiocese of Rouen, a village to which Philip Emmanuel de Gondi had the right of presentation. The next year, May 27, 1615, he became a canon of the collegiate chapel of Ecouis in the diocese of Evreux. Monsieur de Gondi likewise had the right to appoint the treasurer of the canons of that chapter. *CED* XIII:19-24.>

CHAPTER EIGHT

A General Confession Made by a Peasant Occasions Monsieur Vincent's First Mission, and This in Turn Leads to Others

Madame de Gondi felt joy and indescribable consolation in having Monsieur Vincent in her house. She regarded him as a second guardian angel who each day drew down new graces upon her family by his zeal and prudent conduct. Her ambition was to advance unceasingly along the way of perfection, and he in turn as a wise director helped her by all means at his disposal to fulfill this earnest wish. These two souls animated by the same Gospel spirit, devoted themselves to various charitable works. The virtuous woman gave generous alms, particularly to the poor peasants on her own lands. She visited the sick and served them with her own hands. She had a particular concern that her officials exercise justice correctly and carefully, and to ensure this, she was careful to make good appointments to this position. Not content with this, she strove to settle lawsuits among her subjects, appease quarrels, and above all saw to the protection of widows and orphans, making sure they were neither oppressed nor treated unjustly. She used all her energy to see to it that God was served and honored in every place she had any influence. In all this she was seconded by her husband's piety, and aided by Monsieur Vincent's presence and advice. In turn, he too was not remiss in exercising his charity and zeal on these occasions. He visited and consoled the sick, instructed and exhorted the people by public preaching and by private interviews, and used every device possible to win souls to God.

Around 1616 he went to Picardy with Madame, who owned some land in the region. They stopped at the chateau at Folleville in the diocese of Amiens, which he used as a base for works of mercy, as was his custom. <Ftn: The chateau of Folleville is presently in ruins. The church, which still exists, contains the pulpit from which Vincent preached his famous sermon.> One day he was asked to go to the village of Gannes, about two leagues away, to hear the confession of a dying peasant who had requested the last sacraments. He was a good man and had an excellent reputation. Monsieur Vincent, however, thought that it might be well to have him make a general confession as a greater security towards the salvation of his soul. From later events it appears that God directly inspired this thought to show his mercy to this poor soul.

God wished to use his faithful minister to withdraw this man from the precipice. Despite his reputation his conscience was burdened with several mortal sins he was too ashamed to

confess. As he himself later publicly stated, he had never mentioned them in confession. When in her charity Madame came to visit him on his sickbed he said: "Madame, were it not for this general confession I would have been damned. I was guilty of several grave sins which I had never dared reveal." <Ftn: CED XI:2. See also XI:169-72, XII:7-9.>

These words showed the true contrition that moved the sick man and the sentiments he carried to the end. Death came three days later at age sixty, and he owed his salvation after God to Monsieur Vincent. This is how he spoke of these events to members of his Congregation at Paris:

Shame prevents some of the good country people from confessing their sins to their pastors, but this leaves them in serious danger. Some time ago one of the most renowned persons of our day was asked if these people could be saved, should shame prevent them from confessing their serious sins. He replied that if they were to die in that state they would surely be lost. Alas, my God, (I said to myself) how many may be damned? How important the general confession is, if it is accompanied with true contrition, as it usually is. This man admitted he would have been damned, because he was truly moved by a spirit of repentance. When this takes possession of a man he conceives such a horror of sin that not only does he confess to a priest but to the whole world, if that will assure his salvation. I have seen people who after their general confession wanted to proclaim their sins before everyone, and I've had difficulty restraining them. Despite my refusal to allow them to do this, they say to me, "No, Monsieur, I will tell them to everyone. I am good for nothing, I deserve death."

You can see in that, if you please, the power of grace and the strength of sorrow. I've known several in this state, for it is frequent enough. Yes, when God enters the heart he makes the person realize the enormity of the offenses he has committed, and he is willing to announce this to anyone who will listen. Touched by a spirit of compunction he has no hesitation in saying aloud: "I am an evil man, because on this or that occasion I did such-and-such. I ask pardon of God, of the pastor and all the parish." We notice some of the greatest of the saints have acted in the same way. Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* revealed his sins to the whole world. Saint Paul declared and published in his epistles that he had

blasphemed and persecuted the Church, to show forth more abundantly God's mercy towards him. This is the effect of grace when it fills the heart. It replaces every other sentiment.

God's grace working in the soul of this peasant, in the presence of Madame de Gondi whose vassal he was, made him admit publicly his sacrilegious confession and the great sins of his past life. This struck this virtuous lady with astonishment. She said to Monsieur Vincent:

Alas, Monsieur, what is this? What have we just heard? This is the way it must be with most of the people. Alas, if this man with his good reputation was really living in danger of damnation, what must we think of others who live less righteously? Alas, Monsieur Vincent, how many souls are lost! What shall we do about this?

Monsieur Vincent said:

It was January 1617, when all this happened, on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, the twenty-fifth of the month. This lady asked me to preach in the church of Folleville to persuade the local people to make a general confession. I did this, pointing out the importance and usefulness of this practice. I showed them how to do so worthily. God had such regard for the confidence and faith of this good lady (for the great number and enormity of my sins stood in the way of my effecting any fruit) that he blessed this sermon. All those present were moved by God, and came to make their general confession. I continued my instruction, disposing them to receive the sacrament well, and then began to hear their confessions. Even with the help of another priest who was with me, however, the press of those waiting to receive the sacrament was too great. Madame sent to request the Jesuit Fathers of Amiens to come help us. She wrote to the rector, who came himself, but not having enough time available he sent another Jesuit, Father Fourche, to help us in hearing confessions, preaching and catechizing. By the grace of God, these occupations kept us busy.

We next went to other villages in the vicinity which also belonged to Madame, to do the same as we had done in the first. We had large crowds, and God gave us his full blessing. This is how the first mission was accomplished. That it took place on the

feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul was due solely to God's design. <Ftn: *CED* XI:3-5.>

This mission in Folleville was the first given by Monsieur Vincent and has always been considered as the seed for all the others to follow. Every year, on the twenty-fifth of January, he and his Congregation thanked God for all the graces given in his infinite bounty to this first preaching. He always wanted this feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul to be regarded as the founding date of the Congregation of the Mission, although it was to be eight more years before this first seed grew and multiplied. He never thought that this tiny mustard plant would serve as the basis for the establishment of a new Congregation in the Church, as later came about. This is why the missionaries of the Congregation celebrate the feast of the Conversion of the Apostle, in memory of the way this new Paul, their father and founder, happily completed on this day his first mission. <Ftn: The saint himself established this celebration. *CED* XI:169-172; XII:7-8.> This first one was to be followed by so many others, lead to the conversion of such a large number of souls, and contribute so strikingly to the growth of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Madame de Gondi recognized clearly by the success of this first mission the necessity of general confession, particularly among country people. She saw how the mission could help bring about this among the people. She conceived the idea of giving a foundation of sixteen thousand *livres* to any community willing to undertake the giving of a mission every five years in all her territories. She charged Monsieur Vincent with carrying out this project. He appealed first to Father [Etienne] Charlet, provincial of the Jesuits, who showed the need to consult Rome before accepting. The answer was unfavorable. The Fathers of the Oratory received the offer, but they too refused. Lastly, not knowing where to turn, she wrote her will, which she reviewed yearly. In it she gave the sixteen thousand *livres* to set up this project. it would be arranged in the time and place judged appropriate by Monsieur Vincent, or to use the language he himself used, it was "put at the disposition of this wretched man."

CHAPTER NINE

Vincent Secretly Withdraws from the de Gondi House but Later Returns There

The good opinion of all those who knew Monsieur Vincent grew abundantly. God bestowed great blessings God bestowed on his charitable enterprises and everyone came to recognize that he was filled with the Spirit of God. Both the general and Madame shared this opinion, which they showed publicly on occasion, much to the confusion of Monsieur Vincent who sought only abasement and lack of recognition. This situation concerned him so that, in imitation of many the saints, he saw no other remedy than to flee from the danger of vanity. More than one person before him, despite a life of virtue, had been seduced by calm seas and a favorable wind.

Saint Ambrose had written of Moses of old: "He fled from King Pharaoh's court. He feared that the favors he had received would tarnish his soul and that the power and authority he had acquired would bind him to the place he was. He fled, not from the lack of resolve or courage, but to find the path of innocence, the road to virtue and the freedom to express his piety." <Ftn: PL 14:579.>

Although the de Gondi household was one of the best managed of the court, and Monsieur Vincent did nothing contrary to true piety, the honors he received and the signs of affection which he experienced were enough to cause him anxiety. He felt that the influence he exercised over the minds and hearts in this illustrious family were only traps that would prevent his progress in the way of perfection so appropriate to his station in life. He therefore closed his eyes to all natural influences, to all worldly prospects, and resolved to leave this position so that he could give himself more perfectly to God.

Another reason which suggested itself to Monsieur Vincent that he should leave the service of Madame was his recognition that she was becoming too dependent upon him. She was troubled by scruples and other interior trials, brought about by God to add the crown of patience to that of charity. She had developed such an esteem and confidence in his spiritual direction that she feared losing his service. She was convinced that she would never be able to replace him with anyone with his grace and understanding who could calm her troubled soul, lighten her fears, and lead her in the way of true and solid virtue. She was so afraid of losing him that on those occasions he was forced to be away she could hardly bear his absence. She feared that hot weather or some accident was bound to happen. Surely all this

was an imperfection in an otherwise virtuous woman. When Monsieur Vincent became aware of her obsession, he tried to help her by directing her to see a Recollect priest in confession. <Ftn: Probably a Franciscan Recollect, a reformed branch in the Franciscan family.> He was a well-known director of souls, and Monsieur Vincent judged he would be acceptable to Madame. This proved to be the case. It gave Monsieur Vincent the opportunity to convince her that God could just as well lead her by another as by himself, if only she would put all her trust in his infinite goodness.

These sentiments were not strong enough to overcome what she saw as the necessity of having someone as prudent and charitable as he to accompany her on her trips to the country where she owned much property. She was obliged to visit these holdings frequently, often for a good part of the year. Yet she felt unable to bring herself to seek the help of the priests of the small towns to resolve her personal difficulties. Monsieur Vincent considered her situation and her wish that no one else have the least thing to do with her personal life, plus the fear he had of seeing the esteem people had for the "wretched man," as he imagined and described himself. Added to this was his fear that this excessive attachment might block the spiritual progress of an otherwise virtuous soul. Instead of being an indispensable help to her he feared he might actually prevent her advancement along the way of perfection. Thus he finally concluded that he must leave the service of the de Gondi family.

Since Father de Berulle had persuaded him to accept this position in the first place, Monsieur Vincent now presented this plan to leave for his approval. He said only that he felt an interior movement of grace to go to one of the distant provinces to devote himself to teach and serve the poor country people. Father de Berulle did not object to this. He had seen in Monsieur Vincent a man so committed to God and so enlightened by his grace that he felt he could propose nothing better than what had been suggested.

He left the de Gondi house in July of 1617, using as pretext a previous agreement to make a short trip. He was well aware that there would likely be adverse judgment on his leaving like this, even accusations of ingratitude for such honor and good treatment he had received during his service in this house. He undoubtedly was sensitive on this point, for he was by nature thankful for all that was done for him, and yet he rose above all human considerations. He renounced personal interest and opened himself to criticism. Yet he felt that he was being faithful to God and was acting for the greater benefit of the virtuous soul confided to his spiritual direction. Although the

means he used were extraordinary they show his lack of self-interest and his commitment to God alone.

When Father de Berulle realized that Monsieur Vincent was set on leaving the de Gondi house but had no particular place to continue his priestly work, he suggested that he might look into the region of Bresse where there was a serious lack of Gospel workers. He suggested the parish of Chatillon-les-Dombes, where his zeal could reap a great harvest. <Ftn: This parish, in the ancient province of Bresse, was located near the principality of the Dombes. Today it is the chief town of the department of Ain. The church of Saint Andrew in Chatillon was dependent on that of Saint Martin in Buenans, a village close to Chatillon. Officially speaking, Saint Vincent was named as pastor of Buenans. He took canonical possession of both of these churches August 1, 1617. The canons of Lyons were the temporal lords of Chatillon. Appalled by the condition of the parish, which had been neglected by previous benefice holders, they appealed to the newly founded house of the Oratory in Lyons. This request came to the attention of de Berulle, its founded. Since no one was willing in Lyons to care for these parishes, he turned to Vincent.> Monsieur Vincent followed this recommendation. One of the first things he did upon arriving at Chatillon was to gather together the five or six clergymen he found in the area. He formed them into a sort of community to make their ministry more effective for God and his Church. <Ftn: Saint Vincent was assisted by Louis Girard, a doctor of theology, who later served as his vicar and then as his successor. *CED* XIII:47, 52, 53-54, 439.> This arrangement lasted for a long time, to the great edification of all the parish. He applied himself with his usual zeal to instructing the people and converting sinners by his effective preaching and exhortations in both public and private. He did not neglect the sick and poor. He visited them and consoled and helped them in all kinds of ways. God blessed his efforts to bring back to the faith some heretics, as we shall see later in this book.

Up to this time nothing was known in the house of the general of the galleys of these events, for Monsieur Vincent had told no one his intentions except one or two confidants in Paris. Sometime after his arrival he thought he ought to inform the general, who then was in Provence, of his reasons for leaving his service. He lacked the capacity and the grace, he said, to serve adequately as tutor of his children. He included the remark that he had told neither Madame nor anyone else of his intention of not returning. <Ftn: *CED* I:21.> The general was so struck and saddened by this information that he immediately informed his wife in the following letter:

I am in despair at a letter I have just received from Monsieur Vincent. I am sending it to you to see if whether something can be done to prevent his loss to us. I am astonished that he did not discuss this with you and that you had no hint of this. Please use every means to make sure we do not lose him. Although his position may be true (his alleged incapacity,) it makes absolutely no difference to me. Nothing is more important to me than my own salvation and that of my children, which I know he can greatly help, or the fulfillment of some resolutions that I have often spoken about to you. <Ftn: Probably his desire to retire to the Oratory. This resolution was fulfilled after the death of his wife.>

I have not yet replied to him. I will await more news from you. Do you think the intervention of my sister, Madame de Ragny, who is not far from him, would make any difference? <Ftn: Hippolyte de Gondy, who married Leonor de la Madeleine, marquis de Ragny.> I doubt if anyone has more influence over him than Father de Berulle. Mention to him that although it may be true that Monsieur Vincent may be weak when it comes to teaching the young, we could easily supply a tutor to work under his direction. Emphasize that I am extremely anxious that he return to our service. He may lead his own life, and I shall be a right-thinking man myself only if he stays with us.

This letter was written in September 1617 and was received by Madame on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This was truly a cross for her, a sword of sorrow which pierced her soul. After receiving this letter she did not stop crying, and could neither eat nor sleep. She wrote to a confidant in this vein:

I never would have thought that Monsieur Vincent's charity towards my soul would allow him to leave me like this. But, God be praised, I do not blame him. I believe that nothing ever happens but by God's special providence as inspired by his holy love. Nevertheless his leaving is strange. I admit I cannot understand it at all. He knows the need I have for his direction and for the business affairs I have taken up with him. He is aware of the pains of mind and body I must bear without his help and the good I wish to accomplish in my towns which I will not be able to do without his advice. In short, I am in a sorry state. You can see how disturbed the general is by what he writes. The

children are depressed, and the good accomplished in my house and in my lands and for these seven or eight thousand souls shall be no more. What? Are not these souls as much redeemed by the precious blood of our Savior as those of Bresse? Are they less precious?

In truth, I don't know what Monsieur Vincent intends, but these matters are so important to me that I must do all I can to see him again. He acts only for the greater glory of God. I certainly do not want to act contrary to his holy will, but I will pray with all my heart for his return. I pray to the holy Mother of God and would pray even more earnestly if my own personal interest were not so intertwined with those of the general, my children, my family, and my subjects.

These were the sentiments of this virtuous lady. She wished to use the most efficacious means at her disposal to revise this decision, and so turned to prayer, both by herself and by all those whose piety she could count on. She recommended this intention to all the leading religious communities of Paris. Several times she visited Father de Berulle. She opened her heart to him, exposing the great pain and affliction she suffered. Her tears and pressing arguments convinced this great servant of God of her need for the presence and counsel of Monsieur Vincent. He agreed that she could in all good conscience do everything possible to bring about his return, for he saw that amid her acute suffering she retained a complete resignation to God's good pleasure. She was disposed to suffer all rather than go against his holy will. To her great consolation he assured her that he would use his good offices with Monsieur Vincent to persuade him to return.

This was balm for her soul. She later said that Father de Berulle was the most consoling man in the whole world. She could not rest at ease, however, for she was well aware that Monsieur Vincent was not a person to do things by halves. He had undoubtedly already thought of whatever she might do or say, before leaving. All this did not prevent her from taking every measure she could to convince him to return. She wrote several times, after showing her letter first to Father de Berulle. She sent him the letter her husband had written to her and asked him to weigh well the great hope he expressed of having Monsieur Vincent come back under whatever conditions he might impose. In one of her letters which will allow us to see her state of mind in regard to him she wrote as follows:

I was not wrong to fear losing you, as I expressed to you many times, for it has come about as I dreaded.

The anguish I experience would be insupportable were it not for an extraordinary gift of the grace of God, which I do not deserve. If this were only temporary I would not mind it so much, but when I consider all the occasions when I need your help, your guidance or your advice, whether in life or in death, my sorrow knows no bounds. Can my soul and body long endure these trials? I do not look for or receive any help from elsewhere, because you know well that I cannot open my soul to many. Father de Berulle promised he would write to you. I, too, beseech God and the Holy Virgin to return you to our home for the salvation of our entire family and for many others who will benefit from your charity. I beg you once more to do this for us for the love you bear for our Savior. I submit to his will, although I do not know for how long. If you refuse me, I shall place at your feet all that shall befall me and all the good I shall not be able to do for want of your aid. You will be responsible for my being in places deprived of the sacraments and for whatever suffering I endure, for you are aware of how few can help me.

You see that the general has the same hope as myself, by the mercy of God. Do not refuse to do what you can for his salvation, for he in turn can do much good to others. I know that my own life is useless, since I live, it seems, only to offend God. It would not be of great consequence to put my life in danger, but at least my soul should have some help at the hour of death. Recall the anxiety I experienced the last time I took sick in one of the villages. I fear that something worse will befall me and the very thought does me such harm I do not see how I can avoid dying from it. <Ftn: *CED* I:21-22.>

Before leaving this matter we should reflect on the admirable way God acts towards those called to a high degree of virtue. He disposes the various events and accidents of life as elements in their advance along the road of perfection. What shows the wisdom and power of God is that often those very things which seem most contrary to his divine plan are the ones that contribute best to fulfilling it. God's good pleasure, without a doubt, had given Monsieur Vincent to Madame de Gondi to serve as a faithful guide in the pilgrimage of life. Her great progress in the path of virtue and the ardent charity which inflamed her heart and flowered in such marvelous deeds,

were evident signs of God's blessing upon the direction of her wise counselor.

For his part, Monsieur Vincent found new occasions every day to exercise his zeal for building up the kingdom of Jesus Christ. However, God had brought it about that Monsieur Vincent and Madame de Gondi would be associated for his service and their mutual sanctification by works of piety and charity. In the same way, he caused their separation, which at first glance seemed so contrary to all the desirable results already attained and so harmful to this virtuous lady, to prepare them both for still more graces. By their resignation and acceptance he prepared them to receive still greater blessings. They would be worthy instruments for his all-powerful mercy in cooperating more completely in the salvation of a great number of souls. We shall see this later in this book.

God willed that Madame, his faithful servant, should make several acts of heroic resignation. She had to sacrifice her Isaac, her support, her counsel, her consolation, her help deemed so necessary to both her own advancement in virtue and even her own salvation. For Monsieur Vincent, God willed that he make several heroic acts of perfect detachment from those dearest to him, to whom he had been led by divine grace to esteem with a pure and sincere charity.

Beyond doubt, he was obliged to make a great effort to overcome his natural inclination when he left this house without even saying a word to anyone. Another renunciation was called for when he received this letter from Madame, not to succumb to the reasons, recriminations, prayers and entreaties it contained. A person less enlightened or less united to God than Monsieur Vincent could easily have been taken unawares by the recital of the pain, the distress, the great need she had of his help, the language she used to implore him to reconsider, and the recollection of the esteem, respect, and good will she expressed.

Since he had committed himself completely to God and wished to conform himself totally to his good pleasure, the first thing Monsieur Vincent did upon receiving this letter was to raise his mind to God. He then renewed his promise of inviolable fidelity to his divine Majesty and offered the sacrifice of all human inclination and consideration. He asked for the light and grace to know the divine will and to have the strength to follow it. After some reflection in God's presence he felt that he was not being asked to change the decision he had taken. He accordingly wrote to Madame, expressing his sympathy for her suffering but urging her to submit to the designs of God's holy will. <Ftn: CED I:23.>

She had already been assured that she might in good conscience pursue the possible return of Monsieur Vincent. This letter did not in the least hinder her efforts to bend his spirit. She persuaded people of all different classes and occupations to write to him. He received letters from her children, from Cardinal de Retz, her brother-in-law then bishop of Paris, from her close relatives, from the chief officers of the household, from several pious persons. They all requested and urged his return. <Ftn: During Saint Vincent's stay in the de Gondi household, three members of the family were in turn bishops of Paris: Pierre, uncle of the general of the galleys; Henri, brother of the general, and the first Cardinal de Retz; and Jean-Francois, another brother. This latter named his nephew and namesake his successor, and he became the second Cardinal de Retz.>

Father de Berulle wrote also, as he had promised he would, but he wrote in a style worthy of his great prudence and piety. He merely pointed out the extreme discomfort of this virtuous lady, the dangers threatening her, and the wish the general harbored for his return. He said nothing more. He left it to the discretion and charity of Monsieur Vincent to consider if the will of God were sufficiently manifest. He was persuaded that Monsieur Vincent was more than capable of discerning the designs of God in his own regard and able to carry out this divine purpose with no need of outside advice or persuasion.

Since all these remonstrances seemed to have no effect on Monsieur Vincent, Monsieur Dufresne, the general's secretary and one of his closest friends, was sent to Chatillon in October 1617 to speak to Monsieur Vincent. <Ftn: Dufresne had previous been a secretary to Queen Marguerite de Valois, and was responsible for the saint's introduction to her household. Saint Vincent returned the favor by recommending Dufresne to the de Gondis.> He succeeded in persuading him that God's call to this remote place was not absolutely sure. This was enough to make Monsieur Vincent uncertain of just what the will of God for him really was. In an affair of this importance he did not want to act solely by his own lights.

In imitation of the apostle Paul he sought his own Ananias, that is, he took counsel of a wise and virtuous person. He suggested that Monsieur Vincent accompany him to Lyons, where he could consult Father Bence, superior of the Oratory. <Ftn: Jean de Bence, one of the first companions of Pierre de Berulle. One of Bence's companions, Paul Metezeau, gave Saint Vincent a letter to introduction of Jean Beynier, a Huguenot, who provided hospitality to the new pastor. Beynier would later be converted by Vincent.> After considering all these issues, he suggested

that a return to Paris would allow Monsieur Vincent to consult with those who had known him for a long time. He would be able to discern with more light and assurance God's exact will for him.

After receiving this advice he wrote to the general who was then in Marseilles, showing that in two months he hoped to be in Paris where he would search out the designs of God for him. He wrote much the same thing to Monsieur Dufresne but without committing himself in any way. Some time later, at Chatillon, he received the following reply from the general, on October 15 of the same year.

Two days ago I received the letter you wrote from Lyons, informing me that you will be coming to Paris towards the end of November. I am exceedingly happy to hear this news. I look forward to seeing you there, in the hope that you will answer my prayers and accept the advice of all your good friends. I will not now say anything more about this, for you have read the letter I wrote to my wife. I ask you only to consider the thought that possibly God wills you should contribute much to making the father and his sons worthy gentlemen. <Ftn: CED I:23.>

Monsieur Vincent left Chatillon, to the great sorrow of the people there, who regretted losing one who had served them so well, and reached Paris on December 23. <Ftn: His official resignation was dated January 31, 1618; his successor, Louis Girard, assumed the pastorate July 10 of that year.> Here he met with Father de Berulle and some other enlightened advisers. Encouraged by their counsel he finally returned to the service of the general of the galleys on Christmas eve. The whole family rejoiced, particularly Madame, who received him as an angel from heaven. She regarded him as sent by God to guide her along the right path leading to her salvation and her own perfection. Fearing that he might leave a second time, she made him promise that he would continue in her service until her death, which he did. God willed it so that this good woman would be his instrument in helping bring about the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, as we shall see later in this book.

CHAPTER TEN

The Beginnings of the Confraternity of Charity for the Sick Poor

While Monsieur Vincent was still at Chatillon, as he was about to mount the pulpit one feastday, a lady of a noble house in the neighborhood <Ftn: Mademoiselle de la Chassaigne.> said a few words to him. She asked him to recommend to the charity of the parish a family whose children and servants had fallen sick on their farm about a half league from Chatillon. They needed help urgently. He felt obliged to speak about them in his sermon. In it he spoke of the duty we have to help the poor, especially the sick, and in particular this family which had been recommended to them.

God so blessed his words that after the service a large number of people visited the sick family, carrying bread, wine, some meat, and several other provisions. After vespers, he himself went with some of the people of the parish, unaware that others had already gone. He was astonished to meet a number on the road returning in large groups, and even some sleeping under the trees, since it was so warm. The Gospel text came to mind: "These are as lost sheep, with no shepherd to guide them." <Ftn: Matt 9:36>

He said:

This undoubtedly shows that these people have great charity, but is it well organized? The poor sick family will be overwhelmed with so much in such a short time, most of which will spoil. Afterward they will be no better off than before.

The following days he met with several zealous and wealthy women of the parish to seek ways of establishing greater order in the way the sick poor of the moment and those who would call for help in the future could be helped. He found these women well disposed towards this project and was able to work out with them a plan for action. He drew up a few regulations which they promised to observe and which would encourage these virtuous women to give themselves to God through this practice of charity. Thus began the Confraternity of Charity for the corporal and spiritual help of the sick poor. They chose several officers from among their own number and met under Monsieur Vincent's chairmanship every month to report on progress.

He himself said on several occasions that he was due no credit in the beginning of this good work. All was accomplished with no planning on his part and with little thought of what significant developments these small beginnings would become, by the grace of God. <Ftn: CED IX:208-10, and 242-44.>

The Confraternity of Charity which Monsieur Vincent began at Chatillon was the first, the mother confraternity, of a great many others he and his Congregation have since established in France, Italy, Lorraine, in Savoy, and elsewhere.

After Monsieur Vincent returned to the de Gondi house, as we have related in the previous chapter, his zeal would not leave him idle but led him to undertake many missions for the poor people in the countryside. Previously he had worked in the various territories belonging to Madame. He was now determined to extend his charity to all the other regions belonging to the de Gondi house. In keeping with this resolution, he gave a mission at Villepreux and the villages which depended on it. <Ftn: A small town located near Paris.> He had the help of two clerical counselors of the Parlement of Paris, Fathers Berger and Gontiere, with Monsieur Cocqueret, doctor of theology of the college of Navarre, and several other clerics as well. <Ftn: Jean Coqueret was one of the most esteem and learned priests of the age. Together with the other theologians, Louis Bail and Nicolas Cornet, he took part in the conferences held at Saint Lazare to determine strategy in the struggle against Jansenism. *CED* III:318-32.> Here, on February 23, 1618, he established the Confraternity of Charity of the Sick Poor, under the authority of Cardinal de Retz, then bishop of Paris, who approved its rule. This was the second begun by Monsieur Vincent, and by God's grace, it has continued, like the first, to this day. The third was established in the town of Joigny, and the fourth in Montmirail. <Ftn: See the rules for the confraternities in *CED* XIII:461-75.> God blessed these beginnings to such an extent that the Confraternity began in more than thirty parishes in lands depending on the general of the galleys or on his wife.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Conversion of Several Heretics whom Monsieur Vincent Brought Back to the Catholic Church

While Monsieur Vincent was at Chatillon, God used his zeal and prudence to influence several people who had fallen into heresy. He was able to bring them back to the path of truth.

We will recount here the events surrounding the conversion of only two of these heretics. They owed their conversion, after God, to the zeal of Monsieur Vincent. He was responsible for their regaining the gift of faith which they had lost in their defection from the Church.

The first was a young man from Chatillon named Monsieur Beynier, born into a family that had instructed him thoroughly in their heretical doctrines. He was an only son and had inherited a sizable estate from his parents. Under the evil liberty of his false religion, however, he led a dissolute and scandalous life. Monsieur Vincent, moved by his zeal for the glory of God, wished earnestly to snatch this prey from the hands of the devil, to return him to Jesus Christ. Little by little he gained the friendship of this young man, despite his reputation for leading a debauched life. He often visited him and engaged him in conversation, much to everyone's astonishment. In so doing, he aroused the jealousy of the Protestant pastors of the locality. They were indifferent to his dissolute life as long as he remained committed to their religious sect.

These pastors began to object when they noticed that he was becoming more reserved than before. This was the first step recommended by Monsieur Vincent to help him recognize and embrace the truth. Finally, at a time willed by God, his eyes were opened and his heart moved. He abandoned both his life of debauchery and his heresy. He gave himself so completely to the practice of the Christian virtues that he resolved to embrace perpetual celibacy. He even forgave the debt of two or three persons whom he felt his father had treated fairly, although they had not registered any complaint on this score. As for the rest of his worldly goods, he used them as a source of alms and other pious works. As a legacy he endowed several religious houses, particularly the foundation of the Capuchin Fathers at Chatillon. We owe the following account to Father Desmoulins of the Oratory who was well aware of these events, since he was superior in Macon at the time.

What appeared most remarkable in this conversion of morals and beliefs is the part played by Monsieur

Vincent, whom God used for the purpose (these are his exact words.) Monsieur Vincent assigned all the credit to those who had merely received the abjuration and given absolution. He could have claimed this honor for himself, following the suggestion of Archbishop de Marquemont of Lyons, were it not that his personal humility preferred it be assigned to others. <Ftn: Denis de Marquemont, archbishop of Lyons, 1612-1626. *CED XIII:494.*>

The second heretic Monsieur Vincent regained for the Church was Monsieur Garron, who later moved to the capital city of Bresse. We learn of his conversion from a letter of thanks he wrote to Monsieur Vincent dated August 27, 1656, some forty years after his conversion.

Behold, one of your children in Jesus Christ again has recourse to your paternal goodness. He benefited from it before when he was engendered in the Church by your absolution from heresy in the church of Chatillon-les-Dombes in 1617. You taught me the principles and the beautiful maxims of the Apostolic, Roman Catholic religion. By God's mercy I have persevered in it, and I hope to remain in it for the rest of my life. I am that little Jean Garron, nephew of Monsieur Beynier of Chatillon, in whose house you stayed while you were there. Please give me some advice now to help me carry out God's designs. I have an only son who, now that his schooling is ended, has decided to become a Jesuit. This son is blessed above all others in this province in worldly goods, but I do not know what to do. <Ftn: Saint Vincent was responsible also for the conversion of Garron's three brothers. *CED XIII:49,51.*>

He presented reasons for and against this proposition and finally concluded: "I am afraid of erring in this matter. I beg of you most humbly to advise one of your children what course to follow. You will be happy to know that the pious association of charity for the sick poor is still alive in Chatillon." <Ftn: *CED III:29.*>

We do not know what Monsieur Vincent said in response to this letter. Its contents nevertheless confirm our opinion that God had given him the grace of discerning hearts, teaching the truth, and inspiring the love of true virtue and solid piety. Here is a father of one of the richest families of his province. His only beloved son wished to leave home and deprive him of one of the greatest of human consolations. He did not listen to flesh and blood but turned to him, to whom, after God, he owed

the life of his soul, to ascertain God's will in this matter. He was ready, if it proved to be the divine will, to sacrifice his Isaac, so deeply had Monsieur Vincent planted piety and the love of God in his soul that its growth forty years later produced such heroic fruit.

This same letter was, no doubt, a source of great joy to Monsieur Vincent. It let him learn in his old age that God by his grace had preserved this first Association or Confraternity of Charity which he had begun forty years before in Chatillon. It had been an inspiration and model for the establishment of many others in various places where the sick poor, suffering members of Jesus Christ, could receive such gracious help for both body and soul.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Marvelous Change Brought About in the Life of a Noble Person under Monsieur Vincent's Spiritual Direction

Monsieur Vincent's reputation during his stay in Bresse spread in the vicinity, leading the Count de Rougemont, a resident in that province, to visit him for spiritual direction. He was so pleased with his talks with Monsieur Vincent that he decided to place himself completely under his guidance. He was formerly a noble of Savoy, since retired in France after King Henry annexed Bresse to the kingdom. He had been raised at court and had assumed all its values and practices. At the time one of the most deplorable evils was dueling, by which gentlemen proved their valor or defended their honor. He had gained notoriety as one of the leading duelists of his time.

By the marvelous effects of divine grace, God used the words of Monsieur Vincent to convince him of the evils of this practice and the spiritual danger in which he lived. He was so touched that not only did he give up forever his dueling, but all other misguided elements in his life as well. To atone for his past excesses he adopted the most heroic of Christian practices.

First, having sold his estate of Rougemont for more than thirty thousand *ecus*, he used a good part of the proceeds for the founding of monasteries and the relief of the poor. His meditations on the sufferings of Jesus Christ led him to ask how many blows were borne by the Son of God in his scourging. He wanted to give a like number of *ecus* to the Oratory at Lyons. In a short time he so progressed in virtue under the guidance of his prudent director, that he became an example to all. Mental prayer became his usual occupation, and he was often seen to spend three or four hours in meditation, kneeling with no support and head uncovered. His home, the Chateau de Chandes, became almost a hospice for religious and a hospital for the poor, both sick and well. They were received here with an almost unbelievable charity for the relief of their bodily and spiritual needs, for which he provided priests.

Not a sick person lived in his domain whom he did not visit and serve in person. On those rare occasions when he had to be away, he had his household staff visit.

Father Desmoulins of the Oratory is the source of the following information.

I write nothing but what I have seen with my own eyes. This good nobleman seemed almost ashamed to own so much, even though he looked like a simple farmer

and used his wealth in favor of the poor. One day, with tears in his eyes, he said to me: "Alas, Father, what is to happen to me? And why am I treated as a lord, and why do I own so much?" (Monsieur Vincent, as his spiritual director, reportedly kept him in that condition.) "It is Monsieur Vincent's responsibility. If not for him, Father, I assure you that in less than a month the count de Rougemont would not own a single bit of land!" He was astounded that a Christian could hold anything on his own, seeing that the Son of God deprived himself of everything during his stay on earth.

What a remarkable lesson for the great of this world on how to make use of their wealth and with what detachment they ought to own their worldly goods. They should remember the words of the holy apostle that "they should use their earthly goods as if they did not use them, for the form of this world passes away." <Ftn: 1 Cor 7:31.>

This view also consoled the poor. They saw their condition respected and even sought for by a great lord in an effort to conform more closely to Jesus Christ. It gave an occasion for the sons of Monsieur Vincent to thank God for having given such graces to this nobleman through the prayers and efforts of their wise founder. He himself never spoke of these matters, except in a conference he once gave on detachment from creatures. He cited the example of the Count de Rougemont, but without referring to the part he himself had played in this story. Here are his own words, preserved in the minutes of this conference:

I once knew a gentleman of Bresse, Monsieur de Rougemont, an avowed duelist. He was well placed and had often had occasion to be challenged or to challenge others who had offended him in some way. He told me himself that he could hardly remember the number of persons who had challenged him because of some quarrels or whom he had challenged as his adversaries. He told me he had struck, wounded, and killed an unbelievable number. But God so touched his heart that he entered into himself and saw what a sorry state he was in. He decided to change his life, and with God's grace he did so.

After some little time in his new manner of living he went to request from the archbishop of Lyons the privilege of keeping the blessed sacrament in his chapel as a mark of respect for our Savior and as a way of furthering his well-known piety. When I visited his house, he told me what practices of devotion he

was observing, mainly his detachment from worldly goods. "I feel sure", he said to me, "that if I am bound to nothing in this world I will be able to give myself completely to God. I consider that if I allow the friendship for a lord or a relative or a neighbor to hold me back, or if my own self-love hinders me, or if my worldly goods or my vanity, my passions or my love of ease do me harm. If, in short, anything can deprive me of my sovereign good, I must pray, cut, crush, leave this place. This is what I set myself to."

He then told me something I have often thought about. He related how he was on a journey one day, thinking of God, as he was his custom. He wondered where, since the time of his conversion, he had held back anything. He reviewed his business dealings, his associates, his reputation, the various movements of the human heart, both great and small. He went round and round in his mind considering these things.

All at once his eyes fell upon his sword. "Why are you carrying it? Why? Abandon this sword which, after God, has delivered you from a thousand dangers? If you are attacked once more, you would be lost without it. You might come across some disturbance and you will not be able to restrain yourself if you still carry it. You will again offend God. What, O God, should I do? What should I do? Such an instrument of my shame and my sins is still dear to me? This sword alone still stands in my way. Oh that I was not so cowardly to hold on to it!"

Just at that moment he found himself near a large rock. He got off his horse, took his sword, and immediately broke it on the rock into a hundred pieces. He then remounted his horse and rode off. He told me that this act of detachment, this breaking the iron chain which held him captive, gave him such a sense of liberty that great as his love was for that sword, he never again felt attracted to any object but God alone. <Ftn: CED XII:231-33.>

We can see by this example how a heroic act of virtue and a victory won by force over oneself can lead in short time to great progress in sanctity. Also, we see how important it is to renounce attachment to the least things of this earth to be united perfectly to God.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Different Works of Piety that Monsieur Vincent Was Involved with After His Return to the de Gondi Household

True charity is never content to sit idly by. Once it possesses one's heart perfectly, it is ever on the alert to do all it can to further God's glory and bring about the salvation and sanctification of souls. Since Monsieur Vincent was so endowed with this virtue, he showed its fruits wherever he was. No sooner had he returned to the de Gondi household than he undertook duties similar to those he had done in Chatillon and the other places he had lived. After the missions at Villepreux and its surrounding villages, which we spoke of in a previous chapter, he began other missions in all the villages which depended on the de Gondi family. These produced unbelievable fruits, often aided by Madame de Gondi who, though unwell, would go in person to distribute alms or help in other ways. She visited and consoled the sick living on her or her husband's lands, healed long-standing arguments, and brought lawsuits to an end. She also supported by her own authority all the good that Monsieur Vincent and his team attempted to accomplish for the suppression of abuse and scandal and for the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Finally, after returning to Montmirail, Monsieur Vincent took up again his usual routine, teaching catechism to the poor and to children, promoting frequent confession, and visiting the sick poor. Once, speaking in one of his sermons of the special devotion all Christians ought to have for the Mother of God, he had the children begin a hymn in her honor on a Saturday. This practice continues still. The older people who survived Monsieur Vincent spoke after his death of how the people from that time on always thought of him as a saint.

During 1620, while Monsieur Vincent was so occupied at Montmirail, Madame de Gondi learned that three heretics lived in the vicinity. She requested that Monsieur Vincent undertake their conversion. She invited these gentlemen to her chateau, where Monsieur Vincent would spend two hours in instructing and in answering their various objections. This lasted for a week, after which God opened the eyes and touched the hearts of two of these men, but not the third. He was a bit conceited, given to dogmatizing, but not noted for the personal probity of his life. Although convinced of the truth presented by Monsieur Vincent, he was not yet persuaded. He looked for subtleties, and always had a few new doubts. Once, as Monsieur Vincent later recounted

in one of his edifying talks, this person seemed on the verge of abjuring his errors but raised a final objection.

Monsieur, you have said that the Holy Spirit guides the Church of Rome, but I have trouble believing this. You see Catholics in the countryside abandoned by their evil and ignorant shepherds. They are not taught their duty and for the most part scarcely know what Christianity is all about. If, on the other hand, you look at the cities, you see them filled with do-nothing priests and monks. In Paris alone there are perhaps ten thousand who leave the peasants in lamentable ignorance, leading to their damnation. And yet you would have me persuaded that the Holy Spirit is behind all this? That I will never believe.

This objection raised by the heretic deeply impressed Monsieur Vincent. It renewed his conviction of the great spiritual needs of the people of the countryside, and the obligation of helping them, all of which he knew from personal experience. Without admitting this, he replied to the heretic:

You are mistaken in what you say. Many parishes have good pastors and vicars. Among the clergy and religious in the cities, many go into the country regions to catechize and preach. Some of these religious are given to prayer, chanting the office both day and night. Others serve the public good by writing books, teaching sound doctrine, or in administering the sacraments. If some do nothing, these are individual men subject to error and are not the Church. When we speak of the Church as being led by the Holy Spirit, we refer to the Church as a whole, when she is assembled in council. Also, the Holy Spirit is present in the faithful when they act by the light of faith and follow the path of Christian justice. Those who do not resist the Holy Spirit. While they are still members of the Church, they live (as Saint Paul put it) according to the flesh, and shall die. <Ftn: Rom 8:13.>

Although this response should have been enough to answer this heretic, he remained obstinate in his error. His mind was so deeply impressed with the ignorance of the peasants and the little concern of the priests for their welfare that he regarded it as an infallible argument against the Church being led by the Holy Spirit.

The following year Monsieur Vincent returned to Montmirail together with several priests to present missions in this town and the surrounding villages. One was Monsieur Feron, then

bachelor in theology and later doctor of the Sorbonne and archdeacon of Chartres. The second was Monsieur [Bernard] Duchesne, also doctor of the Sorbonne and archdeacon of Beauvais. Several other priests and religious who were his friends accompanied him. All the region benefited so much from these missions that the obstinate heretic of whom we spoke was moved by curiosity to investigate what was happening. He attended the catechetical instructions and sermons. He saw for himself the care being taken for the instruction of the peasants in what they needed to know for their salvation. He witnessed the way in which even the slowest and crudest were treated to help them understand what they must believe and do. He saw the effects in the hearts of even the most hardened sinners to bring them to conversion and penance. All these things impressed him so strongly that he sought out Monsieur Vincent to say to him: "Now I can see that the Holy Spirit truly guides the Church for I see how much care is taken for the instruction and salvation of these poor villagers. I am now ready to enter the Church, if you would be pleased to receive me." When Monsieur Vincent asked him if any doubts still remained in his mind, he replied, "No, I believe all you told me. I am now prepared to renounce publicly all my past errors."

Monsieur Vincent asked him several other questions on the main truths of faith to see if he remembered well what he had been taught. Since he was satisfied with the answers, he directed him to appear the following Sunday at the church in the village of Marchais, near Montmirail, where a mission was in progress. Here he would make his abjuration and receive absolution for his heresy.

He appeared as arranged. In the presence of the official witnesses who had been notified, Monsieur Vincent called him by name at the end of the morning sermon to come before the congregation. He was asked if he still wished to renounce his heresy and enter the sheepfold of the true Church. He replied, pointing to a statue, "Yes, I am still of this mind, but I still have one difficulty. I cannot believe that any power resides in this crudely fashioned stone statue of the Blessed Virgin here."

Monsieur Vincent answered: "The Church teaches that no special power resides in material things, unless it be on those occasions that it pleases God to confer this power upon them. He did this, for example, with the rod of Moses, the source of so many miracles. Even children understand this." Thereupon he called upon one of the better-instructed children to explain what we ought to believe about sacred images. The child replied, "They are good to have, and we respect them, not because of what they are made from, but because they represent our Lord Jesus

Christ, his glorious Mother, or the other saints in paradise. They have triumphed over the world, and now these silent images urge us to follow in their faith and good works."

This reply so pleased Monsieur Vincent that he repeated it. He pointed out to the heretic that there was no reason to delay at this difficulty, once he understood Catholic belief. The same was true of all the other points of doctrine. All the same, he thought he was not yet ready for his abjuration and put it off for another occasion. In fact, he later did present himself again, abjured his heresy before the whole parish, and publicly professed the Catholic faith to the edification of the entire region. He has persevered in this belief ever since.

These events surrounding the conversion of this heretic, and particularly the reason for leaving his error to embrace the Catholic faith, that is, the care taken in the education of the country poor, led to Monsieur Vincent's speaking of it to his Congregation in a conference he once gave: "What happiness for us missionaries to witness to the guidance of the Church by the Holy Spirit, by our work for the instruction and sanctification of the poor!" <Ftn: *CED* XI:34-37.>

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

After Appointment as Royal Chaplain of the Galleys, Monsieur Vincent Visits Provence and Guienne to Provide Physical and Spiritual Help to the Convicts

When the general of the galleys had seen the blessings brought about through the efforts of Monsieur Vincent in working for the salvation of souls, he wished to widen the arena for the exercise of his charity, that is, to the convicts condemned to serve in the galleys. <Ftn: The galley slaves were sentenced to servitude in the fleet and in times of war they took part in naval battles. The galley slaves were, however, under a separate jurisdiction from the navy, with a general named by the king. This title was suppressed in 1748.> He requested the late king of glorious memory, Louis XIII, to appoint him as royal chaplain of the galleys, which he agreed to do. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:55. The date of his appointment was February 8, 1619.> This new office required Monsieur Vincent to travel to Marseilles in 1622. He had to see for himself the condition of these poor convicts and to provide for their needs as much as he possibly could.

On his arrival there, he saw a sight as pitiable as could be imagined. These poor creatures were doubly weighed down, by the weight of their sins and by the more tangible weight of their chains. They were overwhelmed by pain and misery that destroyed any thought of their salvation and were given to constant blasphemy and despair. It was an image of hell. They mentioned God only to deny or to curse him, and the evil dispositions of these poor unfortunates rendered useless all their sufferings. Monsieur Vincent was so touched by what he saw of the convicts that he resolved to do all in his power to help them. By encouraging them, he hoped to lift their spirits and to dispose them to be receptive to the spiritual good he hoped to provide. He listened to their complaints with great patience, sympathized with their sufferings, embraced them, kissed their chains. He did all he could by entreaty and protest to the officers of the galleys to have the convicts treated more humanely. In so doing, he gained their confidence, disposing them to be more open to God.

He wrote something like this to a priest of the Congregation who used rude and harsh words in speaking to peasants. He pointed out that if the priest wished to win over any of these poor souls he should deal with them in a spirit of meekness, the true spirit of Jesus Christ. <Ftn: See *CED* IV:53 which gives the text of this fragment.>

He desired to serve these poor convicts and bring a greater number of souls to heaven. This led him to accept this appointment as royal chaplain of the galleys. In this position he would have charge of the other chaplains, and thus be in a better position to succeed in his charitable designs. This was in keeping with the ardent love burning in his heart. It impelled him to undertake whatever might procure the salvation and sanctification of souls, particularly of the most abandoned.

After some time in Marseilles, he was obliged to return to Paris, where God wished to use him on other occasions for his glory. The trip to Marseilles was important for him, for it allowed him to see at first hand the wretched state of these poor convicts. He could then devise some relief from their great sufferings and some hope for their spiritual welfare. He was able to move in this direction by assigning some priests of the Congregation of the Mission to take care of the Hospital for the Galleys. They also conducted missions on the galleys themselves, as we shall recount in a later chapter of this book.

On his return to Paris he made it a point to visit felons newly condemned to the galleys. He found these prisoners in a worse state than even those he had left in Marseilles. They were kept in the dungeons of the Conciergerie or other prisons, sometimes for extended periods. They were infested with vermin, overwhelmed by weariness and poverty, and entirely neglected in both body and soul.

Seeing these prisoners in such misery, he approached the general of the galleys, pointing out that these poor creatures were his responsibility. While they were awaiting their assignment to the galleys, his charity should see to it that some decent care be taken of these men. In fact, Monsieur Vincent proposed a plan to benefit the convicts, both physically and spiritually. The general of the galleys approved and gave Monsieur Vincent full authority to carry out his plan. This involved renting a house in the faubourg Saint Honore, near the church of Saint Roch, where the convicts would live under guard. As a result of great efforts the house was readied to receive the prisoners in that same year, 1622. <Ftn: The correct date is 1618. Coste, *Life* I:115, n. 1.> Here Monsieur Vincent could give free rein to his charity, to provide all sorts of services for these poor abandoned people. He visited them often, taught them, sympathized with them, prepared them for general confession, and administered the sacraments to them. Not content with these spiritual aids, he looked after their bodily needs as well. Sometimes to be of great service to these convicts he would stay with them, even during a time of dangerous contagion. In his

love for them he forgot himself and his own safety, preferring to give himself completely to them.

When he was obliged by other duties to leave them, he enlisted the help of two other clerics, both good and devoted men. One was the late Monsieur Portail. <Ftn: Antoine Portail, 1590-1660. He came as a young man to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. He met Vincent de Paul in 1612, and became one of his first companions. He was ordained in 1622. He was employed among the galley slaves, and gave missions in the countryside and worked for the ordinands. He was chosen first assistant general, and director of the Daughters of Charity in 1642, spending most of the rest of his life at Saint Lazare.> He had joined Monsieur Vincent several years before and, on his advice, had received the priesthood. He was always obedient to the wishes and orders of this wise director. He persevered until 1660, when death separated these two friends in anticipation of a more perfect union in heaven. The second was the late Monsieur Belin, chaplain of the de Gondi house at Villepreux. Both lived in the prison hospital and celebrated mass there. God so blessed this work of charity begun by Monsieur Vincent that in his Providence he has allowed it to continue to this day.

The poor convicts have been housed, helped, and cared for in both body and soul these many years, first in the faubourg Saint Honore and later near the Saint Bernard gate of the city.

The chaplain of the galleys had begun so well that the general was most pleased. In the following year, 1623, the galleys of Marseilles were moved to Bordeaux because of the war against the heretics. <Ftn: In 1622 the Huguenots rose in revolt against the king. From their fortified center at La Rochelle, their survival depended on receiving supplies by sea from England. Louis XIII massed his navies to blockade the city, and thus the galley slaves were transferred from Marseilles, on the Mediterranean, to Bordeaux, on the Atlantic, where they were evangelized by Saint Vincent.> As a result, he heartily agreed that Monsieur Vincent should go to Guienne to bring the same help to the convicts in that province as he had done in Marseilles and Paris.

On his arrival in Bordeaux he contacted several other religious orders for help in this work. He was able to assign two chaplains to each of the galleys, where they were able to conduct a mission for the prisoners. These were helped to reconcile themselves to God by making a good general confession, submit themselves to his divine will, and patiently accept their sufferings as satisfaction for their past sins. In Bordeaux, Monsieur Vincent was able to bring a Moslem into the Church. He brought him back to Paris with himself, where he presented him

to the general, who graciously received him. He was given the name Louis at his baptism. Now that he is still alive he is ever mindful of the thanks he owes to Monsieur Vincent, to whose charity, after God, he owes the grace of his salvation.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

He Provides for the Physical and Spiritual Necessities of the Poor of Macon, with Excellent Results

Since the fire of charity burned ever more brightly in the heart of Monsieur Vincent, God provided other opportunities for the development of this virtue. Once, passing through Macon he became aware of the many poor people who suffered even more in soul than in their physical needs. <Ftn: September 1621. *CED* XII:497.> What is worse, they seemed to have no sense of the deplorable state of their spiritual welfare. They were unaware of the most elementary things concerning salvation and lived in a spirit of irreligion and horrifying impiety. No one seemed able to bring about any relief to this problem.

These doubly stricken people walked the streets or frequented the churchyards, begging alms, unmindful of the laws of the Church or even the commandments of God. They almost never went to mass. They did not know how to confess their sins or to receive any of the sacraments. They passed their lives in profound ignorance of God and of what concerned their salvation and descended to lives of filth and vice. Monsieur Vincent had such great sympathy for these suffering people that even though he had not planned to stop in Macon, he decided to stay. As a good Samaritan, he looked upon these poor people as travelers robbed and beaten by the enemies of their salvation. He hoped to bind up their wounds and provide some sort of help to them. He set up a system whereby the men of the town helped the poor, while the women looked after the sick. <Ftn: It was his practice, later followed by his missionaries, to found confraternities of charity in each parish in which they preached a mission.> Here is the account written by Father Desmoulins, then superior of the Oratory in Macon:

I did not learn of the condition of the poor through others but saw it myself with my own eyes. From the beginning of this project, all the poor who received help came to confession on the first of the month. Other confessors and I came upon older people of sixty or more years who openly told us they had never gone to confession before. When we spoke to them of God, the Blessed Trinity, the birth, passion, and death of Jesus Christ, and other mysteries of our religion, they said it was a language they had never before heard. Through this Confraternity of Charity these disorders were addressed, and the corporal and spiritual needs of the poor were quickly met. His

Excellency, Louis Dinet, then bishop of Macon, approved Monsieur Vincent's plan of action. The members of the chapters of the cathedral and of Saint Peter, all of noble birth, supported it. Monsieur Chambon, dean of the cathedral, and Monsieur de Relets, provost of Saint Peter's, were among the directors, and Monsieur [Hugues] Fallart was lieutenant general. They carried out the directions given by Monsieur Vincent, that is, that a list be kept of all the poor of the town, who should be given alms on particular days. If found begging in the churches or going from door to door, they would be fined. In addition, the townspeople were forbidden to give them anything in these circumstances. Those passing through the city would be allowed to stay a single night, then would be sent on their way with two *sous* as a parting gift.

The sick poor would be helped by food or medicine, just as in other places where the Confraternity of Charity had been established. This whole enterprise began with no public funds to support it, but Monsieur Vincent was so adept at organizing things that many contributed to its success. One gave money, another gave food, each according to his or her ability. In all more than three hundred poor were housed, fed, and reasonably cared for. After giving the first contribution, Monsieur Vincent left the town. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:494-95.>

But how did he leave? We can learn from what he himself wrote in 1635 to Mademoiselle le Gras. On his advice she had gone to Beauvais for a similar project but needed some encouragement. <Ftn: July 21, 1635, but Coste holds for 1634. *CED* I:239-40.>

I spoke well when I warned you that you would have great difficulty in Beauvais. Blessed be God, you have succeeded. When I first began the Confraternity of Charity in Macon, people made fun of me. They said I could never bring it off. Tears of joy greeted its establishment. When I was about to leave, the authorities of the town were prepared to do me such honor that I was obliged to leave secretly to avoid their congratulations. This is one of the better of these Confraternities of Charity. I hope that the trouble you have experienced at the beginning will in the end turn into consolation and that the enterprise will become more stable. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:833-34.>

The fathers of the Oratory were good enough to offer him lodging for the three weeks he remained in Macon. They became aware that he removed the mattress from his bed, preferring to sleep on the straw underneath. He had begun this practice some years before, and continued it right up to the time of his death, that is, for over fifty years. Since these fathers found out about this only on his last day with them when they came early to his room to say goodbye, he passed it off lightly, with some innocuous comment.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

He is Chosen by the Blessed Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, and by Mother de Chantal as the First Spiritual Father and Superior of the Religious of the Visitation of Saint Mary in Paris

It had been several years since God had brought into being the saintly order of religious of the Visitation as a new flower spreading the odor of sanctity in the garden of the Church. God used Blessed Francis de Sales, bishop of Geneva, to begin and to cultivate this mystical plant, which he did with all the care suggested by his incomparable charity. <Ftn: Francis de Sales, bishop of Geneva, was born on August 21, 1567 near Annecy, and died in Lyons, December 28, 1622. Francis de Sales and Vincent de Paul admired one another greatly. Vincent spoke at the beatification process of his friend.> Mother de Chantal, whose memory is held in benediction, had been sent to Paris by Blessed Francis to found a monastery of the order. <Ftn: Jane Frances Fremiot, born in Dijon, January 23, 1572, had four children from her marriage to the Baron de Chantal. After his death, she placed herself under the guidance of Francis de Sales, and with him established the Order of the Visitation. She lived in Paris from 1619 to 1622, where she became acquainted with Vincent de Paul, whom she requested from Jean Francois de Gondi, archbishop of Paris, as ecclesiastical superior of her daughters. Until her death, December 13, 1641, she kept in close contact with Monsieur Vincent, whom she consulted both as a spiritual director and as an advisor in the business matters of the monastery of the Visitation.> She worked with such zeal and prudence that despite opposition, contradictions, and persecutions, the walls of this new Jerusalem and home of peace were raised. <Ftn: On May 1, 1619, the first house opened.> Several souls, mindful of their salvation and their perfection, came to seek a refuge against the vanity and temptations of the world. Modesty, meekness, patience, obedience, charity, and all the other virtues of these spiritual daughters of Jesus Christ were the admiration of all who came to know of them or who heard of them.

It now became a question of finding a spiritual father and superior for this religious community, that is, a visible guardian angel. By his charity and prudent conduct, and by his vigilance and fidelity, he would preserve the primitive spirit which Jesus Christ had given them, through the ministry of their holy founder. He would have to be able to render all help

necessary to have the sisters pass from virtue to virtue along the way of perfection.

As this holy prelate had said in his book *Philothea* [*Introduction to the Devout Life*] <Ftn: Part I, Ch. 4.> speaking of a spiritual director for an individual, "He must be chosen from ten thousand. Even then you will find fewer than you would like who are capable of this office." This being so, we can imagine how difficult it would be to find a true spiritual father and a worthy superior for a whole congregation. Each day it was growing in numbers and in virtue. It demanded more light and grace in the one charged with its direction since the religious life is the more sublime. Its life of perfection is more important, and its failure would be more disastrous for the Church. For these reasons the holy founder required qualities beyond those needed for personal direction. He looked for a man of great virtue and great charity joined to learning and experience. This meant, in a word, a man endowed with all the virtues, capable of leading souls called by God to the highest perfection.

With these desirable qualities in mind, it is a tribute to the high virtue and the other gifts of mind and heart of Monsieur Vincent that he should be chosen from among all his learned and pious contemporaries. Blessed Francis de Sales had a singular gift of discerning spirits, and Mother de Chantal a clear understanding mind. They judged Monsieur Vincent to be the best qualified and most capable person for this responsibility, to assume charge of those they held most dear and most precious in all the world.

In Paris there were persons of learning and piety older than Monsieur Vincent: pastors accomplished in their work, noted doctors of the colleges of Sorbonne, Navarre, and the other colleges of the noted university of the first city of the kingdom. There were also renowned spiritual directors. Despite all this, after long consideration, prayer, and consultation with the saintly superior the blessed bishop felt he could not make a better choice for this important position than Vincent de Paul. He found in him all the qualities so necessary for the first spiritual father and superior of this religious congregation at its birth. <Ftn: He became superior of the Visitation sometime before December 22, 1622. He was not the first but the second superior, succeeding Charles de la Saussaye who died September 21, 1621. Saint Vincent, however, made the first regular visitation of the convent and was noteworthy for his care of the nuns.>

If what was said by an ancient author be true, "It is a special grace to be praised by one himself worthy of praise;

<Ftn: Cicero, Letters, Book 5, 12.> the excellence of virtue in the one who speaks gives weight to what he says in honor of the other," <Ftn: Panegyric of the emperor Julian, by Claudius Mamertinus.> we must admit that Monsieur Vincent could not have received a more significant endorsement than he did from the saintly bishop of Geneva. We know from the results that the bishop's judgment was correct.

From this time on, Monsieur Vincent served as superior of the sisters, under the authority of Cardinal de Retz, then bishop of Paris, <Ftn: Henri de Gondi, the first Cardinal de Retz, and uncle of Jean Francois Paul de Gondi, the second Cardinal de Retz.> and of his successors. In Book Two <Ftn: Ch. 7. The original edition reads Book Three, clearly an error.> we shall see the way this wise superior guided the houses established in Paris and elsewhere as well. God's blessing remained upon his leadership, which lasted thirty-eight years, until the end of his life, despite his efforts to resign several times because of the pressure of other work. Besides, he doubted that as a member of the Congregation of the Mission, committed to the direct service of the most abandoned poor, especially those in the countryside, he should be involved in this sort of work.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

He is Appointed Head of the College des Bons Enfants, and Later Makes the First Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission

Madame de Gondi, as we have already said, saw both the need and the success of the missions. She had conceived the idea some years before of endowing a foundation of priests or religious to give some of their time to providing missions on her lands. She grew more and more anxious about this project, especially each year when she reviewed her last will and testament. Her plan was to contribute sixteen thousand *livres* towards this undertaking, and her wish was that Monsieur Vincent would be the one to carry it out.

Monsieur Vincent looked everywhere for the means and the occasion for complying with the wishes of this virtuous lady. He spoke several times with superiors of various orders and used all his powers of persuasion to have them accept the foundation. However, he found none willing to take up the project for his own community. Each one had his own reason, but the fact was that none judged it proper to do so, for all felt this foundation was destined by God to be Monsieur Vincent's arena of service. Providence directs all things to their proper end and often makes use of secondary agents to effect its design. This is how it came about, in this instance, that the foundation became Monsieur Vincent's concern.

Madame de Gondi became aware of the refusal of the religious communities to take up this work. <Ftn: CED XI: 170-71.> She also was aware that doctors and other clerics helped Monsieur Vincent in the work of the missions. She thought that if they had a house in Paris they might possibly come together in some form of community. This might even attract others to this same work, and so perpetuate the work of the missions she had so much at heart. She spoke of this to her husband. He not only approved the idea but wished to become a co-founder with her of this foundation. The two spoke to His Excellency, John Francis de Gondi, the general's brother, the successor to Cardinal de Retz as leader of the Church in Paris, and later its first archbishop. <Ftn: This Jean Francois was brother both to Philip Emmanuel and Henri de Gondi. In 1622 he succeeded his brother, the first Cardinal de Retz, as the first archbishop of Paris, raised to an archdiocese by Gregory XV in that year.> He heartily approved their plan, since his diocese would likely win many advantages from it. He proposed that on his part he would make available the College des Bons Enfants, which was then at his disposition, as the residence for these

priests. <Ftn: This residence, nearly three centuries old, was one of the oldest of the university, but almost abandoned and dilapidated. It occupied some sixteen acres. It took its name, "Good Youth," from the type of upper-class students expected there. Students, whether foundation scholars or paying borders, were provided with shelter and sleeping quarters.>

The three together considered who might be best suited for bringing this project to a successful conclusion. All three decided to meet with Monsieur Vincent to overcome all objections his humility would raise and to have him accept. All this came about as they hoped, chiefly because Monsieur Vincent's great respect for all three of these persons led him to do all they asked of him. He agreed to their proposition, first, to take over the direction of the College des Bons Enfants and the priests who might come to live there to help out in the giving of missions; second, to accept, in the name of these priests, the foundation given by the de Gondis; and third, to select personally those he thought proper and disposed to participate in this holy work.

Once they had agreed on these matters, a formal deed was drawn up. On March 1, 1624, the archbishop sent him his appointment as head of the College des Bons Enfants. <Ftn: At this same time, Saint Vincent acquired rights to the priory of Saint Nicolas de Grosse-Sauve in the diocese of Langres. *CED* XIII:56-57. The document is dated February 1624. He may never have exercised these rights, however.>

On April 17 of the following year, the general of the galleys and his wife delivered the contract of foundation, written in a fashion worthy of their piety.

It declared, in the first place:

God, having for some years inspired in us the desire to honor him in our own lands and elsewhere, and we, having now considered how it has pleased his divine Majesty to provide in his infinite mercy for the spiritual needs of the residents of the cities by many doctors and good religious who have preached and catechized, and who have preserved in them a spirit of devotion, only the poor of the countryside now remain, and they alone are neglected. It has seemed that this evil might be remedied by a pious association of clerics, learned and devoted and of known ability. They should renounce all the conveniences of the towns and all benefices or other Church dignities. Under the guidance of the bishops they would give themselves entirely and solely to the salvation of these poor people, going from village to village at their own

common expense. They would preach, instruct, exhort, and catechize those poor people and bring them to make a good general confession of their past lives, without taking any recompense in any manner whatsoever. In this, they would give freely what they have freely received from the hand of God.

To help arrive at this, the said lord and lady, in thanksgiving for the gifts and graces they have received and continue to receive from the divine Majesty, to contribute to the salvation of the souls of the poor in honor of the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord and of the life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord, for the love of his blessed Mother, and to obtain the grace to live the rest of their lives worthily and come with their family to eternal glory, the said lord and lady have contributed a sum of forty thousand *livres* into the hands of Monsieur Vincent de Paul, priest of the diocese of Dax, with the following clauses and charges, To wit:

The said lord and lady confide to Monsieur Vincent the right to select and choose within the year a certain number of clerics to live at the expense of the foundation. These men will have the learning, piety, good conduct, and integrity of life necessary to engage in this work for the remainder of their lives under the direction of Monsieur Vincent. The said lord and lady expressly understand and order that because of the confidence they have in him and because of the experience he has had in the missions, so blessed by God, he should guide this undertaking. Nevertheless, it is understood that Monsieur Vincent will continue to live in the de Gondi household to continue to provide the spiritual help he has given these many years past.

That the said clergy and others who might in future wish to join in this holy enterprise devote themselves solely to the welfare of the poor country people. For this purpose they promise not to preach or administer the sacraments in any city where there is an archiepiscopal or episcopal palace or regional court, unless it be a case of unusual necessity.

That the said clerics live in common, under obedience to the said Monsieur de Paul or his successors after his death. That the name of this community be the Company or the Congregation of the Mission. That those who join this community have the

intention of serving God in the manner spoken of above and promise to observe the rules which shall be given. That every five years they serve all the lands of the said lord and lady by preaching, hearing confessions, catechizing, and the other good works spoken of above. That they render spiritual help to the poor convicts so they may benefit from the corporal sufferings they may have to undergo, although the general recognizes no obligation on his part to do so. That this charity be continued in the future by the said clerics to the said convicts for good and just considerations. Finally, the said lord and lady remain jointly founders of this good work. As such, they and their heirs enjoy and retain in perpetuity all the rights and privileges accorded to patrons in the sacred canons, except the right of assigning persons to positions of responsibility, which right they have renounced. <Ftn: CED XIII:197-202; for the act of approval by the archbishop of Paris, April 24, 1626, see CED XIII:202-03.>

Some other clauses in this contract had to do with the good order to be observed by the priests, or the frequency of the missions, or their own development. These are too long to cite here, but what has been given suffices to see the origins of this first of the houses of the Congregation of the Mission. It also allows us to see how exalted and agreeable to God, whose greater glory alone motivated this action, was this foundation for the salvation of most abandoned souls, such as the poor of the countryside.

It is particularly noteworthy how disinterested the benefactors were. They imposed no obligation of masses and prayers for themselves, neither in this life or after their death. Freed from this obligation, the priests of the Congregation could act with greater liberty. They could give themselves completely to the functions of their ministry and work more diligently for the missions. These charitable founders voluntarily deprived themselves of all the spiritual suffrages they might have had, in favor of the poor and to the greater glory of God.

Shortly after the execution of this contract, the general of the galleys went to Provence, and Madame remained in Paris. They were both greatly consoled that their offering to God had been accomplished. They were greatly relieved to know their new foundation was off to a good start by being placed in the care of Monsieur Vincent, in whom they had such complete confidence. They knew for sure that, like the servant in the Gospel who had

received the ten talents, he would devote himself completely to making good use of them. In this they were not to be disappointed, for under the prudent and faithful direction of Monsieur Vincent this first foundation, by the blessing of God, led to many others, as we shall see in this book.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Madame de Gondi Passes from This Life to a Better One. Monsieur Vincent Goes to the College des Bons Enfants

The foundation of the priests of the Mission was the one dearest to the heart of Madame de Gondi. She recognized the great fruit it could produce in the Church for the salvation and sanctification of many souls. After God had allowed her to put the finishing touches on this project, it seemed, like another Saint Monica, she could say in her heart that her work on earth was at an end. God heard her prayers, calling her to himself to receive the crown prepared for her because of her great service to his divine Majesty. <Ftn: PL 32:775.>

Only two months after signing the contract of foundation, she was stricken with an illness that soon brought her to the last extremity. Her previous sicknesses and the fatigue brought on by her life of zeal and charity left her with little strength to resist the progress of her latest sickness. On the eve of the feast of Saint John the Baptist in 1625, she passed from this life to her eternal home. <Ftn: June 23. She died in Paris, at age forty-two.> This death must have been precious in God's sight, for it was preceded by a saintly life that would fill an entire volume were it set down in writing. Monsieur Vincent was the one person with the most complete knowledge of her excellent qualities and her rare virtues, but he kept a close silence on all her actions in which he had any part. He never spoke of these things so as not to reveal his own part in them. Since this holy and virtuous woman had done almost nothing for the service and glory of God without the cooperation of Monsieur Vincent, her works could not be spoken of without attracting attention to himself. He feared this more than anything and did all he could to avoid it.

After the last respects were paid to Madame de Gondi, her body was taken to the Carmelite monastery on the Rue Chapon as she had requested. Monsieur Vincent left soon afterwards for Provence to bring the sad news to her husband. He knew well that this news and the painful separation it involved would deeply affect the general of the galleys. He at first concealed his reason for coming, speaking instead of the obligation the general had to thank God for the special graces he and his family had received. This thanks to God is shown by a perfect spirit of dependence on God and a desire to conform ourselves to his holy will in all things without reserve. Finally, he came little by little to the sad news he bore. After his first shock, the general was consoled by Monsieur Vincent with all that the

Holy Spirit suggested as consolation in the face of the sad news and as a help to him in bearing this affliction, which he felt so deeply and so sharply, with peace and tranquility of spirit. We can truthfully say that among the special graces Monsieur Vincent had received from God was his gift of consoling the sorrowful and assuaging the interior sufferings of others. Our Lord Jesus Christ had given him this grace by a special outpouring of his Spirit. This enabled him to say in imitation of the Lord, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to evangelize the poor, to console the afflicted, and to cure those wounded in heart." <Ftn: Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18.>

This gift of Monsieur Vincent had often been experienced by the saintly departed woman, who suffered much from the interior pains God saw fit to send her. In this state she could find no surer consolation than that offered by Monsieur Vincent. She recognized in him such a concern for the true good of her soul and a source of such graces for her family that she never wanted him to leave her household. She regarded him as the Ark in the house of Obedom, attracting God's blessing by his very presence. All this explains why in her last testament she begged him, "for the love of our Savior Jesus Christ and of his holy Mother, never to leave the household of the general of the galleys, nor, after his death, the home of her children." In addition, the testament continued by asking the general to retain Monsieur Vincent for himself and the children, to remember and practice his wise recommendations. She was well aware that if they did, they would benefit greatly from his prudent direction.

Monsieur Vincent was not satisfied to remain in this house, for though well run, it had too much of a worldly atmosphere about it. Considering what God was calling him to, he preferred to obey that call rather than fulfill what his patroness has so earnestly desired. He ardently besought the general to assent to his leaving to take up residence in the College des Bons Enfants. He finally obtained this agreement and moved to his new home.

In 1625 this faithful servant of God, who had sailed on the stormy sea of the outside world, came by a singular gift of divine Providence to that sure harbor where he was to lead a truly apostolic life. He renounced all honors, dignities, and other worldly goods to commit himself to work at his own spiritual perfection and the salvation of others through the practice of the virtues taught and lived by Jesus Christ. <Ftn: He spent a year arranging his temporal affairs and providing for the future of his sons, and then retired to the Oratory, where for thirty-five years he lived a most courageous and edifying

life. He continued to support the charitable works of Saint Vincent. The saint wrote to his former benefactor to take his leave as his life was coming to an end; see *CED* VII:435-36. Father de Gondi died at Joigny, June 29, 1662.>

It was here that he laid the foundations of his Congregation of the Mission, committed as were the first disciples of Jesus Christ to follow that first missionary, come down from heaven to live among us. He dedicated himself to the same cause as did Jesus during his mortal life.

To appreciate God's designs in regard to this new Congregation of the Mission, it is necessary to know the one chosen by the infinitely wise Providence as its founder. We must see how God gave him all the qualities of mind and heart so necessary to succeed in this project of such importance to the glory of his name and the good of the Church. It certainly will not be easy to discover what his humility so carefully concealed. What charity or obedience obliged him to reveal we can know but we cannot know the main facets of his disposition. These were interior and of a spiritual nature. In the following chapter we can present only a superficial and imperfect sketch of his character. Yet this will be enough to give some indication of the person we will speak of in the remainder of this work.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Monsieur Vincent's Dispositions of Body and Soul and his Manner of Acting

Monsieur Vincent was of medium height and well proportioned. His head was somewhat fleshy, large enough, but well suited to the rest of the body. His forehead was broad and stately, his face neither too full nor too pinched, his appearance mild, his look penetrating, his hearing acute, his bearing grave but benign, his countenance relaxed and open, easy to approach, his disposition kindly and good. <Ftn: He always refused to have his portrait painted, even at the repeated requests of those closest to him like Mesdames Goussault and de Lamoignon. His confreres also tried to persuade him to allow a portrait to be painted. Finally, a painter was secretly brought to Saint Lazare to study his proposed subject, and he produced a portrait. The details of this were preserved by Brother Bertrand Ducournau, the saint's secretary.> His temperament was sanguine and bilious. His constitution was strong and robust yet he was more subject to the bad weather than one would have thought. This left him open to developing fevers.

His spirit was broad, composed, circumspect, capable of great things, and difficult to take unawares. He was not a quick learner, but when forced by circumstances to do so, he could penetrate quickly to the heart of the matter. He looked into all the circumstances both great and small. He foresaw the difficulties in a course of action and the likely outcomes. Unless forced to take quick action, he would seek counsel before deciding. He looked into the reasons for and against and was happy to consult with others. When asked for his advice, or when obliged to come to some decision, he outlined the problem at hand in such clear order that he astonished even the most expert in the field, above all in matters spiritual or ecclesiastical.

He never rushed into business matters. Neither the magnitude of the question nor its problems bothered him. With determination and force of mind he would undertake a project, applying himself with order and insight and would bear its burdens with patience and tranquility.

When a question of some issues arose, he would listen respectfully, never interrupting the speaker. By contrast, when he himself was interrupted he would stop at once and later take up again the thread of his argument. When he gave his opinion on some matter, he did not speak at length. He would express his thought in few words, with his natural eloquence. He could not only explain his perspective clearly and solidly but also touch

his listeners by his affective language when he thought it proper. Both prudence and simplicity marked his speech. He said sincerely just what he thought. He kept quiet on some matters when he saw it could cause some hurt if he spoke. He was ever present to himself, careful never to say or write anything showing anger, rancor, or disrespect towards anyone.

His mind was not given lightly to changes. His maxim was: if things are going well, do not easily change them to improve them. He suspected new and extraordinary propositions, whether merely speculative or practical. He held to common usages and customs in matters of religion. He used to say: "The human mind is quick and restless. The most active and most creative minds are not always the best, if they are not accompanied with discrimination. Those walk most securely who travel the same path as most of the wise."

He did not stop at mere outward appearances, but penetrated to their nature and end. By his own excellent common sense, he was able to distinguish the true from the false and the good from the bad, even though they often appear under the same guise.

His heart was tender, noble, generous, and free. He easily developed an affection for what was good and in keeping with the holiness of God. Nevertheless, he had an absolute control over his natural tendencies. Reason so controlled his passions that it was hard to know he had any.

We cannot say he had no defects, for Holy Scripture says otherwise. Even the apostles and other saints were not preserved from faults. All the same, scarcely anyone in this final age was so involved in all sorts of situations, meeting all types of people, and participated in a large variety of enterprises and who met with less criticism than Monsieur Vincent did. God had given him the grace to be fully self-possessed, so nothing seemed to surprise him. His viewpoint was ever directed towards our Savior Jesus Christ and so his words and actions were influenced by this divine model. In this way he acted with great circumspection and reserve towards the great and with kindness and affability towards the least. His life was not only above reproach but worthy of the universal and public approbation he received.

Since there are ever those who do not follow the general opinion, some spirited types took exception that he took too long to make up his mind and carry out his decisions. Others objected that he spoke too poorly of himself and too well of others.

There is something in these two points, but most people fall into the opposite defect. We might say of Monsieur Vincent

what Saint Jerome wrote about Saint Paula: "Her faults would be considered virtues in others."

As to the first charge, Monsieur Vincent was slow and deliberate in making decisions because of both his nature and his understanding of what was proper. His own understanding gave him an extensive view of a question, which required some time to resolve, and often left him in a sort of indecision. His spiritual viewpoint was that we must never anticipate divine Providence. He had a most sensitive conscience on this point. He was convinced that God could accomplish what he wished just as well with him as without him. What God does of his own accord is done better and with greater assurance.

On the other hand, people often do more harm than good. They contribute some of their own frailty or passion. He used to say: "Nothing is more common than the poor success of things done too precipitously." <Ftn: CED I:434.> Experience proves that Monsieur Vincent's deliberate way of acting did not hinder any good work. On the contrary, he did more of the most varied and important things and stuck to his projects better than most other people, as we will have occasion to see during this book. It seemed that God wanted to convince everyone that ardor and haste were not the key points. The earth, solid and heavy as it is, is what brings forth trees and flowers. The vivacity of fire, if not well regulated, is suited more to destroy.

As to the second point, the world is so given to self-praise and pulling down the reputation of others that if he conformed to this way of acting no one would ever have said a word of reproach. But since he did just the opposite, there were complaints. His usual practice was to praise virtuous people, but speak disparagingly of himself, as being in a long line of sinners. In so doing he was following the example of the greatest saints, and even the Saint of Saints. He said by the mouth of a prophet that he was a worm and no man. <Ftn: Ps 22:7.> Although Jesus was just and innocent, or rather Justice and Innocence itself, he passed for a sinner among men. He presented himself before his heavenly Father loaded down with the sins of the people.

Monsieur Vincent had so taken to heart this practice of humility and self-deprecation that he seemed to see only vice and sin. When he requested prayers to help him bless God, it was not to thank him for the singular graces his goodness had bestowed upon him, but to praise the patience with which divine mercy bore his sins and, as he used to say, supported him even in his abominations and infidelity.

Only in the secret of his heart did he express his thanks to God for his great favors and the evident gifts he had

received from his hand. He never spoke of these things, fearing to attribute any of this to himself. He looked on the graces he had received as belonging to God and on himself as being unworthy of them. He did not think of these gifts as belonging to himself but as coming from God and belonging to him. He imitated the apostle in boasting only of his infirmities and concealed all the rest.

On the other hand, in closing his eyes to the weaknesses and faults of others, particularly in those he was not actively directing, he gladly praised the good he perceived in them. He did so not so much to attribute these good qualities to the other person but so as to glorify God, the sovereign Author of all good. He said once: "Some always think well of their neighbor, as much as true charity will allow them to do so. They cannot witness virtue without praising it nor virtuous persons without loving them." He was himself an example of this maxim, but always with the greatest prudence and discretion. He seldom praised the members of his own Congregation publicly, and then only when he judged it would be expedient for the greater glory of God and the greater good of all. For others, he rejoiced openly with them for the graces they had received from God and the good use they had made of his gifts. He spoke this way to encourage them to perseverance in the good they had begun.

Lastly, to express in few words what we will say more fully in Book Three on the virtues of Monsieur Vincent, he had taken Jesus Christ, our divine savior, as the only exemplar of his life. He had so imprinted the image of Jesus Christ upon his mind and was so penetrated with his holy maxims that he spoke, thought, and acted only in view of God. The life of our divine Savior and the lessons of the Gospel were the sole rule of his life and actions. They were his book of morals and his book of politics, and they guided him in all the matters that passed through his hands. They were, in a word, the sure foundation on which he built his entire spiritual edifice.

We can say in truth that without realizing it, he left us a miniature portrait of his whole life and a sort of motto, when he said one day: "Nothing pleases me except in Jesus Christ." <Ftn: This statement and a few other slight corrections on one page of this chapter were added to a second printing of the first edition in 1664.> This was the source of his unshakable constancy and firmness in doing good and of his being able to stand unmoved by any consideration of human respect or his own personal interest. This source enabled him to support the contradictions, to endure the persecutions, to put his life on the line and, as the wise man says, to defend to the death justice and truth. Towards the end of his life Monsieur Vincent

spoke in these remarkable words: "Whoever speaks of the teachings of Jesus Christ speaks of an unshakable rock: eternal truths, which infallibly produce their proper fruit. They should rather expect the heavens to fall than find the truths of Jesus Christ to fail." <Ftn: *CED* XII:116.>

To impress this truth more firmly in the minds of others, he would sometimes use the following story:

Our good peasants know that the moon changes. It causes eclipses of the sun or the other stars. They often speak of these events, and observe them when they occur. An astrologer looks at these same things from afar in another way. By his art or science he can say that on such and such a day, at such an hour, at such a minute, we will have an eclipse. And this is true not only of astrologers in Europe but in China or elsewhere. Looking into the obscure future they can predict what will happen in the heavens a hundred, a thousand, four thousand or more years ahead. They know the rules which govern the motion of the heavens. If these people have this kind of knowledge, how much more should we believe that divine Wisdom penetrates into the least circumstances of the most hidden things. The truth of his maxims given in the teachings of the Gospel, although unknown to many in the world, are clearly seen after they occur, ordinarily only at the hour of death. Alas, why are we not convinced that these same truths as proposed by the infinite charity of Jesus Christ will never be proved wrong? The truth is that we are not convinced and quickly turn to human prudence as our guide. Do you not see that we are to blame if we trust in human reasoning rather than the promises of eternal Wisdom, to the deceitful disappointments of the world rather than the love of our Savior, who came down from heaven to show us the right way? <Ftn: *CED* XII:121-22.>

Monsieur Vincent was not content to fill only his own mind and heart with the truths and maxims of the Gospel. He used every opportunity to persuade others, and particularly those of his own Congregation, of these same truths. This is what he said, on one occasion, on this subject: <Ftn: *CED* XII:182-94.

The Congregation must give itself to God to be nourished by this heavenly ambrosia, to live the way our Savior lived, to direct our actions to him, and to mold our lives on his example.

He made it his first maxim always to seek God's glory and justice, always and before all else. How

beautiful this is, to seek first the reign of God in ourselves and in others! If any group accepts this precept of working for the glory of God, how great will be its own happiness! What reason for hope that all will turn out well! If it pleases God to give us this grace, our happiness will be beyond compare.

In the world, when someone takes a trip, the first concern is that he is going the correct way. How much more those who have professed following Jesus Christ in the practice of the teachings of the Gospel (particularly seeking the glory of God above all things else) should be aware of why they are acting as they do. They must ask themselves, why am I doing this? Is it because I feel like it? Is it because I have an aversion to something else? Is it to please some unworthy creature? Or could it be to fulfill the good pleasure of God and seek his justice? What a noble life that would be! Would it be a human life? No, it would be an angelic life, since I do what I do purely for the love of God and leave aside what I do not do.

If you add to this the practice of seeking to do the will of God, which ought to be the soul of the Congregation and a practice you should keep close to your heart, you will have a means of perfection that is easy, excellent, and infallible. Our actions will be more than human, more even than angelic, but in some way divine, for they will be done in God by the movement of his Spirit and by his grace. What an excellent way of life such a way of acting would be! What a way of life that of the missionaries would be, if it embraced this practice.

Next comes simplicity, which causes God to take delight in the soul in which it dwells. Look around our own group to consider those in whom this virtue is particularly noticeable. Are they not the most lovable? Does not this candor appeal to us when we speak with them? Who should not strive for this virtue, since our Lord himself was so pleased to be with the simple?

Well regulated prudence also makes us agreeable to God since it leads us to those things conducive to his glory and makes us avoid what is opposed. With prudence we do not simply avoid duplicity in word and action but act with wisdom, circumspection, and rectitude. We reach our goals by the means suggested

by the Gospel, not for a time only, but forever. How blessed we would be, ourselves and our Congregation, if we walked this path.

If you add to these virtues meekness and humility, what would be lacking? They are two blood sisters, just like simplicity and prudence. Our Savior Jesus Christ taught us this lesson when he said we must learn of him because he was meek and humble of heart. Learn of me, he said. What words! What honor to be his pupils, to receive this short but powerful lesson, which would be so impressive if it were to make us like himself. O my Savior, shall you not have the same influence over us as the philosophers had over their students, who were so strongly attracted to their statements that it was enough to say, The Master has said . . . , to gain their belief? What will we say in response to our Lord who has taught us so much, if we have learned so little? But what happiness for us if we embrace these virtues born so nobly in the heart of Jesus Christ! Do you want to know? They will lead us to that furnace of love whence they took their birth. O my God, who of us would not be all in love with you!

What can we say of him who would seek the kingdom of God, would embrace the holy practice of seeking his most holy will, who tries to be simple and prudent and practices the meekness and humility of our Lord? What would we all be if we were to act this way? What sort of Congregation would the Congregation of the Mission be? God alone could reveal this to you. For my part I do not have words enough to express myself. Tomorrow at mental prayer think about this, about what such a person and such a Congregation would be.

To all this Monsieur Vincent added two other important maxims, which he professed himself, and which he strove to inculcate in his followers.

The first was not to be content with an affective love for God, to have exalted notions of his glory. These sentiments must be expressed in action or as Saint Gregory says, "to give proof of your love by your good works." <Ftn: PL 76:1220.> On this matter he one day spoke thus to his community:

Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be in the strength of our arm and in the sweat of our brow. Sentiments of love of God, of kindness, of good will, good as these may be, are often suspect if they do not result in good deeds. Our Savior said that his Father was glorified in our bearing much

fruit. We should be on our guard, for it is possible to be well mannered exteriorly and filled with noble sentiments towards the Almighty in our minds and yet stop there. When the occasion for action arises, such people fall short. They may be consoled by their fervent imagination or content with the sweet sentiments they experience in mental prayer. They may speak like the angels, but when it is a matter of working for God, of suffering, of mortifying themselves, of teaching the poor, of seeking out the lost sheep, of rejoicing at deprivations, of comforting the sick or some other service, oh, here they draw the line. Their courage fails them. No, no, we must not deceive ourselves: *totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit* ["all our work consists in action"]. <Ftn: CED XI:40-41.>

He often repeated these words, which he said he had first heard from the lips of a great servant of God on his deathbed, when asked for some final edifying words. He had replied that he saw clearly in this last hour that what some people took as contemplation, ecstasy, or overwhelming experience of God were not evidence of divine union but were mere smoke. This feeling proceeded from idle curiosity or the natural inclination of a mind inclined to the good. All this was far from that good and perfect action which characterizes true love for God.

Monsieur Vincent said:

That is so true, that the holy apostle declares that our good actions alone will accompany us to the next life. Reflect on this, especially so because there are those in our time who seem virtuous enough, and perhaps are. However, they are inclined to an easy and soft life rather than to a solid and laborious one. The Church is compared to a great harvest that needs workers, but workers who actually labor. Nothing conforms more to the Gospel than to take the light and strength one finds in his soul in mental prayer, in spiritual reading, or in solitude, and bring this spiritual nourishment to others. This is what our Lord did, and his apostles also. This is to join the Martha's role to Mary's. This is to imitate the dove that takes but a part of its food for itself, while bringing the rest to the nest for its young. This is what we should do, how we should prove by our works that we do love God: *totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit* ["all our work consists in action"].

The second maxim of this faithful servant of God was always to see our Savior Jesus Christ in others, to inspire our charity towards them. In the Holy Father, the pope, he saw our divine Savior as pontiff and head of the Church. The bishop he saw as Jesus the bishop and prince of pastors. He saw the doctors of the Church as Jesus the doctor, priests as Jesus the priest, all religious as Jesus the religious, the king as Jesus the sovereign ruler, gentlemen as Jesus the noble one, magistrates, governors, and other officers as Jesus the judge and all-wise ruler. In the Gospel the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a merchant, and so it was that he looked on traders. He saw Jesus the worker in the artisans, Jesus the poor man in the poor, Jesus suffering in the sick and dying. He looked on all states in life, seeing in each the image of his sovereign Lord who dwelt in the person of his neighbor. He was moved, in this view, to honor, respect, love, and serve each person as our Lord, and our Lord in each individual. He wanted his followers and all those with whom he spoke to enter into these same sentiments, to make their charity towards the neighbor more constant and more perfect.

This is a sketch of the mind of Monsieur Vincent, traced out for the most part by his own hand, without his being aware of doing so. His constant effort was to remain in the background, to cover the gifts and grace he had received with the veil of silent humility. God willed it so that he unwittingly revealed much of the graces and excellent qualities poured into his soul, to make him a worthy instrument of his glory, and to use him in those great enterprises for the good of his Church, as we shall see in this book.

To summarize in a few words what has been said in this chapter about Monsieur Vincent, we can say without fear of contradiction:

- (1) He was a saint ever directed towards God and leading others to him, as well and directing all things to God as to their final goal.
- (2) He was humble, mistrustful of his own lights, quick to take counsel in his doubts, and attentive to the Holy Spirit as his guide and teacher.
- (3) He was mild in his way of acting, understanding the weaknesses of others and accommodating himself to events and persons.
- (4) He was firm in his accomplishment of the will of God and whatever concerned the spiritual development of his own community. He was not swayed by opposition or cast down by difficulties.

(5) He was straightforward, never allowing himself to be turned aside from the ways of God by any element of human respect.

(6) He was simple in his behavior, rejecting all pretense, duplicity, artifice, or prudence of the flesh.

(7) He was prudent, choosing the best means of accomplishing the end he ever proposed to himself, which was to do what he considered most pleasing to God. He took care in carrying out his designs that he would not shock or sadden anyone, as much as lay in his power, and either avoided difficulties or overcame them by his patience and his prayers.

(8) He was circumspect, not speaking of matters before their time or to those with no right to be informed. He used to say, "The demon rejoices in needless publicity given to good works. These then become trivial and without effect."

(9) He was reserved and circumspect, not given to levity, not pushing himself to the fore.

(10) Lastly, he was disinterested, not seeking honors or personal satisfaction for himself, or any temporal gain. His sole goal, in imitation of his divine Master, was the glory of God and the salvation and sanctification of souls.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Birth and Establishment of the Congregation of the Mission

We could truthfully say that this Congregation in its beginnings was that small mustard seed spoken of in the Gospel: although the least of all the seeds, it becomes a great tree in which the birds of the air build their nests. Nothing was so small as the Congregation at its commencement, not only in external things, but in the mind of Monsieur Vincent and the first priests associated with him. They thought of themselves as the least of all those engaged in Church ministry. They committed themselves to the humblest tasks, serving the lowest and least appreciated in the common opinion of the world, such as instructing and catechizing the poor, particularly in the small villages and the most abandoned places. They would help, assist, and aid the sick poor, and disposing both the poor and the sick to make good general confessions. They thought of themselves as servants of the pastors and other priests, but also of the villagers, the galley slaves, or any other person in need. They were of a mind to do this gratuitously, with no recompense whatever. They considered it an honor to serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor and accepted it as a favor that pastors would allow them to carry out these works of charity in their parishes.

It pleased God to pour out abundant blessings upon these small beginnings, and there soon developed a large community which happily has expanded to many other places, as we shall describe below. This community has contributed, and continues to contribute, with special benediction, to the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

As has already been said, in 1625 after the death of Madame de Gondi, Monsieur Vincent moved to the principalship of the College des Bons Enfants, following the archbishop's efforts, supported by the lady and the general, to carry out the purpose of their foundation. Monsieur Portail, of whom we have already spoken, and who had already spent twelve or fifteen years with Monsieur Vincent, now saw a new opportunity to devote himself to God. He moved to the College des Bons Enfants with Monsieur Vincent, deciding to join the new company of priests and to commit himself to the missions. He persuaded another priest to join him in this decision, promising him fifty *ecus* each year for personal expenses. <Ftn: Adrien Gambart, priest of the diocese of Noyon. Among other works he published *Le Missionnaire paroissial*, 10 vols., Paris, 1668, which reflects the method of preaching recommended by Saint Vincent.> The three went from

village to village, catechizing, exhorting, hearing confessions, and performing the other exercises of the mission with simplicity, humility, and charity, all at their own expense, not asking for anything for themselves. They worked first in those places where the missions had already been set up, but gradually moved to other parishes, chiefly in the diocese of Paris. Since they did not have the means to engage watchmen to live in the College des Bons Enfants, in their absence they left the keys with one of the neighbors.

Who would have thought that from such modest beginnings great progress would be made, such as we now see? Or that two poor priests going out to the smallest villages and other forgotten places would actually be laying the foundations of such a large spiritual edifice which God was pleased to raise up in his Church? Monsieur Vincent spoke of this marvel one day to his community at Saint Lazare:

We went plainly and simply, sent by their lordships the bishops, to evangelize the poor, just as our Lord did. That is all we did. And for his part, God accomplished what he had foreseen from all eternity. He so blessed our work that other clerics joined us, asking to be received into our Company, not all at once, but from time to time. O Lord, who would ever have thought we would develop to our present state? If anyone had said as much then, I would have thought he was mocking me. And yet, that is how God began the Company. Oh well, would you call that human which no one even thought of? Neither myself nor Monsieur Portail ever did. Alas, we were far from that! <Ftn: CED XI:8-9.>

The archbishop of Paris, John Francis de Gondi, later gave official approbation to the institution of the Congregation of the Mission, by a decree dated April 24, 1626, in the same style as he used in the contract of foundation. Two good priests from Picardy, Fathers Francois du Coudray <Ftn: Francois du Coudray, 1586-1649, joined the Congregation in 1626, whose only other members were the founder and Antoine Portail. Saint Vincent chose him to go to Rome to negotiate the approbation of the Congregation; he remained there from 1631 to 1635. He served in many houses: Paris, Toul, Marseilles, La Rose, Richelieu. His theological knowledge was marred by some unorthodox opinions, and Saint Vincent took steps to prevent him from spreading errors.> and Jean de la Salle, <Ftn: Jean de la Salle, 1598-1639, was a gifted biblical expositor (see CED XII:293), came to Monsieur Vincent in 1626. He was the first director of the internal seminary (novitiate), 1637.> came to Monsieur

Vincent and offered to join Monsieur Portail in living and working under Monsieur Vincent's direction. He received them and associated them with himself in executing the foundation set up for the purpose, by an act certified by two notaries of the Chatelet on September 4, 1626.

The late King, Louis XIII, of glorious memory, by letters patent of May 1627, at the recommendation of the general of the galleys, confirmed and approved the contract of foundation allowing the Association or Congregation of the Priests of the Mission to live in common, to reside in various parts of the kingdom of France as shall seem good to them, and to accept all legacies, alms, or other gifts which shall be made to them.
<Ftn: CED XIII:225-26.>

God thus blessed the beginnings of the Congregation of the Mission by the special gift of his merciful Providence. By this same Providence he allowed it to increase and multiply. For this purpose he inspired several other clerics to work with Monsieur Vincent at the harvest of souls. Four other priests joined, besides the three already mentioned, that is, Jean Becu of the village of Brache in the diocese of Amiens, <Ftn: Jean Becu, 1592-1667, ordained a priest in 1616, came to the Congregation in 1626. Two of his brothers followed him, and one of his sisters became a Daughter of Charity.> Antoine Lucas of Paris, <Ftn: Antoine Lucas, 1600-1656, entered the Congregation in 1626, and was ordained two years later. He was known for his zeal and talent for preaching. He died a victim of his zeal for the plague-stricken.> Jean Brunet of the village of Rion in Auvergne in the diocese of Clermont, <Ftn: Jean-Joseph Brunet, 1597-1649, joined Saint Vincent in 1627. He died a victim of his zeal for the plague-stricken.> and Jean Dehorgny of the village of Estrees in the diocese of Noyon. <Ftn: Jean Dehorgny (or d'Horgny), ?-1667, joined Saint Vincent in 1627, and was ordained a priest a year later. He directed the College des Bons Enfants on three occasions. He was assistant to the superior general twice, superior of the house in Rome twice, and director of the Daughters of Charity from 1660 to 1667. Several of his conferences to them are still extant.>

These seven thus associated themselves and joined Monsieur Vincent to live and die in the Congregation of the Mission, promising God to remain faithful their entire life in working for the salvation and sanctification of the poor country people. This they faithfully accomplished. We could say these men were like the seven priests of Joshua. Their trumpets broke down the walls of Jericho, and their example, zeal, and virtue attracted several others to this holy army.

By a papal bull of Urban VIII dated January [12,] 1632, this pious Company was raised formally to the status of a Congregation, the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, under the direction of Monsieur Vincent. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:257-67. By contemporary reckoning, the year was 1633, since the papal year began not on January 1 but on March 25.> The pope gave him the authority to set down regulations for the good order of the community. To further the work of the institute, the king gave new letters patent, dated May 1642, approved by the Parlement of Paris in September of that same year. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:286-87.>

The bull of Urban VIII gave the name Priests of the Congregation of the Mission to those of this community. By this name they are distinguished from all other communities, even those who work at the same sort of mission as those of Monsieur Vincent. We have thought it necessary to underline this to avoid possible misunderstandings, if this distinction is not kept in mind. <Ftn: Alexander VII completed the work of Urban VIII by the approving the constitution of the company, 22 September 1655 (*CED* XIII:380-83). By this brief he approved the taking of vows, while explaining their exact nature for the Congregation of the Mission. He further legislated the exemption of the congregation from the jurisdiction of bishops in matters of internal administration, but respecting their jurisdiction in those things regarding the missions to be given in their dioceses. The first vows were taken by Saint Vincent and his confreres September 8, 1629.>

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Some Remarkable Statements of Monsieur Vincent Regarding the Spirit of Humility and the Other Virtuous Dispositions He Wished to See as the Foundation of His New Congregation

Monsieur Vincent saw that God's hand was with him and his fellow priests, and that God had blessed the beginnings of this new enterprise. He wanted this new structure of the Congregation of the Mission to have a foundation proportional to the heights it one day might attain. Like a good architect he wanted an absolutely firm foundation on which to build. His choice was nothing less than the virtue of humility. He realized that among the temptations and distractions the missionaries would be exposed to in their work, the best means of safeguarding their souls and their salvation was to hold fast to a low opinion of themselves. They must become despised and abject in their own eyes to be great and estimable before God. There was nothing to fear in humility, however well developed it might be. What was to be feared, even abhorred, was the least glorification to which they might come by presuming on themselves. This is why, from the very beginning of the Congregation, he sought to inspire its members with a spirit of abasement, humility, deprecation, and contempt of self.

He led them to think of themselves always as the least of all those who worked in the Church and to judge all others as superior to themselves. We know of no better way to convey his sentiments than to quote what he said once when a new priest recently received into the Congregation had referred to it as "this holy Congregation." This humble servant of God stopped him and said:

Monsieur, when you speak of our Company, we ought never use the terms "this holy Company" or "this holy Congregation," or any such terms. Rather, we ought to say "this poor Company," "this little Company," or some such expression. We should imitate the Son of God, who called the company of his apostles and disciples "little flock," or "little company."

How I wish that God would give this grace to this wretched Congregation that it might be well-grounded in humility, that it might be founded and built upon this virtue, and that humility would ever remain part of its structure. Gentlemen, be not deceived. Without humility, we have nothing. I speak not only of exterior humility but mainly of humility of the heart. This leads us to believe truly that no one on earth is

more wretched than you and I, and that the Congregation of the Mission is the most wretched of all the congregations, the poorest in numbers and in quality of its members. We ought to be at ease when people speak about us this way. Alas, what is it when we want to be regarded differently, to wish to be treated differently than the Son of God? It is insupportable pride. When the Son of God was on earth, what did people say of him? What did they think of him? He was regarded as a fool, a seditionist, a bumpkin, a sinner, though he was none of these. He even allowed Barabbas to be preferred to him, a robber, a murderer, a very evil man. O Savior, O my Savior, how your humility will confound sinners, especially miserable me, on the day of judgment! Be on your guard when you go on mission, you who speak in public. Often enough people will be so touched they will be moved to tears by what you say. They will even say, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that nursed you." <Ftn: Luke 11:27.> We have occasionally heard such things. Nature is pleased and vanity born if we do not turn from these vain praises and if we work for anything else than the glory of God and the salvation of souls. To do otherwise is to preach ourselves and not Jesus Christ.

And what about someone who preaches for applause, praise, esteem, and reputation? What shall we say of this person, this preacher? What, a person who uses the word of God, who speaks of divine things to acquire honor and a reputation, yes, it is a sacrilege. O my God, give the grace to this poor little Company that none of its members falls into this unhappy fault. Gentlemen, we shall never be properly disposed to fulfill our duty towards God if we do not have a profound humility and an entire disregard for ourselves. No, if the Congregation of the Mission is not humble, and if it is not persuaded that it can do nothing of value of itself and will spoil everything rather than succeed, it will never do any good. But if it lives in the Spirit, then, gentlemen, it will be a fitting instrument in God's designs, for through such people God accomplishes his true and great deeds.

Several doctors who explain today's Gospel <Ftn: November 25, Feast of Saint Catherine.> teach that the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins

ought to be understood as applying to people who have entered religious communities. If it be true that half of these persons will be lost, alas, have we nothing to fear? What of me, first of all? Should I not wonder? Let us, gentlemen, encourage one another, not lose heart. Let us give ourselves to God completely, renounce ourselves, our personal satisfactions, our ease, and our vanity. We should recognize that our greatest enemy is ourselves. Yet let us do all the good we can and do it with all possible care. It is not enough to help the neighbor, to fast, to make mental prayer, to work on the missions. All that is good, but not enough. We must do all this in the same spirit as did our Savior and in the way he did, humbly and purely, so that the name of God be glorified and his holy will accomplished.

Plants cannot produce more excellent fruit than that dictated by the nature of the stock on which they grow. We are like the stock of those who would come after us, whose perfection is determined by us. If we have done well, they shall do well, following our example. Those who stay will teach those who follow them the way the first members of the Company practiced virtue, and these in turn will teach others, all aided by the grace of God merited by the original members. How is it that we see in the world certain families in whom the fear of God dwells? I have one such family in mind, whose grandfather and father I knew, both good men, and even today I know that the children carry on this same tradition. Where does this come from? Chiefly from their parents, who have merited this grace from God by their good and holy lives, according to the promise of God himself that he would bless such families to the thousandth generation. <Ftn: Exod 34:7.> On the other hand, we see husbands and wives leading good lives, but who nevertheless seem to lose everything, and nothing succeeds. Why is this? Because their parents have earned God's punishment by the faults they have committed. This punishment has been passed on to their descendants, according to what is written, to the fourth generation. Although these punishments are understood to refer chiefly to material things, we can apply the thought to spiritual things as well. If we are exact in observing our rules, if we practice well the virtues appropriate to a true missionary, we will

merit in some way this same blessing for our children, that is, to those who will succeed us. They will be able to live good lives following our example. If we do ill, it is to be feared that they will do the same and even worse, because nature is inclined always to disorder and seeks after the self.

We ought to consider ourselves as the fathers of those who will follow us. The Company is still in its infancy, it has only just been born. It has been just a few years since it began. Is that not to be in infancy? Our successors in the next two or three hundred years will look on us as the fathers of the Company, even for those who have joined later. They too will be counted as fathers of the community, for anyone in the first hundred years will be so regarded.

When you look up a passage from some Father of the first centuries, you say, "This passage was from the pen of a Father of the first or second century." In the same way, they will say at some later day, the first priests of the Congregation of the Mission did this or that. They lived this way, and they observed such and such virtues. Because things are like this, gentlemen, do we not have a duty to leave a great example to our successors, since the good they do depends in some way on us? If it is true, as some Fathers of the Church say, that God allows parents in hell to see their children's evil as an added torment, then the more these children sin, the more blameworthy are the parents who have caused their children's evil deeds by the bad example given them.

Saint Augustine says, on the other hand, that God allows fathers and mothers in heaven to see the good their children do upon earth, for their greater happiness. In the same way, gentlemen, what a consolation and joy for us when God allows us to see the good our Company accomplishes, abounding in good deeds, faithfully observing the schedule, living in the practice of the virtues, and giving good example everywhere. How miserable I am, that I do not act this way! Pray for me, gentlemen, pray to God for me, my brothers, that I may be converted.

Let us all give ourselves to God and to everything that is worthwhile, working, helping the poor country people who await us. By God's grace some of our priests are almost always engaged in our work, some more, some less, in this or that mission, in this

village or some other. I remember formerly when I was returning from one of the missions, as I approached the gates of Paris I felt they would fall upon me and crush me. Rarely did I return from a mission but this thought came to me. The reason was, I heard a voice saying within me, "You have gone out to such and such a village, but others await the same help as you brought them." Again, I seemed to hear it said, "If you had not been there, probably many persons would have died in their miserable state and would have been damned. If you have found such and such sins in the one parish, do you not think you would probably find the same in the neighboring parishes? And yet you leave, with people dying in sin, and you will in some way be responsible for their loss. You should fear that God will punish you for this." This is how my spirit was troubled. <Ftn: CEDXI:439-45.>

On another occasion he said to his followers:

The state of the missionary conforms to the Gospel maxims. These essentially are to leave all, following the example of the apostles, to follow Jesus Christ and to imitate his manner of living. The devil alone could find something to complain of in such a life, as someone once said to me. Nothing is more Christian than to go from village to village, helping poor people in working out their salvation, even at the cost of fatigue and inconvenience. This is how several of our confreres now work in a village of the diocese of Evreux, where they must sleep on straw. Why? To help souls reach paradise, by teaching and by suffering. Does this not resemble what our Lord came to do? He had only a stone on which to lay his head. Yet, he went from place to place to gain souls to God and even gave his life for them. He could not make us comprehend any better how precious these souls are to him, nor persuade us more effectively to spare no pains in teaching them his doctrine and washing them in the fountain of his precious blood. Would you like to know how to receive this grace? Devote yourselves to the virtue of humility, for the more one is humble the greater shall be his love for his neighbor. Charity is the paradise of communities. It is the soul of the virtues, but it is humility which adorns and guards them.

Congregations which are humble are like valleys, which attract all the goodness of the mountain. If we

are empty of ourselves, God will fill us with himself, for he does not wish anything to go empty. Humble yourselves, then, my brothers, so that God may glance at this little Company committed to serving the Church. Can we say Company when we speak of a mere handful of men, lowly in birth, knowledge, and virtue, the dregs and the outcasts of the world? Every day I pray two or three times to ask God to finish us off if we are not contributing to his glory. What! gentlemen, would we want to continue if we were not pleasing to God and did not procure his greater glory? <Ftn: *CED* XI:1-2.>

These then are the foundations upon which Monsieur Vincent wished to build the spiritual edifice of his Congregation, that is, humility and charity.

Apropos of this, the late Father de Condren, general of the Oratory, <Ftn: Charles de Condren, second superior general, 1588-1641.> whose memory is held in benediction, said one day to Monsieur Vincent:

How happy you are, Monsieur, that your Congregation bears the marks of a foundation of Jesus Christ. In founding the Church he delighted in choosing the poor, the unlettered, and the crude to spread his message throughout the whole world. He used the humblest means to show forth his almighty power, refuted the wisdom of the philosophers by poor sinners, and resisted the power of kings by the weakness of these simple men. It is the same with you. Most of those called to your Congregation are persons of the lowest class, at best rather ordinary. They do not have much learning, but as such are fit instruments to fulfill the designs of Jesus Christ. He uses them to destroy pretense and vanity. <Ftn: *CED* XI:131-32.>

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Establishment of the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission at Saint Lazare

This mystic Jerusalem began little by little to develop into a new city, built from living stones shaped by the practice of the appropriate virtues. It is true, however, that the College des Bons Enfants furnished neither the space nor the revenue to support any except a few persons. God came to the rescue in a manner that will surprise the reader, but in keeping with his infinite wisdom. While the good priest missionaries were occupying themselves solely with extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ and gaining souls for it, God's providence arranged things to enable the community to establish itself in the house of Saint Lazare near Paris. <Ftn: Saint Lazare was situated on the road from Paris to Saint Denis, in what is today the faubourg Saint Denis. It was probably on the site of the ancient abbey which Saint Gregory of Tours mentioned in Book 6, ch. 11 of his history, the abbey governed by Saint Domnolus. It was eventually transformed into a leprosarium at the time of the Crusades, when this disease was spreading quickly through Europe. By the seventeenth century, there were no more lepers interned there, and the house was occupied by some canons of Saint Victor, religious who followed the rule of Saint Augustine.>

This was an ecclesiastical manor, seat of high, middle, and lower courts, in which besides a large expanse of land, buildings, and yards, all services and means of support for the new foundation could be obtained. The circumstances surrounding this transaction clearly show God's hand. This was especially so since it took place contrary to all human expectations and even in the face of situations which, humanly speaking, should have made it impossible.

We cannot better realize what occurred than by the account given by Monsieur Vincent, <Ftn: CED V:533-34.> and confirmed after his death by the leading actor in this affair. His virtue and position as doctor of the Sorbonne and pastor of a parish in Paris merit credence. This individual was the late Monsieur de Lestocq, doctor of the faculty of the Sorbonne and pastor of Saint Laurent in Paris. He left us a written record in his own hand of these events. <Ftn: Guillaume de Lestocq was the pastor of Saint Laurent from 1628 until the day of his death, May 9, 1661. He was the main instrument in achieving the union of the Congregation of the Mission with the Priory of Saint Lazare.> We see in them how admirable was the guidance given the

Congregation of the Mission, and how pure and disinterested was the part played by the one destined by Providence to bring this about.

An account of the events leading to the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission in the house of Saint Lazare near Paris, written and signed by the late Monsieur de Lestocq, doctor of the Sorbonne and pastor of Saint Laurent <Ftn: *CED* XII:244-48.>

Father Adrian le Bon, religious of the order of Canons Regular of Saint Augustine and prior of Saint Lazare, had some difficulties with his religious in 1630. These led him to think about changing his position for another benefice. Several were offered him, abbeys or other significant benefices, but his friends convinced him that it would be preferable to resolve the dispute within his own community. A conference among them, in the presence of four doctors, was proposed. He agreed to this, and the religious also agreed to attend. This conference was held at the home of a well-regarded and saintly doctor. The prior aired his complaints, and the religious replied, speaking through the sub-prior. It was agreed to draw up a formal rule of life for the future, governing their behavior. The prior persisted in his wish to leave his office. Hearing of the priests who devoted themselves to the mission under the direction of Monsieur Vincent, whom he did not know, he thought that perhaps they could be invited to the priory. In this way, the monks would share in the good being done in the Church.

As his neighbor and friend, I was invited to go along to meet with Monsieur Vincent to discuss this possibility. I pointed out to him how this thought must have come from heaven, for these good priests work for the welfare of the country people, so much in need of help, by instruction and help in confessing their sins. It seems they were ordinarily unable to do so to the parish clergy, either through ignorance or shame. I was able to speak this way of their work and reassure him, for I had seen it at first hand. Besides, I assured him that he would see a man of God among them, referring of course to Monsieur Vincent.

Together, then, we went to the College des Bons Enfants near the gate of Saint Victor to inform Monsieur Vincent of the reason for our visit. We told

him that we had heard great things of the Congregation and of the work it did in favor of the poor peasants. The prior said he would gladly contribute to such a charitable work and proposed for this purpose giving the house of Saint Lazare to Monsieur Vincent for his use.

This generous offer astounded the humble servant of God, with the same effect as an unexpected clap of thunder. Upon seeing this, the prior remarked to Monsieur Vincent, "Monsieur, you tremble." "Yes," he replied, "your offer does astound me, for it appears so far beyond us that I dare not think of it. We are simple, poor priests. We live humbly, with no other purpose than to serve the poor country people. We are much indebted to you, Monsieur, for your good will and we thank you most humbly."

In a word, he showed no inclination to accept the offer and seemed to suggest that any further discussion was out of the question. However, the pleasant and affable way he was received so touched the heart of Monsieur le Bon that he did not give up. He said only that he would give Monsieur Vincent six months to think it over.

After this he again asked me to go with him to see Monsieur Vincent to make the same offer. He stressed that God was moving him to give up the priory in favor of the Congregation of the Mission. For my part, I begged Monsieur Vincent not to let this opportunity pass, but this did not change his mind. He insisted on the small number of priests in the community only recently founded, that he did not relish the publicity, that this would be talked about, that he did not appreciate the notoriety, and lastly, that he did not deserve such a favor of the prior.

At this moment, Monsieur le Bon heard the dinner bell ring. He asked Monsieur Vincent if he and I might dine with Monsieur Vincent and the community. The modesty of the priests, the reading at table, and the sense of good order everywhere so impressed Monsieur le Bon that he continued to press Monsieur Vincent. This continued for more than twenty separate meetings in the space of the next six months. As a good friend of Monsieur Vincent I felt free enough to say that I thought he was resisting the Holy Spirit, that he would have to answer to God for his refusal, seeing

that it gave him an opportunity to establish and perfect his Congregation.

I can not begin to tell you how insistently we acted. Jacob did not show greater patience in his quest for Rachel or insist so strongly for the angel's blessing than did the prior and I to have an affirmative answer from Monsieur Vincent. We besought him more earnestly than the Canaanite woman did the apostles. Finally, a year later, the prior said to him: "Monsieur, what sort of man are you? If you do not want to discuss this business any more, will you at least tell me of someone whose advice you respect? Someone you have confidence in? What friend do you have in Paris whom we could speak with? I have the agreement of all my religious, but only yours is lacking. No one who wishes you well is advising you against accepting this offer."

Monsieur Vincent then mentioned that Monsieur Andre Duval, doctor of the Sorbonne, a holy man who had written the lives of several saints, was a friend of his. <Ftn: Andre Duval, 1554-1638, was doctor of the Sorbonne, author of several learned works, friend and advisor of Saint Vincent, who never took important decisions without consulting him. He was so upset at seeing his portrait in one of the rooms at Saint Lazare that he insisted with Saint Vincent that it be removed. See J. Calvet, "Un confesseur de Saint Vincent," *Petites Annales de Saint Vincent* 4 (May 1903):135.> "We will do what he advises."

The prior went to see him, explained the matter, agreed upon all conditions, <Ftn: *CED* VIII:358-62.> and finally drew up the accord between the prior and the religious of Saint Lazare on the one hand and Monsieur Vincent and the priests of the Congregation of the Mission on the other, dated January 7, 1632. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:234-44.> Monsieur Vincent had at last given in to all the importunities, by myself among others, and could have said on this occasion: *Raucae factae sunt fauces meae* ["My throat is parched"]. <Ftn: Ps 69:4.> I would gladly have carried on my own shoulders the father of the missionaries to Saint Lazare and force him to accept. He, however, did not look at the exterior or the advantages of the place and all the outlying buildings and property. During the negotiations he had not even come to inspect the property. It was not the good location that attracted

him but only God's will and the spiritual good to be done there.

After all conceivable objections, he finally accepted it for that reason alone. The following day, January 8, 1632, he came, and all passed off with gentleness and to the satisfaction of the whole house.

It will then be seen that *digitus Dei hic est* ["the finger of God is here"], <Ftn: Exod 8:19.> and that it was the promised land to which Abraham had been led. Monsieur Vincent was that true Abraham, great servant of God, whose children were destined to fill the promised land, and whose family would live for the ages.

The pastor of Saint Laurent sent the foregoing account to the successor of the late Monsieur Vincent, <Ftn: Rene Almeras, 1613-1672, nephew of Madame Goussault, and a civil lawyer, left everything to enter the Congregation in 1637. He was ordained a priest in 1639. The saint entrusted him with many important positions, such as the director of the novitiate, and superior in Rome.> the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, accompanied by the following letter, dated October 30, 1660:

Monsieur, the wish you expressed to have an account of the events leading Monsieur Vincent and his Congregation to Saint Lazare, together with my respect for his memory, have led me to prepare an account, which I enclose. Monsieur, I recount only the hundredth part of what took place, for I cannot detail all the pious conversations between the prior of Saint Lazare and me with the late Monsieur Vincent for more than a year and on thirty separate visits. We had thousands of occasions to discuss various objections and dispose him to accept Saint Lazare.

Most other persons would have been delighted to accept such an offer, but he refused. That is the way it is with many good projects. Moses refused to go to Egypt, or Jeremiah to the people, but despite their excuses God chose them and sent them on their mission. Their vocation was divine and miraculous, in which nature had no part. My account cannot do justice to this affair, of which God was the author and finisher. I could only sketch out these events. Let he who would, supply for my silence. Believe me when I say that I venerate the memory of the late Monsieur Vincent and count it a blessing to have been known and loved by him.

Such is the authentic testimony, having many details which the pious reader will realize that it can bear the weight of the spiritual shrine mentioned in the previous chapter. It shows the degree of virtue and perfection to which the grace of Jesus Christ had raised Monsieur Vincent. We can see how his heart was detached from all self-interest, all human respect. He looked to God alone in all his activities, wanting to hear only those propositions most advantageous to his glory and most in conformity to his holy will.

One circumstance we ought not pass over. It will allow us to see not only the perfect detachment this great servant of God had from all temporal things and material advantages but also the exactness and fidelity which he and his confreres maintained, including the least things that might contribute to the good order of their Congregation and to the quality of the service he proposed to render to God.

Once the main articles of agreement had been worked out, one remained which seemed small enough, but not to Monsieur Vincent. The prior hoped that his religious would share the dormitory with the missionaries. He thought that it would cause no harm to the one group, but be a source of edification to the others by the good example his religious would have in the practice of the virtues and in the regularity of Monsieur Vincent and his followers. This wise superior would not agree, foreseeing the problems that would arise, leading to the loss of the good order established among the missionaries. He asked the pastor of Saint Laurent to represent to the prior that the priests of the Mission remained in silence from night prayer until after dinner the following day, at which time an hour of conversation followed. Again, they observed silence until after supper, to be followed by another hour of conversation. After this, they spoke only when it became necessary, and then in a low voice. He was convinced that if silence were taken from a community, disorder and confusion would surely come in to take its place. He remarked once to someone, if you see a community which observes silence exactly, you may be sure it observes the rest of the regulations equally well. On the contrary, where silence is not observed it is almost impossible for the other rules to be followed. It is likely that the religious would not want to be bound by such a strict rule of silence. This, in turn, would almost surely lead to the loss of this practice among the missionaries.>

Thus Monsieur Vincent besought Monsieur de Lestocq to present his thoughts to the prior, as we find in one of his handwritten letters. <Ftn: CED I:137-41.> He continued by proposing a compromise, that the religious should live apart

from the dormitory, but stated his position clearly in these remarkable words: "I would prefer to remain in our deprivation rather than depart from the designs of God upon us."

He remained so firm in this position that the provision had to be stricken from the agreement before he would consent to the other articles. He preferred to lose all the great temporal advantages that might come to him rather than agree to something which would block the spiritual progress of his Congregation. What made him firm and even inflexible on this point was his esteem and love for solitude and interior recollection. The missionaries needed this especially, since they were exposed by their vocation to all sorts of distracting influences. He used to say on this subject, "True missionaries ought to be like Carthusians in their houses and like apostles outside them."

After signing the agreement by which Monsieur le Bon ceded the priory, the house, and dependencies of Saint Lazare to the Congregation of the Mission, the archbishop of Paris conferred it as a benefice under his control, by letters dated December 31, 1631. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:271-76. Abelly's text reads 1632, a typographical error.> Our Holy Father, Pope Urban VIII, confirmed this by a bull, March 15, 1635, but it was not drawn up until April 18, 1655. <Ftn: On January 8, 1632, the first decree of union was approved by the archbishop of Paris, and by letters patent signed by the king. *CED* XIII:248-54, 372-80.>

The provosts of merchants and magistrates of Paris also approved the establishment of the missionaries in the house of Saint Lazare. The king gave his approval by letters patent, which were given to the Parlement for its consent. However, a certain well-known religious community opposed the move, alleging that the property belonged to them. <Ftn: The religious of Saint Victor. *CED* I:148-49.> This position was rejected by an official decree, so that the letters of the king could be registered on September 17, 1632. We should not fail to remark that while the case was being heard in court, Monsieur Vincent remained in mental prayer in the Sainte Chapelle at the palace. He was totally indifferent as to the outcome of the affair.

This is what he wrote to a virtuous friend in whom he had complete confidence:

You are well aware that the Religious of N. N. are disputing our accepting Saint Lazare. You would hardly believe the way I have treated them, in keeping with what the Gospel ordains. They have no case, as Monsieur Duval has assured me, along with others who know the situation. By God's grace I remain as indifferent to this as to anything else I have ever

been involved with. Please thank God with me for this grace. <Ftn: *CED* I:151-52.>

Another matter connected with this case is still worthy of comment, for it shows the marvelous detachment of this great servant of God. Upon taking possession of Saint Lazare he accepted the care of three or four demented persons committed by their families to be housed in the priory. It is impossible to overstate the charity with which Monsieur Vincent looked after, by himself or others, these persons who offered so little natural satisfaction. They were incapable of recognizing the care being taken of them and in fact were usually unclean, embarrassing, and occasionally even dangerous. Seeing the possibility of his eviction from the house of Saint Lazare by the opposing religious community, well-regarded and with friends in the right places, he began to prepare as was his custom for whatever outcome the trial might bring. He set himself to consider what do, as he told a confidant later. Yet he thought nothing of the new home, an ecclesiastical manor house, so commodious and advantageous to his Congregation, situated at the gates of Paris. His only concern was for the mentally disturbed persons he would have to leave behind. He thought more of the service he rendered them, or rather Jesus Christ in their person, than he did of all the other advantages of the house, which he looked on with complete indifference. How different his sentiments from those of worldly people, and how much more elevated his thoughts than those of ordinary men. He regarded it as foolish to be attached to earthly things and regarded serving the demented as the highest wisdom. He regarded service given from love of Jesus Christ as a great treasure he hated to lose and thought nothing of losing what he had just begun to enjoy, and which was so suitable for the upkeep and support of his new Congregation. What good reason the holy apostle had to say that God was pleased to confound the wisdom of the world! To be wise in the eyes of God it sometimes becomes necessary to become foolish in the eyes of men.

Acquaintances of Monsieur Vincent could testify that he saw as fully and clearly as could be hoped for from a person in his position. There was no frivolity or undue vehemence in his person. His conduct was founded not on simple human reasoning but on the maxims and truths of the Gospel. These were engraved on his heart, and he took them as the foundation of his life and had them ever present to his mind. He conformed himself in all things to the doctrine and example of Jesus Christ, and in keeping with this as much as humanly possible he fled from all vainglory or ostentation. On the contrary, he embraced with enthusiasm humility, abjection, contempt, and self-denial, and

similar practices. He did this to resemble more closely him who was God by nature yet made himself a man, subject to the opprobrium of men and rejection by the people.

In this spirit Monsieur Vincent obtained the peaceful possession of Saint Lazare and wished to continue this service of humility and charity, although he was under no obligation to do so. He continued to receive in the house those rejected by the world, whom no one wanted to care for. He looked on them as the sick members of Jesus Christ, and in this view he provided them with every service and every corporal and spiritual help of which they were capable of receiving.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Account of the Great Good Accomplished in the Church by the Founding of the Congregation of the Mission, of which Monsieur Vincent Was the Prime Mover; First, the Establishment of the Confraternity of Charity for the Corporal and Spiritual Help of the Sick Poor

It is astounding and almost unbelievable, were it not for the accounts of so many people who knew Monsieur Vincent, that a person who thought so humbly of himself and who regarded himself as the last of all priests, would be at the head of a newly founded Company daily growing larger. He was a poor and simple priest, seeking always to remain in the background. Despite himself, he became involved in many significant activities for the service of the Church and the glory of God, as we shall see in this book. But as a holy Father of the Church said, Charity has no measure! It never says, enough, and when it takes possession of a soul it makes the person untiring in his efforts, to the extent prudence allows, to undertake anything that might contribute to the great glory of his divine Savior. It seems to him that all things are possible because of the one who strengthens him.

If we know a tree by its fruits and charity by its good works, we can say with assurance that God had blessed Monsieur Vincent with special graces to enable him to do so much. The charity with which the Holy Spirit filled his heart was so plentiful that it seemed the world was too small to measure up to his desire that God be better known, loved, and glorified.

We will give in this chapter, and in others to follow, a summary account of some of his works which date from the very beginning of the Congregation of the Mission. We will follow approximately the chronological order of these events but occasionally will interrupt this order to discuss related matters. In Book Two we will enlarge upon our treatment of these works of charity.

We will begin in this chapter with the establishment of the Confraternity of Charity for the help of the sick poor. Their corporal and spiritual sufferings so touched the heart of Monsieur Vincent that he became very sensitive on this point. After seeing the good results of the first of these Assemblies or Confraternities of Charity which God had established through him in Bresse, as we have noted in one of the preceding chapters, <Ftn: Ch. 10.> he decided to extend this good work wherever possible. Wherever he gave a mission himself or his priests gave them, he set up this Confraternity for the relief

of the sick poor. God so blessed his efforts that there was hardly a place where the mission had been given that the Confraternity of Charity was not established.

Since it is not enough just to begin good works without trying to sustain and perfect them, Monsieur Vincent considered carefully what had to be done to maintain the confraternities. These were composed mostly of simple village women who needed help and encouragement in their works of charity, in which occasional contradictions would arise. They needed advice, especially in their help for the sick.

Although he had given well thought-out regulations for their guidance and visited the various confraternities as often as he could or had his priests visit them, they became too many to see them as often as he wished. Divine Providence, which watches over all, then inspired a virtuous lady to devote herself, under the guidance of Monsieur Vincent, to this charitable work. Because she contributed so much to these Confraternities of Charity and cooperated with Monsieur Vincent in other activities of which we will speak later, it is important to say more about this good woman.

She was Mademoiselle Louise de Marillac, <Ftn: Saint Louise de Marillac, 1591-1660, daughter of Louis de Marillac and an unknown mother. She married Antoine le Gras, February 5, 1613, and lost him in death, December 21, 1625. They had a son Michel. She placed her confidence in her spiritual director, Vincent de Paul, who eventually used her in his charitable works. She was canonized on March 11, 1934, and on February 10, 1960, was named patroness of all those who devote themselves to Christian social work.> widow of Monsieur le Gras, secretary of the queen mother, Marie de Medici. God had bestowed upon her all the virtues and dispositions suitable for success in all the activities he had destined for her. She was notable for her good judgment, strong virtue, and universal charity, which allowed her to display an untiring zeal for helping her neighbor, particularly the poor. In God's providence she was greatly troubled by interior trials and was very uncertain as to her own deportment about how she might best give herself totally to God, as she wished. For several years she had been under the spiritual direction of the late bishop of Belley. <Ftn: Jean-Pierre Camus.> Following his advice she finally took Monsieur Vincent as her spiritual director. He did not usually take on the responsibility of personal spiritual direction of others for lack of time and because it would take him away from other works of greater importance for the service of the Church. Nevertheless he deferred on this occasion to the wishes of this great prelate to accept the direction of this virtuous lady. He did so under the

inspiration of the providence of God, for the great good he had in store for her, as shall appear later in this book.

This faithful servant of Jesus Christ felt herself strongly moved in her prayer to give herself to the service of the poor. Upon requesting the advice of Monsieur Vincent, she received this letter in reply:

Yes, certainly, Mademoiselle, I agree. Why not, since our Lord has given you this holy thought? Receive communion tomorrow and prepare for the review of life you propose to make. Later you can begin the prescribed retreat. I cannot tell you how anxious I am to see you and know how all goes with you. But I must deny myself for the love of God, which must be your sole wish also. I can well imagine how touched you were by the words of today's Gospel, for they are powerful for a soul loving with a perfect love. You must have appeared in the eyes of God as a beautiful tree, for by his grace you have borne such good fruit. I beseech him, by his infinite goodness, that you shall ever be that tree of life bearing the fruit of true charity. <Ftn: CED I:51-52. The original text is more vivid: "Oh! what a tree you have appeared to be today in God's sight, since you have borne such a fruit! May you be forever a beautiful tree of life bringing forth fruits of love.">

It was providential that Monsieur Vincent had moved to the College des Bons Enfants, as we said earlier, after Madame de Gondi died in 1625. She had contributed so much to the first missions and to the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission. God willed that Mademoiselle le Gras move to the vicinity of the college to be of service to Monsieur Vincent in all his efforts in favor of the corporal and spiritual welfare of the poor. <Ftn: She left the parish of Saint Sauveur and went to live in that of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet.> He found her in such good dispositions and of such tried virtue that at the beginning of 1629 he proposed that she devote herself completely to our Lord to honor his charity towards the poor and to imitate him in the weariness, fatigue, and contradictions he had endured for their sake. <Ftn: CED I:73-74.> He suggested that, following the example of this loving Savior, she would go from town to town, village to village, to oversee the way the meetings and Confraternities of Charity were progressing.

She agreed to do this, motivated by a spirit of obedience and her zeal and her love for the poor. Who can say how great was the blessing and fruit she brought to these visits? She re-established those fallen on difficult times, encouraged the

women who made up these meetings, increased their membership when they were too few to carry out their tasks, gave them fitting advice, trained them in caring for the sick, distributed dresses and other clothes she had brought with her, supplied medicines, and suggested other possible ways they could help in the care and salvation of the sick poor.

Ordinarily she would remain in a parish, and beyond the time she gave to the Confraternities of Charity, she would, with the approval of the local pastor, bring together in a private home the young girls of the region. She would catechize and instruct them in the duties of a true Christian. If a schoolmistress lived in the parish she would give her some hints about how best to fulfill her function. If no teacher was available she would seek out someone suitable for the office. The better to show her how to teach, she herself would hold class in the presence of the prospective schoolmistress.

For several years she gave herself to these duties in the dioceses of Beauvais, Paris, Senlis, Soissons, Meaux, Chalons in Champagne, and Chartres, with outstanding success. She had a hand-written directive from Monsieur Vincent, regarding her activities. <Ftn: See Book Two, ch.9.> From time to time she wrote of events and made it a rule to do nothing extraordinary without his advice. She traveled and gave alms at her own expense, always accompanied by other women and a servant. After spending most of the year in these activities, she ordinarily returned to Paris to pass the winter season but continued her same service to the poor. She was not satisfied to serve them simply by herself but sought as much as possible to enlist other virtuous women in her charitable activities, first by giving themselves to Jesus Christ, and then serving him in his members, the poor. What makes her activities the more remarkable is that she was of a delicate constitution, subject to frequent illnesses, but these did not hold her back from her charitable activities.

We give here an extract from the beginning and the ending of a letter written to her by Monsieur Vincent:

Thanks be to God you have arrived in good health. For the love of God and his poor members, take care of yourself, and do not try to do too much. The devil often uses this ruse to trap worthy souls, to get them to do more than they can, so he can succeed in having them do nothing. On the other hand, the Son of God invites us quietly and calmly to do what we reasonably can, so that we can continue to serve. Do the same, Mademoiselle, and you will be following the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

When you are looked upon with favor and praised, unite yourself to the contempt, mockeries, and affronts the Son of God endured. A truly humble soul is humbled as much in honor as in dishonor. Act like the bee. It makes its honey from the dew that rests on bitter absinthe just as well as from the dew on the rose. I hope you can do the same. <Ftn: *CED* I:95-98. This letter was sent to Beauvais where Louise had gone to establish eighteen Confraternities of Charity. On her return from there, she received extraordinary expressions of gratitude, not only from the women but also from the men who had furtively come to listen to her instructions.>

From the start Monsieur Vincent had conceived of these Confraternities of Charity as established in the small towns and villages with no hospital. Often the sick poor were left with little help, cut off from care or remedy in their illnesses. The late bishop of Beauvais, <Ftn: Augustin Potier de Gesvre, consecrated in Rome on September 17, 1617. He renewed his diocese with the help of Saint Vincent, Adrien Bourdoise, and the Ursuline nuns. He served in a great many important positions in both Church and state. He died June 20, 1650.> became aware of the great good these Confraternities of Charity were doing in both the bodily and spiritual care of the poor. As a result, he wished to set them up in all eighteen parishes of his city. In the same way, several devoted women of Paris, seeing the good results of the Confraternities of Charity in the villages, thought of establishing the same in their parish, Saint Sauveur. The year 1629 saw the first of these Confraternities in Paris, set up by Monsieur Vincent with the cooperation of the pastor of the parish. The following year Mademoiselle le Gras joined five or six women of her acquaintance in the parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, where she lived, to serve the sick poor. She wrote to Monsieur Vincent, then away on mission, to tell him of her progress in this charitable work. He suggested they follow the regulations already set out for the Confraternities of Charity, adding some specific directions for her parish, just as he had done earlier for the parish of Saint Sauveur. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:523-24.> She observed these rules faithfully, and God was generous in his blessings. Several other women joined the first group for the continued service of the poor under the wise direction of the pastor.

In that same and the following year, 1631, the Confraternity was established in the parishes of Saint Merry, Saint Benedict, and Saint Sulpice, with the approval of the archbishop of Paris and the cooperation of the pastors. A little

later the Confraternity was established in the parishes of Saint Paul, Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, Saint Eustache, Saint Andre, Saint Jean, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Etienne du Mont, Saint Nicolas des Champs, Saint Roch, Saint Jacques de la Boucherie, Saint Jacques du Haut-pas, Saint Laurent, and in practically all the parishes of the city and suburbs of Paris.

Messieurs Descords and Lamy, masters and administrators of the Quinze-Vingts Hospital, requested Monsieur Vincent to found a Confraternity of Charity there, which he did. <Ftn: Literally "fifteen twenties," for a total of three hundred, the capacity of the hospital.>

We should not omit here the account of the first years of Mademoiselle le Gras, working with the Confraternity of Charity in her parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet. One day a young woman who had contracted the plague came to see her. When Monsieur Vincent heard of it, he wrote to her:

I have just learned of the accident that has occurred to the girl whom your guardians of the poor have rescued and that you had visited. I must say, Mademoiselle, that I was so upset that were it not the middle of the night I would have come right away to see you. But the goodness of God towards those who have given themselves to the service of the poor in the Confraternities of Charity, in which no one up to now has been stricken with the plague, gives me total confidence that no harm will come to you. Believe me, Mademoiselle, for not only did I visit the late subprior of Saint Lazare in his last illness when he was afflicted with the plague, but I heard his last sigh. Yet, neither I nor those who attended him in his illness, suffered any harm. No, Mademoiselle, do not fear, for God wishes to use you for his greater glory, and I think he will preserve you for that. I will celebrate holy mass for your intention. I would go to see you tomorrow were it not for a meeting I have with some doctors at the Madeleine about the establishment of a mission there. <Ftn: The plague erupted in France in 1628 and ravaged the country. See *CED* I:185-86.>

In regard to the subject of this letter, Monsieur Vincent proved to be correct. This charitable lady, despite all her work and her own constant illnesses, lived thirty years after receiving this letter. God wished to use her services not only for the good of the Confraternities of Charity but also for the founding of an entirely new community of virtuous women. The confraternities were helpful to the sick poor, and the women would contribute so much to these Confraternities and render

many other services to the Church, as we shall see in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The Establishment of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor

If it be true, as the prophet says, that abyss calls to abyss, <Ftn: Ps 42:8.> we can say even more truly that blessing attracts blessing, and charity, which is the source of all virtues, in accomplishing one goal, begins to seek another. This was the case here. The Confraternities of Charity spoken of in the preceding chapter led to a new Company of women bearing the same name and calling themselves Daughters of Charity. God had called Monsieur Vincent to found a Congregation of men to evangelize the poor. He willed that he would also be the father and founder of a new community of women for the service of these same poor people, particularly the sick. This new work has to be attributed to God's providence, since Monsieur Vincent did not originate the idea and did not think it proper to become involved in a new undertaking such as this. This is how things came about.

When the Confraternities of Charity had first been established in the villages, as we have said, the women gave themselves to the service of the sick. They would go one after another to visit them and help them however they could. When these same Confraternities of Charity were established in Paris, the women, moved by the same charitable spirit, wished to visit the sick in their homes and give them the same services as their country counterparts. Soon these confraternities multiplied and enrolled several noblewomen, who could not for one reason or another, such as their husbands' opposition, perform the usual services for the poor: bringing them food, making their beds, preparing medicines, and other such things. Since they themselves employed servants in their own homes for taking care of these chores, they were unable or unwilling to do them personally. They perceived that it was absolutely necessary to have some servants only for handling services for the sick poor. They would distribute food each day, or the required medicines.

This situation was brought to Monsieur Vincent's attention in 1630. He considered the matter carefully before God and recognized the need for some remedy for the situation. He recalled that in the villages were some good women who did not want to marry or who did not have the necessary dowry to become religious. Among these women some would be glad to give themselves to the service of the sick poor for the love of God. God's providence so arranged things that at his next missions he found two women who agreed to what he proposed, and were sent,

one to the parish of Saint Sauveur, <Ftn: Marguerite Naseau, the first Daughter of Charity.> and the other to the parish of Saint Benedict. Later, others came, and were sent to Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet and elsewhere.

Both Monsieur Vincent and Mademoiselle le Gras offered advice as to how they were to comport themselves in regard to the noble ladies on the one hand and to the sick poor on the other. These women came from a wide background and did not communicate among themselves or any central authority other than the ladies of the parish where they lived. Because they had no training in how to minister to the sick, some could not measure up to what was expected. These would have to be sent away, but since few came to take their place, the ladies and the poor alike fell into their original difficulties.

This made it obvious that a larger number of young women was needed to serve in all the sections of Paris in which the Confraternity of Charity had been established. They needed to be taught how to care for the sick, how to get and prepare medicines, but beyond this they needed to be taught to pray and to live a spiritual life, for it would be impossible to stay long in such a painful service to the poor and to conquer the natural repugnances of their position without a solid foundation of true virtue.

Monsieur Vincent recognized the great need, and besides, he was importuned by the ladies concerned to undertake the formation of these countrywomen. He found it difficult to agree to do so. Since he was not a man to jump at a first idea, he was content to have recourse to God in prayer until Providence would make known how to answer this need. He was not mistaken in this, for soon afterwards some other young women came. He chose three or four whom he sent to Mademoiselle le Gras at her home in the parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet. He had alerted her beforehand to receive, lodge, and maintain them in her house, so that she could train them to be worthy of the vocation to which Providence had called them.

This took place in 1633 <Ftn: November 29, vigil of the Feast of Saint Andrew. See *CED* IX:1-14.> solely as an experiment, but God so blessed these beginnings that the number of women increased. They then began a small community which served as the nursery of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor in the parishes, hospitals, and wherever else they were invited.

Seeing the way God blessed this small community, and moved by her love for the poor, Mademoiselle le Gras began to devote herself more and more to their formation. She appealed often to Monsieur Vincent to know whether she should dedicate herself to

this particular work and if she should follow this inclination as divine inspiration. His reply was in keeping with his usual thought, that in new and extraordinary things, we ought first try them out, a little at a time.

Please, once and for all, do not even think of this occupation until our Lord manifests his will. Often we desire something that seems to come from God but in reality does not. God permits these desires to prepare our souls for what Providence has in store for us. Saul sought his lost donkeys but found a kingdom. Saint Louis set out to conquer the Holy Land but overcame himself, gaining thereby a heavenly crown. You wish to become the servant of these poor women, but God wishes you to belong to him alone, perhaps not in that particular way. May your heart, Mademoiselle, honor the tranquility of the heart of our Lord, for then it will be prepared to serve him. The kingdom of God is found in peace in the Holy Spirit. It will reign in you if you remain at peace. Do so, please, and thus honor the God of peace and love. <Ftn: *CED* I: 113-14.>

In another letter, he wrote:

I do not see clearly yet what God wishes in this matter. I am not able to discern his will. Mademoiselle, please pray to God for this purpose during the holy season when he pours out the graces of the Holy Spirit most abundantly. <Ftn: *CED* I:200.>

By these letters and others he wrote on this matter, we can see how hesitant he was in discerning the true vocation of this virtuous woman in regard to the formation of the country girls. Not only did he judge her capable of greater things than that, which at the time appeared insignificant, but he did not want to put limits on the talents and graces she had received from God. His own humility would not allow him to think that God would use him to direct one so favored by Providence as Mademoiselle. <Ftn: *CED* IX:52-57.> He kept her two years in this uncertainty, refusing to give a definite answer. He would exhort her to place her trust uniquely in God, assuring her that she would never be deceived. <Ftn: Convinced that it was God's will that Saint Vincent approved of her desire, Louise pronounced the formula of her consecration on March 25, 1634. From this time on, March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, is the day when the Daughters of Charity renew their own consecration.> His own humility made him wish that God would act without involving himself. He thought he was good for nothing except to thwart the designs of Providence. It seemed, on the contrary, that God wished to use his faithful

servant despite himself, to begin and to lead this work so important for his glory.

Lastly, his repeated recommendation to Mademoiselle le Gras that her confidence in God would never be deceived was verified in time by the extraordinary blessing God bestowed upon her first efforts which she had undertaken and continued only through her spirit of obedience. We could say that Monsieur Vincent was deceived, for he thought only of training a small group of young women to help in the parishes of Paris. God so multiplied this company in numbers and in grace that Monsieur Vincent and this virtuous Mademoiselle had the consolation of seeing in their own lifetimes its expansion to twenty-five or thirty places in Paris, into more than thirty other villages, hamlets, and towns in various provinces of France, and even into Poland, where the queen, by her zeal and charity, wished to aid the poor of her realm.

We see what fruits Monsieur Vincent's humility produced, even if he did not think of founding this new community of women. God was pleased to bestow such a dew of blessings and graces upon them that they were sought for everywhere, to such a point that they could not be fully trained. These women were (if we may speak this way) plucked up from the seed-bed almost as soon as they were planted there, before they had been fully formed. God in his mercy helped them to such an extent that their frugality, industry, love of poverty, patience, modesty, and charity served to edify people wherever they were sent.

The first foundations of their community were laid in the house of Mademoiselle le Gras in the parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet. Later, on the advice of Monsieur Vincent, she transferred the community to another house half a league from Paris in the village of La Chapelle. <Ftn: La Chapelle is now a part of Paris, and nearly adjacent to Saint Lazare.> This was thought to be a more suitable place to house, feed, and clothe in country fashion the candidates destined to serve the poor. Finally, around 1642 they returned to a house in the Saint Lazare section of Paris, where they remain to this day. <Ftn: The new house was directly across the street from Saint Lazare.>

Monsieur Vincent prescribed rules and constitutions for them, which were approved by the archbishop of Paris. By his authority he constituted them a Company or Congregation under the title Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor, and under the direction of the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission. The king confirmed and authorized their establishment by letters patent, confirmed by the Parlement of Paris. <Ftn: CED XIII:578-87.>

Besides their service to the sick poor, they devoted themselves in several places to the education of young girls, teaching them to know and serve God and to fulfill the principal duties of the Christian life.

This enterprise seems small to the eyes of the world, which judges things only by appearance and glitter. Those who reflect how precious works of mercy and charity are in the sight of God, and how strongly they are recommended by our Lord, know that this institute, so small in our eyes, is great in the eyes of God. It is the more meritorious in its activities in that Jesus Christ has expressly declared that he regards as done to himself what has been done in favor of the poor. Besides, charity towards the poor is the purer and more perfect, for the only thanks received from those served is often contradiction, complaints, and ingratitude.

Using the humility and charity of Vincent de Paul, God brought this small community to birth. It produced in the past, and continues to produce today, the fruits of humility, patience, charity, and the other virtues most pleasing to the Son of God, and most recommended in the Gospel, as we shall see in Book Two.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The Ordination Retreats for the Benefit of Those Wishing to Receive Holy Orders

Saint Paul's advice to the bishop Saint Timothy, not to impose his hands lightly on those seeking to receive holy orders, <Ftn: 1 Tim 5:22> is important not only to the bishop who must not share in the sins of others, as the apostle says, but to the whole Church. According to a Father of the Church, it ordinarily is threatened more by its own ministers than by outsiders. We may truly say that the persecutions of tyrants have not caused so much difficulty to the salvation of souls as the scandalous lives and pernicious conduct of bad priests.

This concerned many bishops who wanted to fulfill worthily the responsibilities of their office. On the one hand, given the large extent of their dioceses and the large number of parishioners they saw the necessity of having a large number of priests and other ministers. On the other hand it was practically impossible to know who among their many candidates would have the requisite qualities and virtues for such a holy ministry. No matter how carefully the bishop examined the candidates and considered their moral qualities, it was difficult to be sure who among them would make a good priest. The bishops were often deceived.

The late Augustine Potier, bishop of Beauvais, whose memory is held in benediction because of his zeal, pastoral vigilance, and his other virtues, often considered this situation and its possible remedies.

He recognized that God had conferred his Spirit upon Monsieur Vincent to minister to the spiritual needs of the people by the missions he had given in most of the parishes of the diocese and by the Confraternities of Charity he had established. He thought this holy priest would have the light and grace to help him reform his clergy. Because he appreciated Monsieur Vincent's virtue and especially his charity, the bishop opened his heart to him, telling him how worried he was in regard to this matter. He often called Monsieur Vincent to Beauvais or came himself to Paris to discuss what best might be done.

One day this good prelate asked Monsieur Vincent what could possibly be done to put an end to disorders among the clergy and bring them to appreciate their sacred calling properly. This wise and experienced missionary responded that it was practically impossible to reform bad priests who had grown old in their faults, or to redirect pastors who had begun poorly. To

have any hope of success in working to reform the clergy it was absolutely necessary to go to the root of the problem and apply the remedy there. Since changing the older priests was so difficult, the proper plan must be to see to the formation of good ones for the future. In the first place, only those should be admitted to orders who had the requisite knowledge and other signs of a true vocation. Second, those who wished to become priests must be trained in their obligations and taught a true priestly spirit which they could then bring to the parishes.

The bishop of Beauvais was pleased with these reflections. One day in July of 1628, while traveling, he was conversing with Monsieur Vincent in his carriage, when he abruptly closed his eyes and said nothing, turning over something in his mind. Those with him remained quiet, thinking perhaps he was dozing. He opened his eyes to say he was not sleeping but only thinking what could be the quickest and most effective way of preparing candidates for holy orders. He further said that he had resolved to bring the candidates into his own house for several days. During that time he would arrange some suitable exercises to instruct them in what they should know and the virtues they should practice in their calling. Then Monsieur Vincent, who previously had spoken to him in general of the necessity for such preparation, wholeheartedly approved of his initiative and said, "Oh, Your Excellency, surely this is a thought come from God. This is an excellent means for bringing order, step by step, to all the clergy of your diocese."

Encouraged thus to put the plan into immediate execution, this virtuous prelate resolved to do so at once. Before leaving Monsieur Vincent he said he would begin preparations, but asked him to think over what would be appropriate for such a conference and the timetable for the retreat to follow. He invited Monsieur Vincent to come to Beauvais fifteen or twenty days before the next scheduled ordination, which was to be the coming September. Monsieur Vincent was careful to fulfill the bishop's request. As he said, "I was more convinced that God wished this service of me, asked for by the mouth of a bishop, than if it had been delivered by an angel from heaven."

Upon his return to Beauvais, the bishop examined the ordinands, and himself opened the retreat and the conferences. Monsieur Vincent and two doctors of the faculty of Paris, Fathers Messier <Ftn: Louis Messier, archdeacon of Beauvais; *CED* I:65.> and Duchesne, <Ftn: Jerome Duchesne, archdeacon of Beauvais and doctor of the Sorbonne.> then continued the program. It was similar to that which later was followed in the ordination retreats, and which remain in usage up to the present. Monsieur Vincent undertook to speak on the decalogue.

He did it so clearly and with such feeling that many of the ordinands were moved to make a general confession. Even one of the doctors, Monsieur Duchesne, was one of the lecturers. He was so moved that he asked to make a general confession of his entire life to Monsieur Vincent, much to the edification of all the ordinands.

Later, the bishop of Beauvais came to Paris to meet with the archbishop. He told him of the great fruit these retreats had begun to effect in his diocese and pointed out their importance, their usefulness, and even their necessity. He was so convincing that from the beginning of 1631 this good prelate ordered all candidates for ordination in the archdiocese of Paris to report first to the priests of the Congregation of the Mission ten days before ordination. They would learn from them the dispositions required in the priesthood, and, he hoped, would begin to acquire them.

In keeping with this decree, Monsieur Vincent began in the following Lent to receive the ordinands into the College des Bons Enfants, for he had not yet moved to Saint Lazare. The retreats were conducted as prescribed, and this arrangement has continued until the present. From this first house of the Congregation of the Mission, this holy practice of providing a retreat and spiritual exercises for the ordinands has, through the zeal of Monsieur Vincent. They spread to several other dioceses in France and Italy, and even to Rome itself, with a fruit and blessing better observed in its effects than attempted in words. We have reserved for Book Two a detailed account of the order of the retreats, the fruits they have produced, and the main reasons why these ordination retreats were so important and necessary for the good of the Church.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Spiritual Retreats for Various Groups of People

A prophet of old said that the land was desolate because no one had reflected and meditated in his heart. <Ftn: Jer 12:11.> Exterior things preoccupy us, and we allow our minds to be taken up with all sorts of sensible objects. We hardly ever enter into ourselves, or rarely think of God, or consider the reason we have being and life, and the way to achieve our salvation. From this comes the blind spirit, the disordered heart, and finally the loss of salvation for the greater number of those who are damned.

The great saints have often spoken against this state of affairs and have exhorted the faithful to enter into themselves by the practice of meditation. In these latter days, Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Ignatius, Blessed Francis de Sales, and many other saintly persons have favored spiritual exercises to bring souls to the practice of this vitally important recollection. Although these have been successful, lack of facilities and other difficulties have limited the number of people who could profit by them, particularly among the laity. This consideration led Monsieur Vincent to open the door of his house at Saint Lazare, and even more the door of his heart, to accommodate those persons wishing to pass some days in the exercises of a holy retreat. This faithful servant of God spoke more with his heart than with his mouth in imitating his divine Master so that everyone burdened with sin and vice should come to him to be comforted. <Ftn: Matt 11:28.>

After beginning this charitable work in the College des Bons Enfants, he continued the practice in all the houses of the Mission, particularly those in Paris and Rome. The priests of the Congregation of the Mission (who themselves make an annual retreat following the example of their father and founder, who never failed to make his retreat, no matter how busy he might be) received with open arms all those who came to participate in these retreats, no matter what their class or condition. The rich and poor, clergy and laity, professors and illiterates, nobles and artisans, masters and servants, all were welcome. They sat at the same table and received all kinds of help and services for the good of their souls. They were helped to prepare for a good general confession, aided in committing themselves wholly to God either by adopting a rule of life suitable to their situation or possibly by choosing an entirely different state in life, or were aided in discerning God's designs for them.

In the house at Saint Lazare it was remarked that there might be at any one time in the refectory nobles wearing the cordon-bleu, people from the palace, artisans, hermits, domestics, all making their retreat at the same time, not to mention some clergy as well. Monsieur Vincent remarked occasionally, with that gentle gaiety he knew how to employ, that the house of Saint Lazare was something like Noah's ark, housing all sorts of animals, great and small.

We shall see in Book Two the great fruit and admirable effect these retreats produced on many occasions. Monsieur Vincent was particularly thankful that God in his goodness had chosen him and his confreres to effect the blessings of his mercy and grace. For this reason he had a particularly strong wish that the practice of these retreats be preserved in the Company. He called them a gift of heaven, although they were a serious drain on the resources of the community, for he supported the larger number of retreatants who each year came to Saint Lazare or other houses of the Congregation. No foundation or other regular source of funds existed to defray the costs of the retreats. This great servant of God had no thought of the expenses when it was question of working for the salvation of souls, redeemed at such a price by Jesus Christ. It seemed to him, as was said by the Holy Spirit in the Canticle of Canticles, that when he had used all the substance of his house in such works of charity, he had as yet done nothing compared to what this divine virtue demanded of him. <Ftn: Cant 8:7.>

If it were not enough that men of all classes and condition found in the houses of the Mission all help in their progress in sanctity, his charity, not knowing the meaning of the words "that's enough," arranged that women and young girls would find similar help for the spiritual welfare of their souls. He arranged for them to go to Mademoiselle le Gras' house. There they were received with open arms to benefit in every way from her generous disposition, which seemed never to be satisfied with what she had already contributed.

We give here an extract of a letter written by Monsieur Vincent to her on this topic.

Madame Goussault and Mademoiselle Lamy have gone to your house for their retreat. I would ask you to give them the outline of subjects of meditation which I gave you, to have them report to you in each other's presence what good thoughts they have had in their prayer, and to have reading at table during meals so they may be relaxed and at ease. The subject might be of thoughts they have had in their recollection periods or possibly what they read in the lives of the

saints. After meals they should walk a bit, but other than these two times they should observe silence. It would be good if they kept a journal of the principal inspirations of their mental prayer. They should plan on making their general confession on Wednesday. Their spiritual reading should be from the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis. They should take time to reflect on each section. They might also read several chapters of the Gospel as well. It would be good on the day of their general confession for you to give them for their prayer Granada's *Memorial*, <Ftn: Luis de Granada, *Memorial de la vida cristiana.*> which is calculated to move them to sorrow for sin. For the rest, be careful that they do not become too intense. I pray our Lord will give you his Spirit in all this. <Ftn: *CED* I:381-82.>

Another lady, on another occasion, made a retreat at the Daughters of Charity. She gave Mademoiselle le Gras a copy of what she had written of her reflections and resolutions so that she might send them on to Monsieur Vincent. This wise and experienced director replied in a letter to Mademoiselle le Gras:

I am returning the resolutions of Madame N., which are good, but it strikes me they would be even better if she would come down a bit to particulars. It would be good to apply this remark to all who make the retreat at your house. Otherwise it is only an exercise of the mind. There is a danger that having these good thoughts and having a certain consolation in thinking about a virtue, a person would begin to flatter herself that she has become virtuous. To acquire solid virtue practical resolutions have to be taken, and faithfully carried out. I am afraid without this, it would not be solid virtue, but simply imagination. <Ftn: *CED* II:190.>

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Spiritual Conferences for Clergy

Spiritual conferences have ever been in vogue in the Church, especially for those who want to progress in virtue. The fathers of the desert regarded them as an excellent means for mutual encouragement as they walked the narrow path of evangelical perfection. Entire volumes have been preserved reporting what they discussed in these holy assemblies. These fathers always considered Jesus Christ to be present in these meetings because of his word in the Gospel, that when two or three are gathered in his name, he would be in the midst of them. <Ftn: Matt 18:20.>

Monsieur Vincent was well aware through his own experience of how useful these conferences were, for he had used them with great blessing from the beginning of his Company. He seized the opportunity offered him by God to extend these conferences to other priests, as we shall see in what follows.

Several pious clergymen who had attended the ordination retreats and received many graces in the exercises, had felt a great desire to lead a life worthy of their sacred calling. They hoped to preserve this holy disposition and continue in the way of sanctification. For this purpose they consulted Monsieur Vincent, asking him for his advice on how best they might correspond faithfully to the grace they had received at their ordination. <Ftn: CED I:203-05.>

Monsieur Vincent was the soul of charity and was filled with an ardent zeal for whatever might contribute to the spiritual good of the clergy. Among other things he proposed they should meet once a week to discuss matters pertaining to their state, such as the virtues proper to priests, functions of a true ministry, and other similar matters, all calculated to be most useful for the good of their souls. These conferences would serve to develop a union of hearts among themselves in the service of Jesus Christ and his Church, as a support and mutual encouragement and as a help in their holy ministry.

This proposal seemed to the priests concerned as though it came from heaven itself through Monsieur Vincent. Tuesday was chosen as the meeting day for the conference, which was immediately inaugurated with the blessing of the archbishop of Paris in 1633. <Ftn: It has become commonly known as the Tuesday conferences.> It has continued to the present with much success not only for the personal development of those attending but for the good of the entire Church, as we shall see in Book Two. <Ftn: Ch. 3. Jean Jacques Olier, Louis Abelly, and Jacques

Benigne Bossuet and nearly three hundred other priests were received as members of the Tuesday conferences during the saint's lifetime.>

Although this first meeting of priests was small in numbers at the beginning, God blessed it. As a result, it soon became a sacred nursery serving to produce for France several archbishops and bishops worthy of their office and a large number of vicars general, ecclesiastical judges, archdeacons, canons, pastors, and other clergy who most worthily fulfilled their benefices, offices and dignities in the Church. They have spread out to all the dioceses of the kingdom, where all have benefited from their good example, their zeal, and their efforts for the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

These priests certainly did not come to the Clergy Conferences for any temporal advantage or for hope of receiving a benefice. On the contrary, of all the dispositions stressed for the participants, one of the most often emphasized was total lack of self-interest, with the corresponding intention of purely and simply giving oneself perfectly to the service of God in perfect fidelity to one's vocation. This wise and zealous director ordinarily stressed nothing so much as love of humility, of contempt, of poverty and suffering, after the example of Jesus Christ, their divine Master. They were to imitate him by their service to the poor, visiting them in hospitals, prisons, and other such places. When invited by Monsieur Vincent they were to accompany the priests of the Congregation of the Mission to the parishes and villages, to serve the poor country people. They were to undertake the lowest and least esteemed priestly tasks.

God exalts the humble and rejects the proud, and confirms their humble service by raising them up. These Clergy Conferences produced such a change in priestly lives in Paris, even among some priests of noble birth, that they began to devote themselves with such zeal to diverse works of charity that they edified the city. Cardinal Richelieu heard of these developments. <Ftn: Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal Richelieu, 1585-1642. As bishop of Lucon he acted as a spokesman for the clergy at the Estates-General of 1614. Raised to the cardinalate in 1622, he entered the council of the king (1624) and quickly became its head. He guided both foreign and domestic policy. He was the author of royal absolutism, destroying the power of the nobles and of the Huguenot minority. Louis XIII followed his deathbed advice to appoint Mazarin as his chief minister.> As a result, he summoned Monsieur Vincent to explain what was happening in these assemblies and conferences and to talk about the work of the priests of the Congregation of the Mission. He

was most satisfied and from this time on developed a high esteem for the person and virtue of Monsieur Vincent, whom he had not known before, as he told his niece, Duchess d'Aiguillon. <Ftn: Marie de Wignerod de Pontcourlay, 1604-1675, whose husband died in 1622, after two years of marriage. Despite her entrance into the Carmelites, the cardinal saw to her worldly advancement and appointment as a duchess. She was a great and consistent benefactress of the Congregation of the Mission, Daughters of Charity and other congregations. She was president of the Confraternity of Charity at Saint Sulpice, her parish. After Monsieur Vincent's death, she had a silver-gilt reliquary made in the shape of a heart surmounted by a flame to enclose his heart.> On several later occasions he met Monsieur Vincent, exhorting him to continue the good works he had begun, and stating that he thought that his Congregation would do great good for the Church, and promised him every protection and support.

The cardinal wanted to know which priests came each week to Saint Lazare, the purpose of these assemblies, what they discussed, the charitable works they supported. When he received a satisfactory response to all these questions, he let it be known that he had a particular interest in having good bishops in the Church in France, who would have all the qualities required in such a high office. He asked Monsieur Vincent who might he think worthy of the episcopate, who might then be proposed to the king for nomination to vacant sees in the kingdom. Monsieur Vincent gave him the names of several. This wise and zealous minister immediately took pen and paper and wrote in his own hand the names in the order they had been given. <Ftn: CED II:386-88. Richelieu kept his word, and after his death, Louis XIII appealed again to Vincent, asking him to recommend suitable candidates for the episcopacy.>

What should be mentioned is that all this took place so discretely that Monsieur Vincent never said a word about it. The priests of the Clergy Conferences never knew a thing of it during his lifetime. Monsieur Vincent was taken up in inculcating a spirit of humility, simplicity, and evangelical disinterestedness, without ever breathing the least word that he had anything to do with their appointment to high office. Rather, he exhorted them incessantly to flee what appeared grand and mighty and instead to seek their own abnegation.

We shall see more in detail in Book Two <Ftn: Ch. 3.> the great good God drew from these assemblies at Saint Lazare, for the sanctification of the clergy and for the service of the whole Church. One of the benefits was that the clergy conferences begun at Paris soon appeared in other dioceses. By

the solicitude of the prelates, the pastors, benefice-holders, and priests of the towns and villages began to come together to discuss matters concerning the ecclesiastical state and the obligations flowing from it. All of this proved most helpful not only to reform the clergy but also to edify the people. The year 1642 saw an occasion when Monsieur Vincent was able to establish a second clergy conference in the College des Bons Enfants.

The women of the Association of Charity of Paris, of whom we will speak later, had requested some priests, besides those who lived in the hospital, to help tend the sick. In keeping with his usual charity, Monsieur Vincent welcomed the six at Saint Lazare who were to engage in this work, to prepare themselves by a spiritual retreat. He exhorted them to do well this work of charity and to preserve the spirit of piety and fraternal union among themselves. To help in this he offered some suggestions, chief among which was to meet every week at the College des Bons Enfants for clergy conferences much like those held at Saint Lazare. These good men willingly accepted this suggestion but chose Thursday as their meeting day rather than Tuesday because Thursday was ordinarily not a class day. This allowed those studying theology to come to these weekly meetings without missing any of their classes. Thus it was that this second clergy conference began. It has continued up to the present. It allowed several priests to join the study of virtue to that of knowledge. Thus they would make themselves more capable of serving the Church and giving greater glory to God.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The Establishment of the Hospitals in Paris and Marseilles for the Galley Slaves

Monsieur Vincent's pity for the poor galley slaves had its origin in his own experience, as we have described earlier. The charity of his heart did not allow him to forget these poor people, even among all the other important affairs calling for his attention. His thoughts often turned to the hospice he had provided for them near the church of Saint Roch, but lack of time prevented him from visiting them as often as he would have liked. He realized that this state of affairs could not go on for long unless there was some source of funds and a house of their own. Their present house was simply rented. He resolved within himself to work at this, with the help of divine Providence, to bring a solution to these difficulties.

He first requested help from the late king, Louis XIII of glorious memory, and the magistrates of Paris, to assign him the ancient tower between the gate of Saint Bernard and the river, to shelter these poor convicts. This was granted in 1632, and for several years the house only the alms from some charitable donors kept it going. For his part, Monsieur Vincent looked after their spiritual needs by sending priests of the Congregation of the Mission who lived in the College des Bons Enfants to say mass, hear confessions, instruct, and console. On occasions he brought some well-born and virtuous persons to visit, as a help to the prisoners.

Mademoiselle le Gras was among those who helped out, both personally and by her alms. She was then superior of the Confraternity of Charity in the parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet. The thought came to Monsieur Vincent that perhaps she might propose to these women to give some part of the alms at their disposal to these poor galley slaves since they lived in the same parish. He wrote to her about this proposal in a short note:

Charity towards these poor convicts is of great merit in the eyes of God. You were well advised to help them, and you will do well if you continue to do so in any way you can, until I can have the happiness of seeing you, in two or three days. Consider whether your Charity at Saint Nicolas might not assume responsibility for them, at least for a time. You could help them with the money you have left over, but then what? It is difficult to say, but that is why I

throw out this thought for you to consider. <Ftn: CED
I:166.>

For several years he remained the chief provider for these poor unfortunates. He provided lodging, and what physical and spiritual help he could, until divine Providence inspired a certain wealthy man, who died around 1639, to leave in his will an income of six thousand *livres* to this work. His daughter and heir, aided by the counsel of several priests, would administer it for the express purpose of helping convicts condemned to the galleys.

Only after much difficulty, and over the objection of her husband, was Monsieur Vincent able to arrange the investment of a large enough sum to provide the income as called for in the will. The late Monsieur Mole, then procurator general, helped him in these negotiations. His intervention was most helpful in assuring this income. Monsieur Vincent had alerted this good lady to the deplorable state of the convicts, to convince her that a permanent endowment was essential. She consented, after several discussions with Monsieur Vincent, that the procurator general have in perpetuity the temporal administration of the investment. Later she had the Daughters of Charity appointed to care for the convicts, especially the sick, and provided an income for them from the same six thousand *livres*. Because these prisoners lived in the parish of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, the priests of the parish were made responsible for administering the sacraments and burying the dead. Monsieur Vincent pointed out the heavy financial burden this was, and supported by the intervention of several ladies, these priests were granted an income of three hundred *livres* on condition they would say mass, give sermons and catechism lessons and other spiritual help, all of which they have done with great charity. From time to time Monsieur Vincent would come to these poor convicts, especially when they became numerous or were about to be shipped off to the galleys. He provided a missionary for them, to console them, and dispose them to make good use of their sufferings.

It might seem that he could do nothing more for the convicts. A heart less motivated by his sincere charity would be content with having provided a house and seen to their temporal and spiritual needs. His love, however, would not allow him to think he had done enough or to be content to see them sent away. Instead, he accompanied them to Marseilles, where he unfortunately found conditions worse even than it was in Paris. The convicts who had fallen sick remained chained to their benches in the galleys. They were covered with vermin, full of sores, and nearly smothered in rot and infection. His tender

heart was deeply troubled, seeing these men, made in the image of God, reduced to such misery, Christians condemned to die like animals. He resolved to appeal to Cardinal Richelieu, then General of the Galleys, and to the Duchess d'Aiguillon, the cardinal's niece. <Ftn: See Book One, ch. 46.> He reported on the horrible condition of the convicts and the absolute necessity of a hospital for them where they might be taken when sick. He successfully received authorization to construct one with the help of the late bishop of Marseilles, Bishop Gault, <Ftn: Jean-Baptiste Gault, bishop of Marseilles 1642-1643, a man highly regarded for his holiness and apostolic zeal.> whose memory is held in benediction, and the late Chevalier de Simiane de la Coste, a most charitable gentleman from Provence. <Ftn: Gaspar de Simiane de la Coste, 1607-1649, devoted to a great number of good works, and particularly so to the relief of the convicts in Marseilles.>

Just to have an institution is not enough. It must be supported. So it was that after the death of King Louis XIII, when Monsieur Vincent was called to Paris by the queen regent to help in administering the ecclesiastical affairs of the kingdom, she saw to it that the king, her son, was nominally designated as the founder of the hospital in Marseilles. This was confirmed by letters patent in 1645. The queen mother thereby authorized an annual income of twelve thousand *livres*, drawn from the Provence salt-tax. She specified that the priests of the Congregation of the Mission who had come to Marseilles, as we shall describe later, should have the spiritual direction of the house in perpetuity, in keeping with the concession made by the bishop of the city. The hospital's temporal administration was likewise put into the hands of the priests of the Mission, but together with four of the leading zealous citizens of the city.

To assure good chaplains for the galleys, Her Majesty in these same letters patent ordained that the superior of the mission of Marseilles should have the right to appoint and to dismiss, should the need arise. These chaplains could be obligated to live in community when the galleys were in port, to be better prepared by community exercises to fulfill their duties as chaplain. Her Majesty also specified that priests of the Congregation of the Mission be designated as royal chaplains. This appointment would give them more status to work for the salvation of the convicts with better results.

The Chevalier de la Coste had the welfare of this hospital so much at heart that he went to Paris expressly to hasten the letters patent. He finally obtained them through Monsieur Vincent's recommendation. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:310-12.> In a letter of 1645, he wrote:

I am reporting on the progress of the hospital, to which you have contributed so much. In my last letter I told you how, after much difficulty, we finally, with the help of our Lord, have been able to bring the sick galley slaves here. I am sure I could not express the joy felt by these poor convicts when they saw themselves transferred from their hell to this hospital they call paradise. No sooner did they come in than they were healed of half their illnesses, for they were cleaned of the vermin which covered them, their feet were washed, and they were taken to a bed a bit softer than the wooden benches they were accustomed to. Everyone was delighted to see themselves put to bed, served, and treated with a bit more charity than they were used to in the galley. We were able to cure a number who otherwise would have died. We can surely say that God has blessed this work, for we have seen the conversion of some lapsed Christians and even have witnessed some Moslems requesting baptism. <Ftn: *CED* II:525-27.>

After this time, most of the galleys were transferred from Marseilles to Toulon. <Ftn: This transfer took place to avoid a plague from 1649 to 1655.> Care for the sick was also moved. A house was rented for the care of the sick, and a priest of the Mission was regularly on hand to render spiritual services to the convicts, and see to all that could be done for their cure.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Founding of a Group of Women to Serve in the Hotel Dieu Hospital of Paris and for Other Works of Charity in Paris and Elsewhere

The many ills in this valley of tears forces charitable souls to expand their care and increase their ways of meeting the diverse needs of so many suffering people. Monsieur Vincent, as a person totally taken up with this virtue, was ever on the alert to hear of special needs, and his heart was ever disposed to respond. He held to the maxim of never pushing himself into new enterprises. He believed in waiting for a manifestation of the will of God, usually through others, especially superiors, rather than acting by his own initiative. His humility made him diffident about his own perceptions and alert to the possibility that he might be mistaken, especially when it came to knowing the designs of God in unusual enterprises.

This explains why he listened with such great interest and with such respect to those who proposed something that ought to be done, especially when it came from persons with a reputation for virtue. In this spirit he considered a proposal made to him in 1634 by Madame Goussault. <Ftn: In 1613 Genevieve Fayet married Antoine Goussault, a royal councillor and president of the Chambre des Comptes. Her husband died in 1634, and she then dedicated herself to works of charity. She had the idea of an association of ladies for the relief of the sick in the Hotel Dieu in Paris, and was their first superior. She saw that the Daughters of Charity were called to the hospital of Angers. Her name occurs frequently in Saint Vincent's correspondence. She died September 20, 1639.> Her memory is held in benediction because of her great charity. This lady had been widowed in the flower of her age. Although all avenues were open to her, because of her gifts of nature and fortune she renounced all prospects to commit herself to Jesus Christ. She generously resolved to devote herself solely to serve the poor, particularly the sick among them. She often went to the hospital of Paris, the Hotel Dieu, to visit, but did not find things well run there, such as they later became. She appealed to Monsieur Vincent to extend his charity to these poor people and asked advice on how best to bring about some needed changes in this large hospital.

In keeping with his usual prudence and discretion he felt it best not to use the scythe in another man's field. That is, he did not wish to meddle, whether spiritually or temporally, in

the hospital already under the direction of those he thought capable of bringing about any necessary changes.

Madame Goussault tried for a long time to persuade him to take an interest in this project, but finally was convinced that she was not going to change his mind. Instead, she contacted the late archbishop of Paris, who informed Monsieur Vincent that he would be happy to see him consider the proposition of this virtuous lady that an assembly of women should be formed to look after the sick in the hospital. The archbishop asked Monsieur Vincent to think how best to bring about this new organization of women.

Monsieur Vincent recognized the will of God in this order of the archbishop and accepted his suggestion. He first brought together several women to discuss the matter. He spoke so effectively that on the spot they agreed to give themselves to this good work. The names of these first women were the following, as we learn from a letter of Mademoiselle le Gras:

Yesterday a meeting was held at the home of Madame Goussault. Present were Mesdames de Villesavin, de Bailleul, du Mecq, Saintot and Pollalion. The proposal as presented was accepted, and we agreed to meet again next Monday. Meanwhile, we will pray for God's blessing and receive communion for this intention. Each of us will speak to our women friends about this. Madame de Beaufort will take care of this. We need you and your daughters, perhaps four of them. We will also have to think of some way to get some servants. <Ftn: *CED* I:229-31. The foundation of the Ladies of Charity has to be dated to about June 1634.>

The second assembly was better attended than the first. Among those present were the wife of the chancellor, <Ftn: Coste, *Life* I:322, note 60, corrects the identification of this person from Elisabeth d'Aligre to Madeleine Fabri, the wife of the chancellor, Pierre Segquier.> Madame Fouquet, <Ftn: Marie Fouquet> Madame de Traversai, and several other virtuous noble ladies, who joined the first group. Three officers were elected by the group, a superior, an assistant, and a treasurer. Madame Goussault was the first superior, and Monsieur Vincent was designated the permanent director of this company. The virtues and example of these first women attracted several others, so that soon more than two hundred women had enrolled, even some from the nobility, such as presidents' wives, countesses, marchionesses, duchesses and princesses, and all considered it an honor to offer themselves to God to serve the poor, recognizing them as the living members of his Son, Jesus Christ. <Ftn: The noble ladies of the court wanted a group of their own

Ladies of Charity in imitation of those in the parishes of Paris. Queen Anne of Austria, whose own piety and support of Saint Vincent were well known, wanted to be part of this group. *CED XIII:821-22.*>

This company, under Monsieur Vincent's direction, began in that year, 1634, a fruitful service to the Hotel Dieu hospital which lasted all his life and even after his death. The women provided both corporal and spiritual aid, which this father of the poor urged them to add to the past usage of the hospital, either because of insufficient care or lack of certain facilities. It held a thousand or even twelve hundred patients, with this number increasing to over two thousand later. There was a constant coming and going of these poor sick people. Some remained for a week or two, and others stayed longer, for a month or more. On some days, fifty, sixty or eighty, were admitted, and sometimes a hundred. Each year at least twenty to twenty-five thousand passed through the hospital. Some were cured, some died. In either case a harvest of souls was ready for the reaping. It offered a favorable occasion for reforming their lives by a general confession and a conversion of morals, or possibly by preparing themselves to crown their life by a happy death.

Monsieur Vincent did not experience much difficulty in bringing together these women or in having them work for the poor. The question of working in the Hotel Dieu hospital was otherwise. From his first talk to them, he pointed out the likelihood of their service being misunderstood, for their charitable service would emphasize the deficiencies in the administration of the hospital, leading to obvious difficulties. He had spoken of the great good they could do, but at the cost of great opposition. The women should prepare themselves well, he said, and consider carefully how best to carry out their ministry. He himself thought it best to contact the administrators of the Hotel Dieu to alert them to the good intentions and virtues of these charitable women, as well as to inform them of the directive he had received from the archbishop. To their credit, the administrators agreed to allow the women to come into the hospital, to serve the sick in many different ways.

After appointing those who would begin these visits and others to follow, he provided a set of practical recommendations: (1) Each day, before entering the Hotel Dieu hospital, they should invoke the help of our Lord, the true Father of the poor, and the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of Saint Louis, the founder of the hospital. (2) They should present themselves to the religious sisters in charge of the

hospital, offering to work with them in serving the sick, to participate in their merits before God. (3) They should esteem and respect these religious as visible angels and speak of them with kindness and humility, always with an entire deference. (4) Should their good intentions not be appreciated, they should be understanding, seek to appreciate their perspective, and never try to get the better of them.

He said to them:

We say we are trying to help the poor and to aid them in their search for salvation, but we will do neither without the help of these good religious in charge. We must show them every respect, as mothers of the poor, as spouses of our Lord and as the ladies of the house. The Spirit of God works gently. This is how we must act if we hope to succeed in our mission.

In this spirit, then, Monsieur Vincent began this holy work and directed wisely and prudently these good women as they began to serve the poor in the hospital. They found easy access to all departments because of their kindly and respectful attitude towards the sisters in charge. This extended not only to the services the sisters provided for the sick and convalescent but also even to their relatives when occasion arose. They were free to go from ward to ward, from bed to bed, consoling the sick, speaking to them of God, and bringing them to make good use of their sufferings.

So as not to come to these poor with empty hands, the ladies worked out with Monsieur Vincent that they would bring some sweets between dinner and supper, to supplement their words of consolation and edification. They rented a room near the hospital to prepare and store the fruit, jellies, or other small items suitable for the sick. They also asked the Daughters of Charity to buy and prepare these things, and help in their distribution.

Monsieur Vincent was away when the Daughters were invited to help. When he learned of it, he wrote to Mademoiselle le Gras, "God bless you, Mademoiselle, for sending your Daughters to the hospital, Hotel Dieu, to help out. Be careful of your health, for you know how much you are needed." <Ftn: CED I:371.> Because this good Mademoiselle was so zealous for the service of the sick poor, she ever feared she was not doing enough to cooperate with the designs of God upon her, although she was doing everything humanly possible. Monsieur Vincent wrote to her:

It is not helpful to remain at the hospital, but to come and go would be all right. Do not fear to do all the good that comes your way, but do fear the wish of

undertaking more than you are able, and more than God gives you strength to accomplish. The thought of going beyond this makes me tremble with fear, for it seems to be against the designs of Providence. I thank our Lord for his grace to your Daughters which makes them so generous and so well disposed to serve him. There is good reason to believe his goodness, as you said, will supply for whatever might be lacking on your part when you are obliged to attend to other things, such as directing the company. <Ftn: CED I:304-05.>

With this rented room and the Daughters to help, the ladies prepared soups appropriate for the often numerous sick, and distributed these each morning. Around three o'clock in the afternoon they would then bring a snack for everyone. It consisted of white bread, cakes, jelly or preserves, raisins or cherries in season, and in winter tea, cooked pears or sugared toast. Later they had to stop the bread, cakes, and tea because of the expense, and also the soup because the hospital itself began to supply it. Each day four or five of the ladies would go to distribute this snack. Putting on an apron, each would go to a particular room, where she would go from bed to bed, distributing what she had brought. This service was given to these poor sick people, or rather to Jesus Christ in their person, to help them in their bodily needs. <Ftn: CED I:253-54.>

To help them spiritually, they would speak to the sick with great kindness, with compassion for their suffering, and with a recommendation to accept their state with patience and submission to God's will. When they came across women or girls not well enough informed about things necessary for salvation, they would gently bring them to understand what must be believed and done to assure salvation. They helped prepare them for a good general confession if it appeared they would benefit from it. If it seemed the illness was mortal, they would help prepare them for a happy death. In those cases where a cure was hoped for, they would try to bring them to resolve to live good lives in the future.

To help out in this charitable service Monsieur Vincent had printed a short tract containing the main points for the instruction of the sick. This booklet contained four recommendations for the ladies: (1) This booklet should be held in the hand when the poor were spoken to, to show that the conversation was not to be general or about themselves, but only of what was in the booklet. (2) They should dress as simply as possible on those days they went to the hospital, or at least keep from vain and fancy clothes so as not to cause difficulty to these poor people. Seeing the excesses and extremes of the

rich, they ordinarily think more of the things they do not have than of those things which they need. (3) They should treat the poor with great humility, meekness, and affability, speaking to them in a familiar and cordial manner, the better to gain them to God. He then spoke of the best way to prepare the sick for making a general confession, in simple, colloquial language, which will show the reader the charity that filled the heart of this father of the poor.

My good sister, has it been a while since you have gone to confession? Would you be willing to make a general confession if you are shown how to do it? I have heard how important it would be for my own salvation to make a good confession before dying. This would remedy faults I may have had in making my ordinary confessions and help me have a greater sorrow for my sins, seeing all I have committed in my whole life and the great mercy of God who has put up with me and has not condemned me or sent me to hell even though I deserved it. Instead, he has waited for my confession to pardon me and give me paradise if I turn to him with my whole heart, as I hope to do with the help of his grace. You may have the same reasons as myself for making a general confession and giving yourself to God by living a good life. If you want to know what to do to recall your sins and to confess them, I was told to examine myself like I will tell you. . . etc. I was also told how to have true contrition for my sins, by making acts of contrition, . . . etc. I was also taught to make acts of faith, hope, and love of God, . . . etc.

This is how the virtuous and charitable ladies, following the advice of their wise director, handled this matter in dealing with the sick poor, to teach them and prepare them for making a good confession. They did so in such a way that there were no complaints, but rather much edification at their good example.

Some two years after the establishment of this company, Monsieur Vincent thought it appropriate to designate every three months a certain number of these ladies to be particularly responsible for the instruction and spiritual consolation of the sick poor. They would leave it to the others to take care of their physical needs. Experience had shown that it was difficult for those who worked at one of these tasks to be competent at the other. Those who had shown a greater aptitude for the spiritual works of mercy were chosen to devote themselves entirely to this aspect of the work. The company was called

together in assembly, where they approved this organization and immediately put it into execution. Fourteen ladies were chosen to carry out this plan for three months. <Ftn: They were called the "Assembly of the Fourteen," or the "Little Assembly," and were held besides the general assemblies. See *CED* II:283; XIII: 762-67, 788, 826.> The next day a delegation called on the canons of Notre Dame, who were responsible for the direction of the hospital, and then began their visits, two each day of the week, to visit, console, and instruct the sick. Every three months, at the rogation days, another group would take over. The group finishing their tour would meet with those about to start in the presence of Monsieur Vincent and the other officers of the company in their rented room near the hospital. They would hear how the others had carried out their assignments, and which ones seemed to have God's special blessing. What succeeded became the rule for the following group, and they took great encouragement from the successes reported. When appropriate, Monsieur Vincent added a word of advice as to what should be done or avoided, especially in their relationships with the religious of the hospital and the sick.

After the patients had been instructed and disposed to make a good general confession, the ladies would ask several religious priests to follow up, but this led to some difficulties. With the approval of the superiors, two other priests were asked to be available with a decent stipend as encouragement. One of these priests spoke several languages, which made it convenient for those patients from outside France. The two priests were not able to attend to all the poor, since the number of patients increased noticeably. The ladies were overburdened in their efforts to instruct them all. Further, it was not fitting for them to work with the male patients in preparing them for making a good general confession.

All these considerations led them to ask the superiors of the Hotel Dieu if six priests might be assigned there to instruct the men, and hear the confessions of both men and women. These priests would replace those already in residence at the hospital who were obligated to attend the divine office in choir, and so could not give enough time to the sick. These six priests would have as their sole responsibility the spiritual help of the poor with no obligation to attend the public recitation of the office. Before beginning their service in the hospital, the six priests were to make a retreat at Saint Lazare, where Monsieur Vincent lived, to dispose themselves to exercise their charity worthily towards the sick. Each year they were to return to Saint Lazare to renew their dedication to their charitable duties. The ladies gave each priest a stipend

of forty *ecus*, arranged for them to say their mass at Notre Dame, and provided room and board for them at the hospital. <Ftn: These six priests were the first to take part in the Tuesday conferences mentioned in ch. 27 above.>

To understand better the great good the company of women had produced for the salvation and sanctification of the sick poor, we should remark that previously it had been the custom to have the sick person make his confession upon admittance to the hospital. Ordinarily they were poorly prepared and ill disposed, not to mention their discomfort, depending on which sickness had brought them to the hospital. As a consequence, many of these confessions were null or sacrilegious, not to mention that some heretics among the sick would not reveal their religious affiliation for fear of being sent away. They would go through the appearance of confessing, just like the others. One result of this great abuse was that there were few true conversions. No one spoke to the patients of general confession, nor of any other kind, unless it were at the approach of death. Even then, many did not know how to make a good confession.

The goodness of God met these deplorable conditions by raising up this company of women. By their charitable and zealous dedication, all directed prudently by Monsieur Vincent, they brought a remedy to all these ills. More than this, they contributed much to the salvation and sanctification of these sick poor. Only God knows what great good was effected through his grace. He alone knows the number of those helped to die as a Christian or to begin to lead a new life of virtue. We can say the number must have been large if we judge by the number of persons converted to God in the Catholic Church. In the first year alone, not to speak of the ones following, God's blessing was so manifest upon this enterprise that more than seven-hundred sixty persons, estranged from the true faith, renounced their errors and returned to the Church. <Ftn: Coste believes this number to be exaggerated; *Life* I:285, n. 25.> Whether Lutherans, Calvinists, or even Moslems, some of whom had been wounded, captured at sea, brought to Paris and then to the hospital, all embraced the Catholic faith. The extraordinary blessing of God upon this charitable work in the hospital earned it such a reputation, that when a certain lady in Paris fell ill, she asked to be taken at her own expense to the hospital for the poor, for she preferred to receive the attention and help given to the poor to what she would receive elsewhere. Her wish was granted.

Monsieur Vincent had the consolation of seeing these marvelous fruits for more than twenty-five years. They continued after his death, thanks to God's constant blessing. One day he

invited the ladies of the company in their assembly to thank God for having chosen them as the instruments of so many blessings.

Ladies, how you should thank God for his inspiration to care for the bodily needs of the poor. By helping them this way, you caused them to begin to consider their salvation. Most would never have been so well prepared for death were it not for your help. Those who recovered from their illness would not have changed their lives if you had not cultivated in them such good dispositions. <Ftn: *CED* XII:803-04.>

CHAPTER THIRTY

The Establishment of a Foundling Hospital

Painters wishing to depict the virtue of charity often use the image of a woman with many breasts and several children in her arms and in her lap. If we wanted to represent the charity of Monsieur Vincent we could use the same symbol, for it is appropriate to the subject of this chapter. We shall see this saintly man as father provider, saving a great number of neglected and abandoned children, earning the right to be credited with saving countless lives. He provided a substitute for those cruel and inhuman mothers who abandoned and exposed their children in the persons of other charitable women who stepped in to rescue and nurture these poor unfortunate infants. This truly Christian undertaking began in this way.

The city of Paris is exceedingly large with an almost countless number of inhabitants. Of necessity there are a certain number of disorders among the people, not all of which can be prevented or remedied. One of the most pernicious of these is the abandonment of newly-born infants, whose life and even salvation is put in jeopardy. The unnatural mothers or others who are responsible for this crime against these innocent creatures, are not concerned about having them baptized into the state of grace.

It has been stated that every year at least three or four hundred abandoned children have been found in Paris or in its immediate suburbs. The commissioners of the Chatelet of Paris are responsible for picking up these children, reporting where they were found, and their condition.

They were first brought to a house called La Couche ["the bed"] in the Rue Saint Landry, where a widow and one or two servants received them and attempted to look after them. She was unable to attend to such a large number, nor was she able to find wet-nurses for all or to care for and raise those who were weaned. The cost of the enterprise was so much for her, that a large proportion of the children died of neglect. Sometimes the servants gave a drug to stop the children from crying, but this caused some to die. Those who survived were either given to whomever would come to claim them or sold for the trifling sum of twenty *sous*. They were bought to be nursed by women past the appropriate age, and their unhealthy milk caused the children to die. Others were to substitute for children in families who used them for evil purposes. On other occasions these children were bought for diabolic and magical rites. All these poor innocents seemed condemned to death, or worse, because nobody was

seriously concerned about them. What is worse, some died without baptism. The widow who first took them in stated that she had neither baptized any children herself nor had them baptized by others.

This strange disorder in a city as prosperous as Paris, one well policed and Christian, deeply touched the heart of Monsieur Vincent when he became aware of the problem. Not knowing what course to take, he spoke to the Ladies of Charity. He encouraged them to go to the house which received these children, not so much to see if such evil existed, but rather to see if some way existed to remedy the sad situation. They were deeply moved at the sad plight of these poor innocents who in truth were more to be pitied than those massacred by Herod. Unable to take responsibility for all, they considered taking some at least, to save a few. They first agreed to care for twelve, but not knowing the designs of God upon any of them, they chose them by lot to honor divine Providence. In 1638, they were taken to a rented house outside the Saint Victor gate of the city, and placed under Mademoiselle le Gras' care, helped by several Daughters of Charity sent by Monsieur Vincent. At first they were fed with goats' and cows' milk, and later wet-nurses were provided.

These virtuous ladies took in others from time to time as their resources and devotion would allow, always by lot as in the beginning. Their burning charity made them hope to serve all the other children, but the expense of feeding and educating so many was beyond their resources. The impossibility of carrying out this desirable task confined it for the moment to their noble hearts, without their actually being able to carry it out.

After much prayer and lengthy discussion, a general assembly of the women was called at the beginning of 1640. <Ftn: *CED* XIII:779-85.> Monsieur Vincent spoke in terms born of his zeal, of the importance and necessity of this good work and the great service to God it would be to practice excellently a virtue so agreeable to him. A general resolution was adopted to undertake the nurture and education of these children. <Ftn: *CED* II:6-7.> To avoid haste, following the advice of their wise director, they resolved to begin slowly. This would be an experiment, with no formal obligation to continue, since they had only twelve hundred to fourteen hundred *livres* yearly of assured income. Later the king assigned them the alms of five of his large farms, which amounted to twelve thousand *livres* yearly, thanks to Monsieur Vincent's intervention with the queen mother. Nevertheless, since their expenses came to nearly forty thousand *livres*, the Ladies found it difficult to meet this obligation and feared they would be overwhelmed.

This caused Monsieur Vincent to call another general assembly around 1648 to decide if the Ladies ought to conclude their involvement or continue to care for these children. They were at liberty to take this decision, for no other obligation bound them except their own charity. He proposed reasons for and against. He recalled that they had been responsible for saving some five or six hundred children. Without their intervention, they would surely have died. Some of these children had learned a trade and others were about to. All had been taught to know and serve God. To judge by the past, it could be well imagined how great the fruit of their charity would be. Then, raising his voice, he finished with these words:

Your compassion and your charity, Ladies, has led you to adopt these children as your own. You have been their mothers according to grace, since their natural mothers have abandoned them. Do you too now want to abandon them? Do you want to stop being their mothers, to become their judges? Their life and their death is in your hands. I am now about to collect your vote. Now is the moment to read their sentence to see if you no longer want to have mercy on them. If you continue to care for them they will live, but if not, if you abandon them, they will surely die. You know from your own experience that this is the truth. <Ftn: CED XII: 801. Coste corrects the date to 1647.>

His tone of voice gave no doubt of his own sentiments. The women were so moved by his words that they unanimously agreed to continue this charity no matter what the cost. The only question remaining for them was how to find the necessary means for carrying out this project.

Following this assembly the ladies obtained from the king the Chateau of Bicetre, where they housed the children for a time but later moved out. <Ftn: Located near Gentilly, this house had been built under Charles V and restored under Louis XIII to serve as a hospital for wounded soldiers.> Perhaps because the air was unhealthy or for some other reasons, the women brought the children back to Paris where they rented a large house in the Saint Lazare section of the city. The infants were cared for by ten or twelve Daughters of Charity. Several wet-nurses were engaged to live in this house to nurse the most recent arrivals, while awaiting other women from the country to come to take children home with them. <Ftn: In his solicitude Saint Vincent did not abandon these poor children. He arranged for the Daughters of Charity to visit them and their nurses, and, in 1649, sent a brother of the Congregation on a six-week tour to bring aid to these nurses in the villages where they

lived.> These women received a monthly stipend for this care. Once the children were weaned they were returned to the house, and the Daughters of Charity took care of them. They were taught to speak, to pray to God, to know him, to love him, and to serve him. When they were a little older they were allowed to go to a small workshop. They would thus avoid idleness and await the day when divine Providence would bring about some way for them to leave the house, ready to earn their own livelihood.

These then are the fruits of this charitable work which has continued for more than twenty-five years under the wise direction of Monsieur Vincent and by the care and service of these virtuous women. Their charity has been so favorable and advantageous to the children that it could be said that they were happier in their abandonment than if they had been raised in their own families. We can presume these must have been either very poor or possibly very wicked. It seemed that God wished to confirm by the support of his grace the first principle of the entire enterprise. This had been said long ago by a prophet, that even if unnatural mothers would abandon their own children, God's paternal Providence would look after them. He would provide other better disposed mothers to love them and supply abundantly what their natural mothers failed to do. <Ftn: Isa 49:15.>

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

The Founding of Several Seminaries for Clergy

Great rivers always flow towards the ocean, ever being swelled by the waters of brooks and streams along the way. So too with the charity of Monsieur Vincent. It was ever directed to God, but grew each day, not so much from what he received from others, as from what he gave away as divine Providence presented various opportunities to him.

We have seen in several preceding chapters how Monsieur Vincent's zeal moved him to work for the revival of the priestly spirit among the clergy. He instituted the ordination retreats, the clergy conferences and retreats to further this ideal. Although all these were helpful, they still did not bring about in the clergy all the change desirable. He felt the remedy must go to the source of the clerical state, to the formation of young men, who showed signs of a true vocation, in the seminaries envisioned by the holy Council of Trent.

This is why, after moving to Saint Lazare about 1636, he used the College des Bons Enfants as a seminary to train young clerics in letters and morals to prepare them for the state to which they aspired. He realized, however, that it would take a good while before the fruits of this seminary would be seen because of the years it would require before the candidate would be of sufficient age and disposition to receive holy orders. <Ftn: CED V:563-64.> He was also aware of the pressing need the Church had of good priests who could be employed almost immediately in various clerical positions.

His zeal led to the desire that it would please God to supply this need, perhaps by the creation of seminaries for those who had already received holy orders or wished to. In them, the candidates could acquire the proper priestly spirit and be formed in the duties of their state. For him to think of himself as having a part to play in this holy enterprise was contrary to his personal humility. Divine Providence brought it about that he had occasion to mention his ideas to Cardinal Richelieu. Monsieur Vincent occasionally met with him and had spoken several times about how the glory of God might be furthered through reform of the clergy. Monsieur Vincent spoke to the cardinal about the ordination retreats and the clergy conferences already established in several places.

He then described his vision of seminaries in the various dioceses, not so much for young clerical students, as for those already ordained or about to be in the next ordination class. During one or two years these men would be trained in virtue,

prayer, divine service, the rites of the Church, chant, the administration of the sacraments, the catechism, preaching and all other ecclesiastical functions, including cases of conscience or other necessary parts of theological studies. In a word, these men would be helped, not merely to develop their personal spiritual life, but to lead souls into the ways of justice and salvation. Unless something of this sort were done few priests would have the qualities needed to serve and edify the Church. Instead, it would be reasonable to expect that a large number of evil, ignorant, and scandalous priests would continue to be stumbling blocks for the people.

The cardinal heard this description with much appreciation, and urged Monsieur Vincent himself to set about this projected seminary. To help him begin, the cardinal assigned one thousand *ecus* to support the first group of priests received by Monsieur Vincent in the College des Bons Enfants in February 1642. <Ftn: *CED* II:223-26.> These men were housed and taught for two years in all things appropriate to their calling. Several other clerics came later, offering to pay their own board, to benefit from the spiritual and academic program. Thus it was that the seminary of the Bons Enfants began under the wise direction of Monsieur Vincent with the permission and encouragement of the late archbishop of Paris. <Ftn: It was later called the seminary of Saint Firmin, and it continued until the French Revolution, when, on September 2, 1792, one of the bloodiest massacres of priests took place.> This good prelate had already allowed the priests of the community of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet to begin another such seminary. God showered many blessings upon it through these priests and especially by the incomparable zeal of Monsieur Bourdoise. Our Lord had conferred on him the true clerical spirit from his youth, joined with a great desire to extend this spirit to others. <Ftn: Adrien Bourdoise, 1584-1655, one of the most zealous reformers of the clergy of his day. He founded a community of priests at the parish Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet. He and Vincent de Paul shared a mutual esteem.>

Several years after the establishment of this seminary at the College des Bons Enfants the number of clerics increased to such an extent they all could not all be conveniently housed. Monsieur Vincent transferred the young people who had been studying the humanities to another house, located at the edge of the enclosure of Saint Lazare outside the city. He named it the seminary of Saint Charles. The priests of the Congregation of the Mission have continued to teach the humanities there and form in virtue those young men who show some sign of having a clerical vocation.

Since then, many prelates of the kingdom have considered forming similar seminaries in their own dioceses for their young priests. Some of them, in fact, have given over the direction of them to the priests of the Congregation of the Mission. This was the case at Cahors, Saintes, Saint Malo, Treguier, Agen, Montauban, Agde, Troyes, Amiens, Noyon, and several other places not only in France but also in Italy and other foreign provinces. Just as the success of the missions given by Monsieur Vincent and the priests of the Congregation led others to begin missions in their own territory, so the sight of these seminaries established by Monsieur Vincent, whose necessity, utility, and feasibility were shown, led to others in various dioceses of the kingdom. They have contributed greatly to the welfare of the clergy in France, and by God's mercy, the kingdom has begun to regain its original splendor. It could be said this splendor had been tarnished a bit during these last few centuries.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE (BIS) <Ftn: This chapter was intended for inclusion by Abelly, but was published only in 1841 after it was recovered from the Sulpician archives.>

Monsieur Vincent's Collaboration with Father Olier in Various Pious Works

Great servants of God, animated by the same spirit, should be fittingly associated with each other and help each other in their charitable enterprises. Such was the case with Monsieur Vincent and the late Father Olier, a great servant of God, whose memory is held in benediction, and who was endowed by God with a truly apostolic spirit. <Ftn: Jean Jacques Olier, 1608-1657, was one of the main restorers of ecclesiastical discipline in the seventeenth century. He was ordained in 1633, and then worked on the missions, often with the priests of Saint Lazare, whom he edified by his zeal and humility. He continued to seek advice from Saint Vincent. Vincent assisted at his death, and consoled Olier's community afterwards. For his words on that occasion, see *CED* XIII:166-67.>

Monsieur Vincent had a special appreciation and respect for the person and the sanctity of Father Olier. The feeling was mutual, for in his turn Father Olier looked upon Monsieur Vincent as his spiritual father and would often say to his seminarians that "Monsieur Vincent is our father." Monsieur Olier often showed his esteem for the virtues he practiced and on occasion would quote Monsieur Vincent's maxims as a stimulus for their own life of virtue. We learn this from those fortunate enough to have been under Monsieur Olier's charge. He was among the first to come to the ordination retreats, which prepared ordinands for the reception of holy orders, as we have already pointed out. From these exercises he drew his inspiration for the true priestly spirit which was so characteristic of him. He was among the first of those, in the exercise of this spirit, to attend the spiritual conferences held every week at Saint Lazare under the personal direction of Monsieur Vincent. Later, he joined some priests of the Congregation of the Mission in the giving of missions. In January 1635 he worked on a mission at Crecy, and in the following year, during the Lenten season, he volunteered to help in the mission given in the hospital of the faubourg Saint Victor.

Seeing at first hand the benefits of these missions for the conversion and sanctification of souls, he wished to bring them to the parishes that depended upon his abbey of Pebrac in Auvergne. He was able to do so after Lent of that same year. Two priests of the Congregation of the Mission helped him, and

several other devoted priests who joined him in this work. This first mission was given at Saint Ilpise. It was reported to the clergy conference at Saint Lazare by an edifying letter in which Monsieur Olier speaks of the success of the mission and of his own thoughts about the efficacy of this particular form of religious devotion. For the edification of our readers, we will give this letter in detail in Book Two of this Life. <Ftn: Ch. 1, sect. 2, part 3.>

This worthy priest, following the success of the missions, obtained the authorization of the bishop of Saint Flour <Ftn: Charles de Noailles, bishop 1610-1646.> for a mission to the priests of the diocese. It would be given in his abbey of Pebrac, along with ordination retreats such as were conducted at Paris. He wrote again in October of that same year to the priests of the clergy conference at Saint Lazare in Paris. He sought their help in what he considered to be the reformation of an entire diocese. In February 1637 he wrote again, after a fourth mission, when about to begin an important fifth one in La Motte, near the city of Brioude. He spoke in this letter of what had already been accomplished by the priests of the city of Le Puy, whom he had put in contact with the clergy conference of Saint Lazare in Paris.

About this same time, Monsieur Olier was well aware from his own experience how greatly the missions helped the welfare of the people, and he realized the need for working to reform the clergy. He decided to give himself to this task. He agreed to accept the charge of a parish in Paris to give the example of what a well-organized parish, a devoted pastor, and a committed clergy could contribute to the welfare of the people. He discussed this with Monsieur de Fresque, the pastor of Saint Sulpice, and was able later to establish a community of priests which proved to be most successful, as all are now aware. In a short time the parish became the admiration and the talk of all Paris, so great was the change brought about. This did not happen without serious troubles raised by the enemy of all humanity, to the extent that upon a misunderstanding having arisen between the former and the present pastor, some neighbors of the faubourg Saint Germain took up arms to dislodge Monsieur Olier and his priests from the parish.

During these troubles, Monsieur Vincent, always so devoted to the good priest, did all he could to defend and support him by his prayers to God, by his advice, and by his influence at court. It should be remarked that Monsieur Vincent himself was blamed by some as causing the troubles because the people called the community of priests at Saint Sulpice "missionaries" although they were not so. This happened possibly because

Monsieur Vincent was thought of as their superior. Some short while before he had sent some priests from the clergy conference of Saint Lazare to the faubourg Saint Germain for a mission, and this led to the confusion.

One day in the Council of Ecclesiastical Affairs of the kingdom, when the subject of this disturbance came up for discussion, Monsieur Vincent was blamed for all the troubles. Rather than defend himself by stating, as was true, that the priests of Saint Sulpice did not belong to his Congregation and had no allegiance to him whatsoever, as he did on many other occasions when their good deeds were praised, he said not a single word in his own defense or to disabuse his accusers. On the contrary, in humility, and to express his esteem for Monsieur Olier and his priests, he took their side completely. He defended their interests more energetically than he would have defended his own. When they were blamed and condemned, he became their apologist, speaking of all the good they did and the happy results of their zeal. To preserve their reputation he endangered his own, allowing his own Congregation to be blamed, in an effort to protect Monsieur Olier and his priests and to enable them to live in peace and tranquility.

This stance of Monsieur Vincent ran so contrary to human prudence that it astonished some of his friends. When they asked why he acted so, he replied that he thought all Christians would have done the same. In acting as he did he felt he was simply following the maxims of the Gospel. His esteem for the virtue of Monsieur Olier gave him this opinion. He looked upon Monsieur Olier's work, not simply as an isolated good deed, but as a public service demanding the support of all persons of good will.

Some time later, Monsieur Olier expanded the field of his zeal to encompass the founding of a seminary which served then, and up to our own time, to train clerics of all classes of society for the benefit of the Church in whatever part of the kingdom they later served. They brought, to the great advantage of the Church, the graces and blessings which they had drawn from that sacred spot. <Ftn: Here too Saint Vincent was able to help Monsieur Olier. This can be seen by the praise that he gave of Saint Sulpice to a priest and a pious woman desirous of helping their seminary. See Book III, ch. 11, sect. 5.>

Because of Monsieur Olier's contributions of which we have spoken, and the great virtues with which God had endowed him, Monsieur Vincent looked upon him as a saint. <Ftn: *CED* VIII: 330.> He did not hesitate to speak everywhere of this conviction. When it pleased God to recall this great servant to himself, Monsieur Vincent attended him at his last illness and

death. <Ftn: CED VI:275.> He was among the many who grieved over the great loss to the Church in the person of this saintly priest. In his remaining years Monsieur Vincent continued to serve the priests of Olier's community. He would meet with them, together with some others of great reputation, to find ways of perpetuating the excellent work begun so worthily by Monsieur Olier. <Ftn: Saint Vincent presided at the assembly of April 13, 1657, called to select a successor to Olier. He was authorized for this by Henri de Bourbon, bishop of Metz and abbot of Saint Germain, the ecclesiastical superior of the community of Saint Sulpice. Vincent signed the official notarized record of the proceedings.>

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Some Help Given by Monsieur Vincent to the late Commander de Sillery and to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, commonly called the Knights of Malta

The late Monsieur Noel Brulart de Sillery, commander of the Temple of Troyes, of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, had served in the embassies in Italy, Spain, and other distant lands. He had undertaken other important affairs for the king, always with honor and to the entire satisfaction of His Majesty. He was moved by grace to give himself totally to God by separating himself from court and from all worldly distractions to consecrate his life to God's service and to the sanctification and salvation of his soul. From his days at court he had heard of Monsieur Vincent and had formed a high opinion of his virtue. This led him to seek his counsel in his plan to change his style of life. His disposition was so good, and his willingness to follow the advice of his wise director so marked that in a short time a decided change was noted in his person and in his behavior.

Recognizing the vanity of luxury and the cost of living in the grand style, he left his home, the Hotel de Sillery, with all its sumptuous and magnificent fittings which were appropriate to the many high offices he held. He dismissed the larger part of his entourage after paying his servants in proportion to their years of service. He sold his most costly furniture and distributed large sums to various works of charity. He then was inspired to consecrate himself more completely to God by entering the priesthood. He did so after taking advice from Monsieur Vincent and disposing himself to receive this great sacrament worthily by suitable practices of piety. He began to live <Ftn: At Saint Lazare, March 1634. CED I:234-35.> in a manner befitting his sacred calling, giving himself to the practice of the virtues. He resolved to put himself under the spiritual direction of Monsieur Vincent and to regulate his life completely under his guidance. This is what he wrote in one of his letters:

My reverend and dear Father:

I have no doubt that you were well aware of how much your friendly and cordial letter would delight your wretched son. Not only was your letter cordial beyond what all others might be, it also spoke to me as master and superior, which I willingly acknowledge, in asking me to dispose of my weapons. I would be rude and rustic if I did not respond to your charity so

lovingly displayed towards me, from a worthy and thoughtful father towards an unfeeling son. There is no other remedy for this than to accept willingly and humbly the confusion I feel at all the failings you know only too well, for which I beg pardon with reverence and submission. I promise you, with the help of our Lord's grace, my most dear father, that I will correct myself. Yes, Father, I have never been so determined as I am now. If only we can work together in amending the many ills your reverence knows so well I am completely filled with, I would be overjoyed in consolation. Should this happy outcome not develop so soon or so completely as your goodness desires, I entreat you, my worthy Father, *per viscera misericordiae Dei nostri in quibus visitavit nos oriens ex alto* ["through the deep mercy of our God, the rising sun has visited us"]. <Ftn: Luke 1:67-68.> not to despair, and not to leave your poor son. You know well he will be poorly guided if he is left to his own devices. <Ftn: CED I:41-42.>

In this letter it is difficult to say what is the more praiseworthy, the humility and simplicity of a man who had passed the greater part of his life among the intrigues of court and in the conduct of important business for the king, or the wise and helpful direction of Monsieur Vincent which had, by the grace of God, gained such ascendancy over the mind and heart of this noble person.

After such a change in his status and in his daily routine, Commander de Sillery was moved by his zeal to contribute to the spiritual progress of the religious and pastors of his order, members of the Grand Priory of the Temple. He received a commission from the Grand Master of Malta to visit the houses and spoke with Monsieur Vincent as to the best way to make these visits fruitful. They agreed that missionaries would accompany the commander to give missions in the parishes at the same time they were visited. This would both help the people and give the religious and pastors responsible for the parishes a good idea of the problems and remedies appropriate to the situation. They carried out these visits with great success. When this came to the attention of the grand master of Malta, he was so pleased he wrote the following letter to Monsieur Vincent to thank him:

Monsieur, I have been informed that the renowned Bailiff of Sillery selected you to help in the visits to the churches and parishes which depend on the Grand Priory and that you have already begun to devote yourself to instruct those who need it so much. This

leads me to write these affectionate lines to thank you and to ask you to continue this service for no other reason than the greater glory of God and the honor and reputation of this order. I beg the goodness of God with all my heart to repay your zeal and charity by his graces and blessings, and to bestow on me the ability to convey to you the depths of my gratitude. Yours, . . . etc.

Grand Master [Paul] Lascaris of Malta, September 17, 1637. <Ftn: CED I:389-90.>

The commander considered that it was not enough to tidy up the stream if the source was not cared for, and so felt unsatisfied at simply making the visits well. Besides that, he wanted to assure good priests for the Temple at Paris and to choose candidates recognized as called by God to service in this community. He wanted to assure that those who received the habit of the order would likewise be clothed in its spirit. He hoped that from their number worthy men would be chosen to serve as pastors, and so little by little the face of this great order would be renewed.

Unfortunately, this pious wish did not succeed as much as he had hoped, although Monsieur Vincent had a hand in the enterprise and had spent some time in the Temple. Monsieur Vincent was not permitted to carry out his ideas, and so the results were disappointing. He wrote to one of his confidants: <Ftn: Louise de Marillac.>

I was shocked at the hastiness of the Temple affair, which I fear did not have the success I had hoped for. I spoke out over and over again, but no one listened. Humility obliged me to defer, but my head told me things would not go well. *In nomine Domini* ["In the name of the Lord"]. I know of nothing so common as the poor success of things done in haste. <Ftn: CED I:434-35.>

We learn from another letter of the grand master of Malta that Monsieur Vincent had written several times about Commander de Sillery and to recommend his own projects to his prayers. He obtained the authorization of the order for the disposal of the commander's large fortune in favor of different charitable works. Chief among these, in recognition of his obligations to Monsieur Vincent and in consideration of the great good his Congregation had contributed and could still in future be expected to contribute to the Church, were benefactions in favor of the Congregation of the Mission. He gave a large sum for the foundation of a house and seminary for the city of Annecy in the diocese of Geneva, helped out in the foundation in Troyes, and

provided for the upkeep of Saint Lazare, motherhouse of the Congregation. He gained the eternal gratitude of the community for his charity. <Ftn: *CED* I:498-99.> God recompensed him by the many graces he conferred upon him, not only in life, but especially at his death, which was precious in the sight of his divine Majesty. In his last hours, Monsieur Vincent gave him every possible help and was able to say later that he had never seen a person die so filled with God as was this virtuous and charitable gentleman. <Ftn: *CED* II:142-43.>

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Missions Given in the Army in 1636, and the Rules Given by Monsieur Vincent to the Missionaries for this Service

The invasion of Picardy by foreign troops in 1636 and their first success at the city of Corbie still live vividly in memory. <Ftn: The Spanish, marking the beginning of the French period of the Thirty-Years War.> This army was so large and its advance scouts so active that real concern was created, especially since no force seemed available to stop their advance. The royal armies were engaged either outside the kingdom or in the most distant provinces. Nevertheless, the late king, Louis XIII of glorious memory, raised a new army in a short time. He chose the house of Saint Lazare as one of the places to enroll the recruits and to train them to defend the nation. The Saint Lazare community was given the opportunity to show its obedience and affection for the service of His Majesty by carrying out this responsibility. This is what Monsieur Vincent wrote to one of his priests then in Auvergne, giving a mission with the late Monsieur Olier.

Paris is threatened with a siege by the army now ravaging Picardy, whose advance elements are within ten or twelve leagues of the city. Most of the people from the region have come to Paris for refuge. Paris itself is so threatened that some of its inhabitants have sought shelter in other cities. The king has raised an army to oppose our enemies, for his other forces are either out of the kingdom or are engaged in our most distant provinces. The site for mustering and equipping the soldiers is in our very house. The courtyards, the stable, the woodshed, and the cloister are filled with arms, and the courtyards are teeming with soldiers. The holy day of the Assumption was no exception to the tumult and confusion, for a drum started beating before seven o'clock in the morning. In the last eight days more than seventy-two companies have passed through here.

While all this was going on, our little Company continued its retreat except for three or four who are on the point of leaving the community. I have written to Monsieur Olier that I may be able to send him four or five of our priests. I will send others to the bishops of Arles and Cahors, <Ftn: Jaubert de Barraut, bishop of Arles, 1630-1643; Blessed Alain de Solminihac, bishop of Cahors, 1636-1659.> and I hope

they can get off before things get more hectic here.

<Ftn: *CED* I:339-41.>

This letter allows us to see not only the marvelous spirit of Monsieur Vincent but also the extent of his virtue and the ardor of his zeal. In the midst of the noisy tumult of an army, with his house filled with soldiers, with arms and other weapons on every side, with the sound of drums in the air, he remains in great peace and tranquility. His priests are on retreat and are making their usual spiritual exercises. While allowing his house to be used for training the soldiers for the service of state and king, he busies himself with preparing missionaries for new fields of service to God and Church. His house has become a training ground for preparing soldiers of Jesus Christ for their battle against the devil. In what country? He thinks, like the prophet Habakkuk, of sending some helpers to the bishops mentioned in his letter. Suddenly he is carried off, as it were, to Babylon, among the lions. The chancellor <Ftn: Pierre Segurier, *CED* I:343-44.> sent him an order from the king that he should send twenty priests to the army to give missions among the soldiers.

Such a thing had never been heard of before, and it promised to be most difficult. Monsieur Vincent could say, in imitation of the prophet, that he did not know the way to this Babylon, for he had never before been in any army. He allowed himself to be taken by the hair of his head, that is, he submitted his own judgment to the king's and showed by his response that his obedience and affection for His Majesty was in keeping with all his other virtues. <Ftn: The prophet Habakkuk of Dan 14:36.> At once he sent fifteen priests, not having any others available, to the army in camp, where they began to take up the work for which they had been sent. <Ftn: Only Fathers Du Coudray, Lambert, Grenu and Mulan, and Brother Alexander are named.>

Monsieur Vincent went at this same time to Senlis, where the king had retreated, to offer his and his Congregation's service to His Majesty. After this he left a priest with the court to receive any orders the king might think proper to give and to relay them to the superior of the priests serving with the army. <Ftn: Robert de Sergis. The plague was rampant in the army, and Saint Vincent did not hesitate to recall a priest in the service of the king to send him to those stricken soldiers. *CED* I:351-52.> Later he bought a tent for the priests and sent along some furnishings and some food in a cart drawn by a mule, which they were to keep for their use. He also gave them a set of rules and regulations about what they were to do and say while serving on this mission.

The priests of the Congregation of the Mission who serve the army must remember that our Lord has called them to this holy service: (1) to offer their prayers and sacrifices to God for the happy outcome of the king's plans, and for the welfare of his army; (2) to aid the soldiers who may be in a state of sin to leave this sad condition, to help those in the state of grace to remain so, and especially to do all in their power to help the dying leave this life in a state of grace.

They should cultivate a devotion to the name of God, given in the Scripture as the God of the Armies, and to the sentiments of our Lord who said: *Non veni pacem mittere, sed gladium* ["I came not to bring peace but the sword"], <Ftn: Matt 10:34.> but said this to give us peace, the end of war.

They should reflect that they can hardly eradicate all sin from the army, but perhaps God will give them the grace to diminish the number. This is as though one were to say that our Lord must again be crucified a hundred times, but perhaps we can reduce this to ninety. If a thousand souls by their evil dispositions are headed for damnation, we must see if, by God's merciful grace, we cannot reduce this number.

The virtues of charity, fervor, mortification, obedience, patience, and modesty are necessary for us to achieve this. We must continually be attentive to this, both interiorly and exteriorly, and give special attention to accomplishing the will of God.

They will celebrate mass each day, or at least communicate, for these intentions.

They will honor the silence of our Lord at the usual hours and will not speak of affairs of state. They will speak of any troubles they may have to their superiors only or to him who shall be appointed to hear them.

If called to hear confessions of those afflicted by the plague, they shall do so from afar and with all necessary precautions. They shall leave the care of the sick in the hands of those Providence has destined for this service.

They should meet together often, after reflecting before God of what should be discussed, for example, (1) the importance of having priests help the army, (2) what help should be given, (3) how best to carry out this help.

They might treat in the same manner other subjects appropriate to their assignment, such as help for the sick, what to do during battles and combats, the virtues to be practiced in the army service, such as humility, patience, and modesty.

The smallest rules of the Mission should be observed as closely as possible, especially in what concerns the hours of rising and retiring, prayer, the divine office, spiritual reading, and the various examinations of conscience.

The superior shall apportion assignments to each one, to one the care of the sacristy, to another the hearing of confessions and the reading at table, to another the sick, to another to serve as procurator and to prepare the food, to another the tent and its furnishings to see to its being taken down and put up again at new locations. The priests shall be assigned to preaching and the hearing of confessions as the superior will judge proper.

As much as possible the priests shall live together. If they should be assigned to various places, such as the advance guard, the rear guard, or into the main body of the army, the superior will assign the various ones to each position. If possible, the priests should live in tents. <Ftn: *CED* XIII: 279-81.>

Such were the regulations Monsieur Vincent gave to these missionaries. Their faithful observance drew down upon them and their works the greatest blessings, as we learn from a letter he wrote to one of the priests:

Blessed be God for the blessing he has given your work, Monsieur, which seems to me to be so great. What? To have done your part in having three hundred soldiers receive communion, and then having paid the supreme price. Only those who reflect on the pains of hell or on the price of the blood of Jesus Christ for even one soul can appreciate the value of what you have done. Even though I do not know these truths sufficiently myself, I understand them somewhat, enough to appreciate what you have done for these three hundred penitents. This past Tuesday nine hundred soldiers went to confession during our missions with the army, not counting yours or those made since. O God, Monsieur, how this has surpassed my fondest hopes! We must humble ourselves, praise God,

and continue with courage, for as long as we are not assigned elsewhere. <Ftn: *CED* I:344.>

He wrote in another letter to Monsieur Portail, on September 20, to excuse himself for not sending the missionaries he had promised to Father Olier:

It is impossible to send the missionaries you expected, for the ones we had prepared have been ordered to report to the regiments of the army in Luzarches, Pons, Saint Leu, and La Chapelle-Orly. Already almost four thousand soldiers have appeared before the tribunal of mercy with every sign of true repentance. I hope God will be merciful to many because of this service, and perhaps favor the armies of the king. <Ftn: *CED* I:346-47.>

After these four thousand confessions, the missionaries were obliged to follow the army and camp with it. At each stop, besides the spiritual help the priests gave the soldiers, several people in the dioceses through which they passed also came to confession and communion, in keeping with the express permission of the local bishops.

One of the missionaries in charge of a group of priests wrote to Monsieur Vincent that they worked constantly for the spiritual welfare of the sick, whether soldiers or civilians, and for the refugees from Picardy. Many of the sick died, but not before receiving the last sacraments from the missionaries. Six weeks later a first group of missionaries returned to Saint Lazare, while others remained with the army until November, when it returned triumphantly from its encounters with the enemy.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The Establishment of the First Internal Seminary, at Saint Lazare, for the Congregation of the Mission

The fathers of the desert followed a well-known maxim of receiving no one into their congregations unless he were well known and of proven virtue. This maxim has since been observed in all communities, both secular and regular, which have been established from time to time in the Church. As one of the most experienced of these ancients said so well, gold should not be worked or finished until it has been tested. <Ftn: John Climacus, PG 88.> Aspirants to the perfection of the religious state, to which they feel called by God to dedicate themselves to his service, ought to pass various tests both to know themselves better and to dispose themselves better to work for the goal they proposed to themselves.

During the first years, when Monsieur Vincent began to work on the missions he did not yet realize the designs of God nor what God may have wanted to accomplish with him and by him. He did not specify any definite program of training for those who wished to join him in his efforts. He was satisfied with the good will that brought these first members to him. At best, he invited them to make a retreat both to strengthen their own resolution and to implore the help of divine grace. Some time later he felt some spiritual exercises ought to be added to the retreat, which was prolonged somewhat more than was usual at the time. Gradually seeing his Congregation take form, and knowing the importance of admitting only well-intentioned subjects called by God, he decided that those who came must first pass some time in a seminary <Ftn: I.e., novitiate for the Congregation of the Mission.> under a director who would form them in the practices of the virtues and introduce them to the spiritual life.

The first director chosen was Monsieur Jean de la Salle, one of the three priests who had first joined him, whom he supplied with a daily timetable and a few general regulations. This seminary was begun in June 1637 in the house of Saint Lazare, where it has remained ever since, always blessed by God. Ordinarily there were about thirty or forty seminarians, both priests and clerics. This was the first seminary exclusively for the priests of the Congregation of the Mission. The others, mentioned earlier, were for ecclesiastics who were not members of the Congregation. Monsieur Vincent referred to it as *spem gregis* ["hope of the flock"] and as the nursery of the missionaries. His confidence in the paternal Providence was such

that he never doubted about adequate numbers of applicants for the seminary. He took as a maxim that God would choose and call whom he would. Just as the first missionaries of the Son of God, his apostles, did not choose themselves but were selected by this divine Savior who called those he wished, so too those who would give themselves to God to work, in imitation of many great saints, at instructing and converting the people must be chosen and called by this same Lord.

For this same reason Monsieur Vincent never wanted to say a single word to anyone to attract him to the Congregation. He forbade his confreres to persuade anyone to enter. This is what he said on this matter:

Ordinarily, God chooses the weak to do his great deeds. We have in our own Congregation some who were admitted with much difficulty and misgivings because they offered little hope, but today we see them as good laborers in the vineyard of the Lord. Some are superiors who direct their missions with prudence and grace. We must praise God for them and admire his influence over them. Oh, gentlemen, be careful when you receive people into the house for their spiritual retreat that you never say anything which would tend to attract them to our Company. It is up to God to call them and provide the initial inspiration. Even more, when you see they are inclined this way, be careful that you do not decide for them that they are to be missionaries, either by your counsel or by your exhortations. Say only they must turn more and more to God to seek his will and to think over carefully such an important matter. Point out to them the hardships they can expect if they embrace this state in life and how they must be prepared to work and suffer for the sake of God. If they still persist, they should be referred to the superior to speak more fully about their vocation. Leave this to God, gentlemen, and remain humbly in expectation and in dependence on the good pleasure of his Providence.

By his mercy, this is what we have done in the Company up to the present, and we can say that whatever has come to us has been sent by God. We have sought neither men, goods, nor foundations. In the name of God, keep it like this and allow God to sustain us. Follow his initiative, please, and do not attempt to anticipate his direction of us. Believe me, if the Congregation follows this path, God will bless us.

If you see that any of the retreatants have the thought of going elsewhere to serve God in some other community, O God! do not prevent them, lest the anger of God fall upon our Company for trying to arrange something contrary to his holy will. And tell me, if you will, if the Company up to the present has not acted this way, in never trying to persuade others to join us, no matter how promising, unless they were sent to us by God and have been considering this vocation for a long time. The Carthusian priests and other religious communities have sent us several young men to make a retreat when they have applied there. They are cautious.

What then? Here is a young man with the thought of becoming a Carthusian. He was sent here on retreat to consider before the Lord what he is being called to, and you try to persuade him to remain here! What is that, gentlemen, if not trying to hold on to what does not belong to us? Or to enter a Congregation which God does not call him to, or which he has not even given a thought to? What would be the effect of this, other than to draw down the curse of God upon our Company? O poor Company of missionaries if you ever fell into this sad plight! But by the grace of God you have not, and never will. Pray to God, gentlemen, pray to God to confirm this Company in the grace he has given us up to now of seeking nothing but his holy will. <Ftn: *CED* XI:425-27.>

Another day Monsieur Vincent received a letter from a priest of the Congregation. <Ftn: Jean de Lestang.> It informed him of a most virtuous ecclesiastic whom he thought a good candidate for the life of a missionary. This person even seemed to show some inclination towards the Congregation. Monsieur Vincent replied:

I have not sent your letter to Monsieur N. [Serre], <Ftn: Louis Serre later joined the Congregation.> for it persuades him to enter our Company, but we have a contrary maxim, never to ask anyone to join our community. God alone will choose whom he will, and we are well convinced that a missionary called by him will do more good than many others without a true vocation. We must pray that he send good laborers for the harvest, and live so our good example will attract many others, if God so wills. <Ftn: *CED* VIII:286-87.>

This is the way Monsieur Vincent spoke, and this is the way he acted. Some people spoke or wrote to him, each in his own way:

Monsieur, I am putting myself totally into your hands to do whatever you consider God is calling me to. Tell me, then, what should I do? Should I quit the world for this or that state? I am convinced that God sent me to you to know his will. I am indifferent to what I should do, so I will follow your suggestion as a most assured manifestation of the will of God.

There were many such cases, but this humble and wise servant of God almost never would suggest or prescribe the state of life they should embrace. As he used to say, he feared he would be anticipating God's Providence and presuming on the direction of his sovereign will rather than humbly and faithfully following it.

The solution of your uncertainty is a matter that must be resolved between God and yourself. Continue to pray for his inspiration about what you are to do. Make a retreat for several days for this purpose and be persuaded that the resolution you come to in the presence of the Lord shall be most agreeable to his divine Majesty and most helpful to yourself.

If those who came to him after deciding to leave the world, but remained undecided about which order to join, would suggest two, he would send them away to have them consider before God which to choose. If the Congregation of the Mission was one of the two, he would say, "Oh, Monsieur, we are a poor Company unworthy to be compared to this other congregation. Go, in the name of the Lord. You will be much happier there than with us." <Ftn: CED XII:316.>

For those who came determined to enter the Congregation, he was most hesitant to accept them. He would ask, "How long have you been thinking of this? How and on what occasion did this thought first come to you? What is your occupation? What motive leads you to seek to be a missionary? Are you disposed to go wherever you might be sent, even to the most remote foreign lands? Are you ready to endure all hardships?" He would point out the difficulties likely to come about in their new state.

He would send them away several times without giving any decision, and even with little hope of being accepted, to test their vocation and virtue. He would put them off for a long time, obliging them to come back several times to get to know them better. He would never give them a definite answer no matter how satisfied he was of their dispositions and their perseverance until he had them make a retreat to discern God's

will. If they persevered in their first objective he would have them meet some of the older members of the community. If these men judged them suitable for the Congregation he finally would accept them for the seminary. There they would receive two years of training in humility, mortification, devotion, recollection, punctuality, and other practices conducive to a life of virtue, and to honor, as he used to say, the infancy of our Lord. He hoped they would become prayerful to prepare themselves for the unction of the Spirit of God, which would preserve in them the fire of charity in their hearts among all the trials and labors of the missions. <Ftn: See *CED* XI:126-28; XII:63-64.> After successfully completing the seminary program the candidates were finally admitted to the Congregation. If they had not completed their studies, they did so to have the requisite learning befitting their state.

He wrote out in his own hand a short summary of the dispositions they should possess as a member of the Congregation of the Mission.

One who wishes to live in community should resolve to live as a pilgrim upon earth, making himself a fool for Jesus Christ. He should be converted, mortify all the passions, seek God alone, submit himself to everyone as the least of all, be persuaded that he has come to serve and not to govern, to suffer and work, not to live in ease and laziness. He should realize that a person is purified like gold in the furnace and that he cannot persevere unless he humble himself before God. In doing so he should be persuaded that he will achieve true contentment in this life and eternal happiness in the next. <Ftn: A nearly literal translation from Book 1, ch. 16, of the *Imitation of Christ*.>

In these few words the saintly man touched on many things. We can safely say he preserved the community from those who, not finding their ease or satisfaction in the world, hope they might settle down to a life of peace and repose in the Congregation of the Mission.

Here is yet another word on the dispositions he desired to see in his confreres, which he spoke to his community on an occasion when word was received of a missionary maltreated in a foreign country. <Ftn: Jean Barreau, consul at Algiers.>

Please God, my brothers, that all who come to the Company come with the thought of martyrdom, with the desire to suffer death and to consecrate themselves totally to serve God either in a foreign land or here at home or wherever it shall please God to use this

poor little Company. Yes, with the thought of martyrdom. Oh, how often we should ask this grace of our Lord! Alas, gentlemen and my brothers, is anything more reasonable than to give one's life for him who has so freely given his for us? If our Lord has loved us so much as to die for us, why do we not have the same affection for him and show it, should the occasion present itself? We see a list of popes who one after the other have been martyred. Isn't it astonishing to see businessmen, for a little profit, cross the seas and run a thousand risks? Last Sunday I met a man who said he had been persuaded to go to the Indies. When I asked him if it were not dangerous, he admitted it was. He knew one merchant who had returned, but another who had not. I then said to myself, if this person, for a few precious stones and a trifling gain, is willing to risk so many dangers, how much more we should be willing to do so to gain the precious jewel of the Gospel and to win souls to Jesus Christ? <Ftn: CED XI:370-71.>

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Monsieur Vincent Devotes Himself to the Poor of Lorraine during the War and Takes Particular Care of Some Gentlemen and Ladies, Refugees in Paris

Saint Augustine says rightly that God is so good he allows no evil from which he cannot draw a greater good. We could appeal to an almost infinite number of examples to illustrate this truth. We do not have to go farther afield than the last war in Lorraine, when it seemed that God permitted the extreme sufferings of this formerly blessed province to draw forth greater spiritual good. The war provided the opportunity for many virtuous persons, among them Monsieur Vincent, to show heroic charity in the service of the needy. He showed these poor suffering people to what degree charity can rise in this last age, when, according to the prediction of Jesus Christ, because of the iniquity which has abounded on all sides, charity has grown cold. <Ftn: Matt 24:12.>

When Monsieur Vincent was alerted in 1639 to the deplorable state to which Lorraine had been reduced by war, <Ftn: The last period of the Thirty-Years War. In this period, Charles V, the duke of Lorraine, was defeated by Richelieu's political and military strategy.> he immediately resolved to offer help. He took some alms at his disposal, added some of his own, and gave them to his confreres to distribute. These alms were soon exhausted. Those who had gone to distribute them returned with almost unbelievable stories of what they had seen with their own eyes. This so affected Monsieur Vincent and several other persons in Paris to whom he related the sad story that all resolved to aid these unfortunate people at whatever cost. These good people donated great sums to the cause which Monsieur Vincent sent by one of his religious to be distributed to those in the greatest need. He did so not only in the villages but also in the larger cities. One would think them nearly untouched by war, such as Metz, Toul, Verdun, Nancy, Bar-le-Duc, Pont-a-Mousson, Saint Michel, and others, yet in these deplorable times people of all classes were reduced to direst necessity. Mothers reportedly crazed by hunger ate their own children. Girls and young women were ready to give themselves in prostitution to avoid death. Even reformed religious broke their cloister to seek bread, to the peril of their virtue and the scandal of the Church.

The enormous number of people of all classes and of both sexes, reduced to extreme necessity, soon exhausted even the abundant alms sent to them. A charity less than what Monsieur

Vincent had would have lost heart and judged the situation hopeless, especially because of the other pressing problems in Paris and in the rest of France. But what can a heart not do which loves God and trusts in him completely? "I can do all things in him who strengthens me," says the apostle. <Ftn: Phil 4:13.> Monsieur Vincent could say the same. God so blessed his efforts in coordinating the contributions of many that he sent at various times nearly 1.6 million *livres* to Lorraine. The queen mother gave a part, and the Ladies of Charity in Paris had contributed significantly to this sum. <Ftn: King Louis XIII, a few days before his death, also contributed from his personal funds. Coste, *Life*, II:371.>

During the nine or ten years of this sad state of affairs, people knew that a brother of the Mission had made fifty-three trips to Lorraine to bring the money collected to the needy. <Ftn: Matthieu Renard, 1592-1669.> He carried at least twenty thousand *livres* each time, and sometimes twenty-five or thirty thousand *livres* or even more. What is miraculous is that by God's protection he passed through regions occupied by the army and through places threatened by soldiers and exposed to their pillaging. Yet he was never robbed or searched, but always arrived safely at the place destined to receive the alms.

To be of even greater service to the poor and to stretch out what he was providing, Monsieur Vincent instructed the missionaries serving in Lorraine to provide a daily distribution of bread and soup and to be mindful of the sick as well. At the same time as the distribution of food, the fathers were not to forget spiritual blessings as well, by instruction, consolation, and encouragement so that the care of souls would accompany concern for bodily needs.

Who can count the number of persons this faithful provider had helped in body and soul through the urgings of his immense charity? How many did he rescue from the depths of despair? He was well aware that God was the prime author of all these benefactions and we will see more particularly in Book Two more of what was involved in this marvelous undertaking. <Ftn: Ch. 11.>

Even this is not the whole story. The providence of God provided a new opportunity for this father of the poor to show the extent of his charity. The continued misery in Lorraine and the war obliged a group of inhabitants of the region to leave to seek refuge in Paris. There they found themselves under Monsieur Vincent's care as the assured refuge of the poor and needy. He found housing, food, and clothing for them in various places. When he found some among them who had not received the sacraments for a long time, because of the troubled times or

because of the absence of their pastors through death or flight, he organized two missions for them. These were held during the Easter season for two consecutive years <Ftn: 1641, 1642.> in a village church about half a league from Paris called La Chapelle. Many distinguished people came from Paris, either to attend the mission or to help out in some way. The exiles received the spiritual help of the exercises, as well as the corporal help they so badly needed. The former group served the latter, and these latter were enabled to make their way in the world.

Among the refugees from Lorraine were several noble men and women forced to come to Paris by the events of their homeland. They gradually sold all they could rescue from their belongings and were reduced to a sad state made worse by their shame at having fallen so far from their former condition. They seemed to prefer to suffer silently rather than advertise their extreme poverty.

A person of some standing alerted Monsieur Vincent to this situation and suggested the thought that some way should be found to help these people. Monsieur Vincent responded, "What joy you give me, Monsieur. Yes, it is right to help these poor nobles, to honor our Lord, at once most noble and yet so poor." He then recommended this undertaking to God, considering within himself how he might secure some help for these poor unfortunate people. He felt this particular project might appeal to some more fortunate noble persons. He contacted seven or eight such people, among them the late Baron de Renty, whose saintly life has been written and published since his death as a perfect model of those souls whose virtues truly ennoble them. <Ftn: Gaston de Renty, 1611-1649, who left the military life for one of religious and charitable work in Paris. He had frequent contact with Saint Vincent, and was his principal help in providing assistance to the nobles of Lorraine who had fled to Paris. See also Book Two, ch. 4, sect. 4.>

Monsieur Vincent called these gentlemen together and he spoke so effectively of the importance and merit of this work of charity that they resolved to band together to help these distressed members of the nobility. Several were appointed to visit the refugees in their lodgings so as to form a clearer picture of their needs, to take their names, and to find out the exact number in each family. This information was presented to their next gathering, where these gentlemen arranged to provide subsistence for the next month. They continued on the first Sunday of each month to meet at Saint Lazare, where they again arranged to support these poor refugees for the following period. Monsieur Vincent was among the contributors, sometimes

doing more than he should have. Once the collection of alms was two hundred *livres* short of what was necessary. He called the procurator of the house and taking him aside, asked him quietly what money was available. The response was that just enough remained for the expenses of the community for the next day. "And how much is that," asked Monsieur Vincent. "Fifty *ecus*," was the reply. "Is there nothing else in the house?" asked Monsieur Vincent. "No, Monsieur, we have only fifty *ecus*." "Please bring them to me, Monsieur." With that he gave this to make up, almost, what was lacking to maintain the refugee nobility for a month. He preferred to deprive himself and to be forced to borrow to feed his own household rather than allow these people to suffer want.

One of the nobles present heard the reply of the procurator and so admired the generosity of Monsieur Vincent that he reported it to the others present. The following morning one of them brought a small bag with one thousand *francs* to Saint Lazare as an alms for the community.

This service to the displaced nobility of Lorraine continued for almost seven years. During that time they were supported in their temporal needs, but in addition they were visited regularly, shown all marks of respect, consoled, and helped in their business affairs as much as was feasible. After Lorraine returned to some semblance of normality, some of the refugees returned home. Monsieur Vincent provided funds for their trip and gave them something to tide them over until they could re-establish themselves in their old surroundings. He continued to assist those remaining in Paris.

No activity of the virtue of charity so completely filled the heart of Monsieur Vincent that he was not open to something new. As he was helping the nobility of Lorraine, he found out about some English and Scottish gentlemen forced by their Catholic faith to take refuge in Paris. He spoke to the same group of gentlemen helping the Lorraine nobility and had them help this new group of noblemen as well. He continued this aid up to the time of his death. The following is an extract from what one of the gentlemen wrote of these events:

Monsieur Vincent always was the first to give. He opened his heart as well as his purse. If anything was lacking he contributed what he had, depriving himself of what was necessary to achieve his goal. On one occasion, to reach a certain sum, three hundred *livres* was needed. He gave it at once, but it was known that he had just been given this money to buy a horse better than the one he had, which was old and feeble and had fallen under him several times. He preferred

to run the risk of injury rather than to leave those in need unassisted.

This assembly of nobility continued for about twenty years. It should be ranked among the major works associated with Monsieur Vincent. As author and promoter, together with the charity and zeal of the illustrious people who composed it, he brought relief to an great number of ill and provided a great number of benefactions to many.

We must not omit here an episode about Monsieur Vincent at this time. He was so aware of the evils of war, the horrible sins, sacrileges, blasphemies, profanation of sacred things, murders, and all the violence and cruelty against even innocent persons, not to mention the devastation of entire provinces, and the ruin of many families, that his heart was torn with sorrow. He decided on a step contrary to all hope and opposed to what human prudence might suggest, to attempt what at best would be considered doubtful and possibly prejudicial to his own interests.

We have discussed in another place the high regard Cardinal Richelieu had for him. Monsieur Vincent decided to approach him not for personal gain, but for the public good. He paid a visit one day and spoke with great respect of the extreme suffering of the poor, and the other disorders and sins caused by the war. He then threw himself at the cardinal's feet and said: "My lord, give us peace. Have pity on us: give peace to France." He repeated this with such feeling the cardinal was moved. He accepted the appeal willingly, but stated that he was working for peace and that peace did not depend upon him alone. It depended on many others, both within and outside the kingdom. <Ftn: This event can be dated only between 1639 and 1642; no more definite date is known.>

Had he consulted some prudent person living in society he would certainly have been advised against this manner of speaking to the prime minister. He ran the risk of being shut out from any more contact with the cardinal. Charity removed his fear and closed his eyes to all human respect, to all except the service of God and the good of the Christian people. <Ftn: Saint Vincent had favored turning armed French intervention from Catholic Austria to the English puritans. He intervened in the two incidents described above, even though they opposed the foreign policy of Cardinal Richelieu. This opposition was shared by the *dévot* party, scandalized that Catholic France was supporting Protestant nations, and opposing Catholic ones.>

Once he spoke on a similar topic:

Once I went to see Cardinal Richelieu to help poor Ireland at the time England was at war with the king.

He said to me, "I am sorry, Monsieur Vincent, the king has too much to do now." I reminded him the pope urged this and had promised one hundred thousand *ecus*. He replied, "One hundred thousand *ecus*, is nothing for an army. You would need one hundred thousand soldiers, equipment, arms, and convoys to transport them. An army is a big machine! It doesn't move too easily!"

Although his prayers were not heard then, and what he proposed was not done, we can nevertheless see how his affection and zeal were always prepared to further religion and the true good of Catholics.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Services Provided by Monsieur Vincent to the Late King, Louis XIII of Glorious Memory, in His Last Illness, for the Spiritual Good of his Soul

The dignity of kings lifts them so far beyond that of others that Scripture calls them gods, seeing they are vicars and living images of God upon earth. This same Scripture, however, after giving them such a sublime and glorious title, warns them in the same passage they must not forget they are mere men, and as such must pay the same tribute to nature by dying just as other men do. <Ftn: Ps 82:6.>

This law is inflexible and encompasses the wisest and most virtuous prince as well as others who are not so, but with an important difference. The death of the good king, as the Church reminds us, is a happy exchange of a temporal and earthly sovereignty for a heavenly and eternal one. For bad kings, on the contrary, death marks the end of their vicious lives and the beginning of the punishment the power of God has destined for them.

The virtues and royal qualities of Louis XIII of most happy memory gained him the reputation during his life as one of the greatest monarchs on earth, but his piety became even more apparent at the time of his death. This is not the place to recall all this truly Christian prince did and said during his last illness. Yet they revealed how much his royal heart was detached from earthly things, or how zealously he hoped for the conversion of heretics and sinners, and how he wished to bring about, as much as was possible to him, that God be better known, honored, served, and glorified throughout his realm. It is enough to say this good king had heard of the virtues and holy life of Monsieur Vincent and all the charitable enterprises he had undertaken for the spiritual good of his subjects. He ordered him to come to Saint Germain en Laye at the beginning of his last illness to be helped by the priest's good and salutary advice. He wanted to tell him of his pious hopes, particularly directed towards the conversion of the heretics of the city of Sedan. <Ftn: Brother Robineau notes that "Monsieur Vincent was called to the bedside of Louis XIII at Saint Germain en Laye at the request of Anne of Austria and with the consent of Father [Jacques] Dinet, the king's confessor." *Robineau* 75. He arrived on April 23.>

The first remark Monsieur Vincent made to His Majesty was to quote the words of the wise man of Scripture: "Sire, *Timenti Deum, bene erit in extremis.*" ["To the one who loves God, it

will go well at the last."] His Majesty, with his usual piety nurtured by frequent meditation of the Scriptures, replied by completing the verse, "*et in die defunctionis suae benedicetur*" ["And on the day of his death he will be blessed"]. <Ftn: Sir 1:13. The king's response is all the more remarkable since the verse did not form part of the prayers for the dying.>

On another day, as Monsieur Vincent spoke with His Majesty on the good use of God's gifts, the king reflected on all the singular gifts he had received, especially the royal dignity to which Providence had raised him and the great honors and privileges attached to this office, chief among which was that of naming the bishops and prelates of his kingdom.

"Monsieur Vincent," the king said, "if I recover, bishops will spend three years with you," <Ftn: *CED* XI:132.> thus wishing to convey the thought that he would require those named to the episcopal office be properly disposed and adequately prepared. He showed by this wish high regard for that office and the appreciation he had for Monsieur Vincent's projects for the training of clergy, hinting they would be equally useful for the preparation of those called to the high dignity of bishop in the Church.

Monsieur Vincent remained at Saint Germain about eight days. During that time he often had the honor of approaching the king to speak with him words of salvation and eternal life, which the king seemed to appreciate.

Finally, the king's sickness worsened despite all remedies employed. This most Christian prince, seeing that God was calling him from this world, sent for Monsieur Vincent to help him in this final passage to the next life. Monsieur Vincent returned to Saint Germain to remain with him the last three days before his death. <Ftn: He returned May 12.> He was almost constantly in the king's presence, helping him raise his mind and heart to God and make those interior acts of piety appropriate to prepare his soul for that final moment upon which eternal happiness depends.

This great prince completed his life by a most Christian death on May 14, 1643. Seeing the queen in such a distressed state, alien to any human consolation, Monsieur Vincent returned to Saint Lazare to pray for Their Majesties. He lamented the loss of so just and pious a prince, but was consoled by the excellent dispositions he had seen in him at the time of death and which crowned a truly Christian life by an equally Christian death. The following day he had a solemn service in the church of Saint Lazare, attended by all the priests of the house, for the repose of the king's soul.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Monsieur Vincent is Appointed to the Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs of the Kingdom During the Regency of the Queen Mother

King Louis XIII of glorious memory left the regency of the kingdom to the queen mother <Ftn: Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV.> during the minority of his son and most worthy successor. Considering the extent of this great monarchy and the importance of its ecclesiastical affairs, this wise and virtuous princess thought it expedient to form a Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs composed of four persons, that is, Cardinal Mazarin, <Ftn: Jules Mazarini or Mazarin, 1602-1661, a veteran of the papal army and diplomatic corps, came to know Richelieu in 1630. He received tonsure but never became a priest. The pope appointed him nuncio in France, where he demonstrated his abilities. He became a French citizen in 1639, and a cardinal in 1641. Recommended by Richelieu to Louis XIII, he became principal minister during the regency of Anne of Austria. He was absolute master of France until his death, the year of the accession of Louis XIV.> the chancellor, <Ftn: Pierre Segulier, 1588-1672, chancellor from 1635 until his death. As chancellor, he was the most important official after the king.> Monsieur Charton, penitentiary of Paris, <Ftn: Jacques Charton, an opponent of the Jansenists.> and Monsieur Vincent. She decided to confer no benefice dependent on her nomination except with the council's advice.

Although Monsieur Vincent was committed to rendering all sorts of services to Their Majesties, he saw himself called to court only with great regret. To assume a position on the council was as disagreeable to him as it appeared honorable in the eyes of the world. His humility made him look on honors always as part of his burdensome cross. He did all he could to obtain the grace, as he called it, of being dispensed from this responsibility. The queen refused absolutely to hear of this, aware as she was of his virtue and ability.

He began this service in 1643, out of deference to the wishes of Her Majesty. He did so with a great fear, not that he might somehow lose the worldly honors whose vanity he knew only too well, but that he might not be able to leave as soon as he hoped. He wanted always to devote himself to the care of his Congregation and the practice of humility and the other virtues which he preferred to all the grandeur of the world. He prayed incessantly to God to deliver him from this burden. He told one of his confidants that he never said his mass without asking for this grace. Once, when he was out of the city for a few days,

word went around that he was in disgrace and had been dismissed from the court. After his return, a priest friend congratulated him on having retained his position on the council. He merely lifted his eyes to heaven and struck his breast, saying, "Ah, wretched man that I am, I was not worthy of so great a grace."

God ordained that he remain at least ten years in this position, which was so disagreeable for him, for most of the matters of the council fell to him to resolve. He was given the petitions made to Her Majesty and looked into the motives and qualities of those who applied either for themselves or for others to prepare a report to the full council. The queen particularly wanted to be informed of the abilities of the petitioners so as not to be surprised. It was a matter of great admiration to see this servant of God preserve a serenity of spirit amid the ebb and flow of personalities and affairs, and possess his soul in peace under the press of distractions and importunities. He received all who wished to see him, always with the same calm demeanor, giving himself to each, making himself all to all to gain all to Jesus Christ.

If we reflect on all the cares of this new position, joined to the direction of his own Congregation and the other communities depending upon him, the establishments and assemblies we have spoken of in previous chapters, it would seem that he would have to be divided into an infinity of parts and preoccupations, looking after all, working night and day to fulfill the charges obedience or charity had placed upon him. By the grace of God this was not the case. He was always recollected within himself, united to God, and so self-possessed in peace and tranquility that it seemed he had no concerns. He was ever ready to listen to those who approached him. He rebuffed no one, but gave satisfaction to all and showed no impatience no matter how inconsiderate his visitors might be. He received with the same affability both the small and poor as he did the great and wealthy. We might say of Monsieur Vincent in his conduct of public business what the holy apostle says of himself, that he became a spectacle to the world, to men and to angels.

The court was a sort of theater where the virtues of this faithful servant of God appeared in full light. His humility won out over the vain plaudits of the courtiers. His patience was proof against their losses, troubles, and the vices of envy and malice. His constancy supported the interests of God and the Church, and there he showed himself free from all fear and human respect. On this stage he bore witness to his inviolable fidelity and constant affection for Their Majesties, his respect and submission to the prelates of the Church, the esteem and

charity he preserved in his heart for all orders of the Church, and for all ecclesiastical and religious communities. His great desire to banish ambition and avarice from those who sought benefices, as well as his hope to remedy the abuses in the use of Church goods, not to mention the usual means employed to obtain benefices and other ecclesiastical dignities, will be spoken of at greater length in Book Two. <Ftn: Ch. 13.>

What should be remarked mainly is that the queen was inundated with requests for all sorts of petitioners, eagerly seeking various charges, benefices, or other positions in the Church. What shows Monsieur Vincent's disinterest perfectly is that he never asked, or had others ask for him, anything for himself or for his Congregation, although he was as close to the source of these benefits as one could be. Had he asked, the queen would almost certainly have been happy to confer anything upon him in recognition of his merit.

There was some speculation during a short time that he was to be given the cardinal's hat. Some of his friends went so far as to congratulate him on this appointment. We do not know if Her Majesty had this in mind. Yet if she did propose this to Monsieur Vincent, his humility would have been eloquent enough to dissuade her. <Ftn: Saint Vincent often opposed Mazarin's views in the proceedings of the Council of Conscience. He was supported by a group of important bishops and nobles. Mazarin, however, got around his opposition by rarely convening this Council. Fortunately, the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria, regularly consulted Vincent on episcopal appointments. The saint retired from the Council, but the date is unknown; it was at least before October 1652; see *CED* IV:491.>

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Monsieur Vincent's Help in Establishing the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross and for the Spiritual Good of its Members

Since Monsieur Vincent's charity did not limit itself to any single outlet but extended universally to whatever he saw as contributing to God's glory, he approved and esteemed whatever tended to this end. He offered his counsel and even his intervention when he saw it might help, such that there was scarcely any public work of piety of his time that he did not have some part in. His advice was sought or his active involvement was asked for, as the following example among many others which could be cited will show.

A woman of great piety, Marie Lhuillier, widow of the late Monsieur de Villeneuve, had occasionally received into her home some virtuous women from Picardy who had occasion to come to Paris on business. <Ftn: Marie Lhuillier, widow at age twenty-three of Claude-Marcel de Villeneuve, became associated with Mademoiselle Lamoignon and Mademoiselle le Gras, and under the leadership of Saint Vincent headed several charitable enterprises. She founded the first establishment of the Daughters of the Cross in 1641. Saint Vincent served as her spiritual director. She died January 15, 1650, aged fifty-two.> She recognized that these good women wanted to help other young women, especially younger girls, by instructing them in all that might help them lead a good Christian life. She felt moved by the same spirit and offered her help in any way she could. Since people in small towns and country places are ordinarily more in need of help than those in the larger cities, she moved into the country to ease the work of her guests. She even sent some of these ladies to other places where they offered effective instruction. This in turn motivated other women moved by the same sense of charity to join them. By this brief experience Madame Lhuillier recognized the great good to be accomplished through the instruction of young girls in the knowledge of God and of good manners. She also became aware of how few in the smaller towns and villages were capable of giving this instruction. The Ursuline Sisters and others devoted to education could not manage to reach into these smaller places. Also, the pious women or widows who wanted to help out in the smaller schools were simply not able to do so. In fact, in many of these smaller places there were no women teachers. The young girls of the region were left without instruction in piety. They either had to live in ignorance or perchance had to go to schools

with boys, with the sad consequences that experience only too well confirms.

Considering all this, this pious widow decided to bring a more fundamental solution to the problems presented. She persuaded these good women who were so well disposed towards her to continue their own education. Beyond this, she persuaded them to choose from among themselves some others who would agree to live in various country places to serve effectively and in a Christlike way as schoolteachers. Since it is almost a universal law that pious works inspired by God are met with contradictions and difficulties, this was the case here as well. Someone remarked that these women were well named as Daughters of the Cross, a title they have retained with great affection, since it reminds them to remain united to Jesus Christ crucified whom Saint Paul calls the power and the wisdom of God. <Ftn: 1 Cor 1:24.> They drew from this source the light and strength necessary to correspond worthily to the designs of Providence in their regard. They were thus able to devote themselves to the service of young women, destroying among them the two great obstacles to a truly Christian life, ignorance and sin.

This virtuous lady did not want to rely solely upon her own inspiration in an undertaking of such importance. Rather she spoke to several well-known religious people, among whom was Vincent de Paul, whom she particularly esteemed and appreciated. She conferred often with him about this matter. He in turn offered advice either to encourage her to undertake this good work or to help her in the spiritual formation of the women living with her. Afterward the number of those living with her increased to such an extent that she sought and obtained the approbation of the archbishop of Paris and later the establishment of this community of women as a formal religious congregation, under the title of Daughters of the Cross. This new community in the Church received letters patent from the king and recognition by the Parlement. The Duchess d'Aiguillon, recognized the great good this new congregation could bring to the Church. Motivated by her own charity, she therefore contributed significantly to help bring the community to her city of Aiguillon and elsewhere as well.

Several years passed before the congregation had developed enough to stand alone. The almost constant illnesses of Madame Villeneuve finally resulted in her death before she could complete her plans for the community. Her sisters were left orphaned at the loss of their mother. This loss occurred at just the moment that Satan attacked the new congregation (permitted by God for his own greater glory) just as had been the case with the apostles at the beginning of the Church, as foretold by

Jesus Christ. <Ftn: Luke 22:31.> It must be said that though many important people wished the congregation to succeed, the various difficulties that arose convinced many of these same people that dissolution of the congregation was the only possible remedy. They believed, at least, that the community should give up its own identity and join some other more firmly established order. <Ftn: The Daughters of Providence, founded by Marie de Lumague, Mademoiselle Pollalion.>

Monsieur Vincent was consulted, and he presided over several meetings at which it seemed to appear that humanly speaking the community could not survive. Despite his usual reluctance to take a definite stand in matters of this nature and the difficulty he had in approving new undertakings, he firmly and absolutely gave his opinion, as though inspired by God, that every possible effort must be made to sustain this community. Despite everything which might be said he held firm in his opinion. He persuaded a virtuous woman of his acquaintance, Madame Anne Petau, widow of Monsieur Renault, lord of Traversai, counselor to the king and Parlement of Paris, to become the protector and guardian of these orphaned sisters. She responded to Monsieur Vincent's request with great affection and zeal, and by her help and mainly through the goodness of God, the congregation was preserved for its mission of serving the Church.

Not content with saving this community that seemed on the verge of ruin and obtaining the help of Madame Petau as patron with the authorization of the archbishop of Paris, Monsieur Vincent even persuaded a promising priest <Ftn: Abelly himself.> to serve as the canonical superior of the new community. This was done to help these women acquire the perfection of their state and to supply what had not yet been worked out at the time of Madame Villeneuve's death. Monsieur Vincent gave some useful advice about the government of the community, which since then has been blessed by God in bringing salvation and sanctification to many souls. The Daughters of the Cross not only prepared as Christian teachers those who came to join the community but also participated in all sorts of other works of charity, especially those in favor of the poor. The doors of their houses and even more so the gates of their gardens were open to receive the poor. They wanted to offer them all kinds of spiritual help, either through instruction in all that is needed for salvation or in how to make a good general confession or on occasion even receiving them into their houses for several days to make a retreat, all according to whatever needs they might have.

After God it was Monsieur Vincent who offered his hand to save the congregation from a fall from which it probably never

would have recovered. Since his counsel assured their continued progress, the sisters recognized him if not as their father and founder at least as their savior. They thanked God for all the temporal and spiritual help which they had received from his charitable hand.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Monsieur Vincent's Experiences During the Troubled Times of 1649. What Occurred During Several Trips He Made at that Time

The kingdom enjoyed a great calm during the first years of the regency of the queen mother. She struggled to establish peace within the kingdom and to use the army to defeat the efforts of those ill-disposed towards us. But whether because of our sins or some other reason of which we are ignorant this calm was followed by one of the most violent storms France had to endure in many years. <Ftn: The troubles referred to here are those of the Fronde, eventually put down under Cardinal Mazarin.> Towards the end of 1648 as this tempest began, Their Majesties were obliged to flee to Saint Germain en Laye in January of the following year. Troops came to block the approaches to the town so that it was quickly reduced to extremities.

Monsieur Vincent's first reaction was to have his community beseech God in prayer to avert the calamity which would prevail if this civil disturbance lasted much longer. Beyond this, he felt it his duty to do all in his power to bring whatever remedy he could to the situation. He resolved to offer his services to Their Majesties at Saint Germain. He would represent to the queen with respect and all possible humility what he thought in the sight of God was most likely to bring back peace and tranquility to the realm. Therefore he left Saint Lazare on the thirteenth of the same month of January.

He took the precaution of leaving a letter addressed to the first president in the hands of the superior at Saint Lazare. In it he recounted the inspiration of God which had led him to go to Saint Germain to do what he could to bring about a peaceful settlement to the present difficulties. He did not have the opportunity to see the first president in person. <Ftn: Mathieu Mole, 1584-1656, first president (chief justice) of the Parlement of Paris for many years.> He assured the queen in this letter that he had consulted with no one else in this undertaking. He took this precaution for several reasons, first to assure the court that he had no communication with the rebellious party, and second to further the opportunity to speak effectively when she would be aware that he was acting solely through God's inspiration. To appease the Parlement he felt he had to show why he had left the city and what he proposed to do.

Leaving Paris in early morning he arrived at Saint Germain around nine or ten o'clock, not without some difficulty because of the heavy flooding and the presence of the military

everywhere. After being presented to the queen he spent nearly an hour with her. Afterwards he met with Cardinal Mazarin for a long time. He was well received by both, who appreciated his sincerity and his upright intentions. His intervention did not have the desired result, that is, peace and the re-establishment of unity in the kingdom, for circumstances were not yet favorable. But he at least had the satisfaction of having done all in his power in service to Their Majesties to procure the public good and relief of the poor. Although the least culpable, they were the most likely to suffer the most from the approaching storm.

When he finished his business in Saint Germain he left for Villepreux, <Ftn: To the home of Father de Gondi, former general of the galleys.> preferring for several reasons not to return to Paris. From Villepreux he went to a small farm in Beauce, two leagues from Etampes, in a poor hamlet called Freneville in the parish of Val-de-Puisseaux. Madame de Herse <Ftn: Charlotte de Ligny, wife of Michel Vialart, the president de Herse. She was a relative of Monsieur Olier, and was associated with all of Saint Vincent's works, particularly the ordination retreats. She died in 1662.> gave this farm to the house of Saint Lazare to support its works. He stayed here for a month. He lived on the bread of tribulation and the water of anguish, for the weather was extremely cold and the housing primitive. It lacked all conveniences and was open to all sorts of trouble, given the unsettled times. Monsieur Vincent lived during this time as another Jeremiah deploring the misery of the kingdom, offering to God his tears, his sufferings, and his penances as pleas for mercy. He was another Job sitting on a handful of straw, awaiting the fulfillment of God's designs, but submissive to his will. During his stay in this poor cottage he learned that other farms near Paris which belonged to Saint Lazare and served as the main resource for his community had been pillaged by soldiers, the furniture removed, the flocks driven away, and eighteen or twenty *muids* of wheat stolen. <Ftn: The farm at Orsigny, near Versailles. Monsieur Vincent accepted this farm December 22, 1644, from Jacques Norais and his wife. Their heirs contested this after their death, and the Congregation lost this farm, the principal support of the house of Saint Lazare. It returned to the community only in 1684.>

The house of Saint Lazare itself had many vexations of its own, for six hundred soldiers were quartered there. They took the doors of the house and barns, and according to one official he had been charged by Parlement to seize the wheat and flour for transport to the public market. This order proved later not to have been given by the Parlement, and the soldiers were

withdrawn and the keys returned, but the damage to the property was not repaired. Every day Monsieur Vincent was advised of some new loss or pillage, but his sole response was "God be blessed, God be blessed."

To understand better the situation of Saint Lazare at this time and to see how the patience of Monsieur Vincent was tried, we may quote from a letter of a pious priest, a frequent visitor to the priests of the Mission.

We have witnessed the persecution suffered by the community at Saint Lazare. They have lost their possessions and goods during the war and the unrest in Paris, brought about by the animosity of some ill-intentioned persons and even of some of the leading magistrates. Under pretext of making an inventory of available foodstuffs in the house and barns, they searched and nosed about everywhere as though they were seeking hidden treasure. Besides, they billeted a regiment of insolent soldiers who behaved unbelievably badly, and even burned all the wood in the woodshed. I saw the embers still smoking when I went to see Monsieur Lambert whom Monsieur Vincent had left in charge. This noble missionary accepted all these affronts and suffered this persecution with his usual serenity and tranquility. He was happy to share in the loss of his spiritual father and to see the loss (since God willed it so) not so much of their own goods but that of the poor for whom these things were destined, for it was their custom to distribute these goods freely and charitably during the year. *Et rapinam bonorum vestrorum cum gaudio suscepistis* ["You joyfully assented to the confiscation of your goods"]. <Ftn: Heb 10:34.>

It could be said to those who conducted an armed search of Saint Lazare for supposed hidden wealth what Saint Lawrence replied to his persecutors who sought the riches of the Church in his day: the poor alone are the living treasures hidden in the vaults of the church. *Facultates quas requiris, in coelestes thesauros manus pauperum deportaverunt.* ["The hands of the poor have carried off to heavenly storehouses the riches you seek."]

Monsieur Vincent was a new Lot, saved from this scene of destruction by an inspiration as though from an angel from heaven when, having gone to Saint Germain en Laye to speak with Their Majesties, he decided not to return to Paris but instead to visit

several houses of his Congregation. These places benefited by the blessing of his presence, to our privation and loss.

Monsieur Vincent remained then at this poor cottage of Freneville, suffering greatly from the severe cold, as well as from the limited amount of wretched food available in this poor region. He had only a bit of green wood to ward off the cold, and his bread was made of a mixture of rye and beans. Not a word of complaint fell from his lips. Rather he endured all in a spirit of penance. He believed it his duty as a priest to implore God's mercy to mitigate the effects of his anger being felt everywhere more and more in the kingdom.

He preached to the peasants of this unhappy place, urging them to use their present afflictions well. He exhorted them to penance as a most efficacious means of appeasing the wrath of God. He prepared them for the sacrament of penance, and he, the pastor of the parish, and another priest of his Congregation heard their confessions.

After a stay in this neglected region he left for Le Mans despite the rigors of the season. He planned to visit a house of his community situated on the outskirts of this town. <Ftn: Notre Dame de Coeffort.> From there he set out for Angers, but near Durtal he escaped from an accident which might have proven fatal were it not for some prompt help from others. His horse slipped while wading a small stream, and threw him into the water. After his rescue he remounted his horse soaked to the skin, but showing no emotion on his face. With some difficulty he found along the way a small cottage where he could dry himself, but as it was the Lenten season he did not eat until he had reached a small inn for the evening. The proprietress remarked that Monsieur Vincent, as was his custom, began to instruct the servants of the inn in their religion. She set off at once to gather the neighborhood children and had them go to Monsieur Vincent's room. He thanked her for this courtesy and immediately divided them into two groups to be instructed, one by himself and the other by a priest traveling with him.

He remained five days at Angers, taking the occasion to visit the Daughters of Charity who served in the hospital. He then set out for Brittany, but as he neared Rennes he had another accident which almost cost him his life. He was crossing a wooden bridge between a mill and a deep pond when his horse shied at the mill wheel. The horse seemed about to throw him into the pond, for his hind legs were already off the bridge. By a sort of miracle God saved him from sure disaster. Later when he was out of danger Monsieur Vincent admitted that he had never before escaped such disaster. He blessed God for such evident

and miraculous protection and besought his traveling companion to join him in blessing the divine goodness.

On all his trips Monsieur Vincent paid no visits of mere civility, either at Orleans, Le Mans, Angers, or anywhere he visited. He intended to do the same at Rennes, to pass unrecognized through the town on the way to a house of his Congregation at Saint Meen some eight leagues beyond the city. Notwithstanding this, he was recognized as he entered the town, which at that time was in the same state of agitation as Paris itself. An authority of the town informed him that he was under suspicion because of his connection with the royal family. He was told that he would be arrested and it was suggested that he leave town immediately. Monsieur Vincent was disposed to follow this advice. Yet at the very moment he was saddling his horse another guest staying at the same inn recognized him. He said angrily that Monsieur Vincent was likely to be shot in the head within two leagues of the town. The canon theologian of Saint Briec who had learned about Monsieur Vincent's visit and had come to the inn to meet with him, heard the threat. He persuaded Monsieur Vincent not to leave but rather to complain to the first president and some others, who received him well.

The following day he was preparing again to leave the inn when the one who had threatened him with death reappeared. The story went around that this man had waited in hiding along the road for the chance to carry out his threat. The faithful servant of God relied completely on God's providence. He seemed always ready to die, even desiring death after the example of the apostle that he might be united with Christ. He seemed unconcerned about his personal safety, but his friend the canon theologian of Saint Briec was not so trusting. He insisted on accompanying Monsieur Vincent all the way to Saint Meen, where he arrived on Tuesday of Holy Week. He remained there two weeks, spending most of his time in the confessional to benefit the poor of the region. They came on pilgrimage to this holy place and sought to be cured of their infirmities as God often granted such favors in response to the intercession of the patron saint of the town.

Monsieur Vincent then went on a charitable mission to Nantes, then to Lucon with the intention of proceeding to Saintes and then to Guienne, just to visit the houses of his Congregation. However, he received a direct order from the queen to return to Paris where the king also had returned. He went at once to Richelieu but fell sick there. When the Duchess d'Aiguillon heard of this she sent a small two-horse carriage and a coachman to bring him to Paris as soon as he would be well enough to travel. Some time before, he had been given the use of

this same carriage because of trouble with his legs, but he had never wished to use it.

In every house of his Congregation he visited on this long trip he greatly consoled his spiritual sons, besides being such an example of humility, cordiality, meekness, and all other virtues he displayed. Finally he returned to Paris in July 1649 after an absence of six and a half months. He returned the carriage and horses to Madame d'Aiguillon with thanks, but she in turn sent them back saying that they were a gift to help him in his work. He refused once more, protesting that the difficulties with his legs were increasing so greatly that he could travel neither by foot nor by horse, that he was resolved to spend the rest of his life at Saint Lazare rather than ride in a coach. When the queen and the archbishop of Paris heard of this, they ordered him formally to use the carriage. He acquiesced in this but not without pain and confusion, calling the carriage, which in reality was quite ordinary, his ignominy. He wanted the horses put to useful work in the fields when he was not using them to go to the city. At that time he was seventy years of age, suffering much from his legs which pained him especially when he tried to stand after sitting for some time. <Ftn: Abelly here shows that believed that Vincent was born in 1580, not in 1576 as he wrote in ch. 1.> He used this poor carriage only out of obedience and necessity. Nevertheless it enabled him to attend to some important affairs in service to the Church which he otherwise could not have done.

CHAPTER FORTY

Monsieur Vincent Works for the Relief of the Poor of the Frontier Regions Devastated by the War, Especially Champagne and Picardy

Scripture truly says that it is hard to cure long and degenerating illnesses, and likewise that a physician is inclined to abandon those with untreatable illness. It is the same for the poor. Those who work to relieve them grow tired and listless in their works of charity. The misery and needs of the poor grow day by day especially during civil wars such as have been the lot of France in recent times. After his return to Paris Monsieur Vincent was informed of the deplorable state of affairs, especially in the frontier provinces of Champagne and Picardy, and the almost limitless number of poor of all ages, sexes and conditions who desperately needed help. It must be added that a heart less moved by charity than his own would have lost courage and succumbed under the weight of this new burden. It would have believed it impossible to find a way to bring help to so many in need.

Precisely at this trying time this saintly man showed his great virtue. Just as the palm tree grows more vigorously the more it is buffeted, so he, relying on God's all-powerful bounty, resolved to undertake this charitable work just as he had done in so many other cases. After imploring the divine mercy whose treasures are inexhaustible he appealed to the Ladies of Charity who have committed themselves to just these kinds of works of mercy. They, like everyone else, had suffered greatly from the misery of the times and had lost some of their most promising members. Because of this they had been forced to give up some of the projects in which they had been involved. Nevertheless these good women closed their eyes to all human considerations and regarded Monsieur Vincent's request as an expression of God's holy will for them. They undertook to work for the relief of the poor of the devastated provinces and organized a collection of alms for their aid. Monsieur Vincent in turn sent several of his priests to aid in distributing these alms. God blessed this effort, which lasted for a full ten years until the signing of the treaty of peace.

Contrary to all hope and human judgment, the value of alms given to the poor exceeded six hundred thousand *livres* in money, food, clothing, medicine, tools, seed for sowing, and other necessities to sustain life. All this was done at the direction of Monsieur Vincent who sent the missionaries of his Company into the regions where they knew the poor were reduced to the

last extremity, and there they stayed. These fathers served in all that part of the country, especially in the cities and surrounding areas of Reims, Fismes, Rethel, Rocroy, Mezieres, Charleville, Donchery, Sedan, Sainte-Menehould, Vervins, Laon, Guise, Chauny, La Fere, Peronne, Noyon, Saint Quentin, Ham, Marle, Riblemont, Amiens, Arras---in a word into every city, town, and hamlet where the ruined poor, so worthy of compassion, were to be found. By this charitable help many were saved from dying of cold and hunger. This was especially true of the most neglected, the sick, the elderly and orphans. These generally suffered frightfully, lying upon their bed of putrid straw or upon the bare earth, exposed to the rigors of the winter weather because the homes of many of them had been pillaged and burnt and they themselves were left with but a single garment to cover their nakedness. They lived in hovels daily awaiting their only deliverer, death itself.

During the early years when this desolation was so extreme, the help given by Monsieur Vincent was likewise exceptional. He sent between eight and ten of his priests of the Mission together with several Daughters of Charity to help out. While the sisters tended to the sick poor the priests helped distribute bread and other necessary things to those in need. The priests crisscrossed the countryside, visiting parishes where pastors had disappeared, bringing spiritual pasturage to poor lost sheep, instructing them, administering the sacraments, consoling them in their losses, and repairing their churches as best they could, for many of them had been pillaged and profaned by the soldiers.

We shall see in Book Two <Ftn: Ch. 11, sects. 2, 3.> how these charitable and fervent missionaries were guided by the orders of their esteemed father in the practice of their works of charity. We shall see how the churches, the priests, religious communities of men and women, the impoverished nobility, women in distress, children, and abandoned sick--in a word all sorts of needy persons received both help and consolation in their distress.

If previous centuries have certainly seen such distress and misery, nowhere do we read in history that anyone responded so nobly, so promptly, and so universally as Monsieur Vincent. All this was done through the goodness of God and the ministry of a poor priest, aided by a small group of devoted women inspired by his charity and guided by his counsels.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

The Death of the Prior of Saint Lazare. Monsieur Vincent's Appreciation of Him

Monsieur Adrian Le Bon, the prior of Saint Lazare, was the instrument in God's hand, as we have said, for bringing Monsieur Vincent and his priests to Saint Lazare. Not only did he agree that Monsieur Vincent should come but rather he was insistent on the point. For more than a year he persisted in trying to convince Monsieur Vincent to accept the house and priory, even using intermediaries to persuade him. The example of the relationship between these two servants of God is perhaps unique in our times. The only conflict between the two was about who was the more virtuous: Monsieur Vincent's humility was matched by the prior's charity. The love of poverty of the one was in competition with the generosity of the other. Perhaps the only way this contest could be ended was in consideration of Monsieur Vincent's disposition to be receptive to the inspiration of God to which he was always so attentive. On this particular occasion perhaps the greatest virtue was to give in to one who might be said to be inferior to him, rather than take another course of action which would have been less advantageous to the development of the Congregation of the Mission.

The charitable prior retained his rooms in Saint Lazare, as did his religious also. It is impossible to exaggerate the satisfaction and consolation he enjoyed for the rest of his life in observing these good missionaries and especially Monsieur Vincent. For his part, Monsieur Vincent looked upon him as the benefactor and support of the missionaries living at Saint Lazare. He was shown all the respect, kindness, and assistance possible, in a spirit of sincere filial appreciation. This lasted for twenty years, until 1651 when it pleased God on the very day of Easter <Ftn: April 9.> to call this good and charitable prior to taste in heaven the fruits of his charity.

Just as Monsieur Vincent had honored, loved, and served this friend during his long life, he did so especially at his passing. He did all that a sincere love could suggest to help the prior in his last hours. He called together all the priests in the house to gather about the bed of the dying man to recite aloud during his lengthy agony the prayers for a departing soul, together with other prayers as well.

When the prior, aged seventy-five, had breathed his last, Monsieur Vincent spoke to those assembled around the bed: "Now, my brothers, our esteemed father is before God." Then, raising his eyes to heaven he prayed:

O God, may it please your goodness to apply to the soul of your servant the merits of the good works and the small services we have been able to do in the Congregation. We offer them to you, O Lord, beseeching you to apply them to his benefit. Perhaps some of you, my brothers, were in need. The prior provided for your wants. Be on guard that you never fall into the miserable sin of ingratitude towards him or the other older priests of the house, for we are like children who must respect them as our own parents. Be grateful to them for the good they have done and strive to remember the prior and pray for him. <Ftn: CED XI: 155-56.>

The funeral was worthily celebrated. Monsieur Vincent himself offered many masses for his intention and had other priests do the same, both in Saint Lazare and elsewhere. He wrote to all the houses of the Congregation:

It has pleased God to make all the members of the community orphans by calling to himself our father, the prior of Saint Lazare. He departed this life on Easter day, fortified by the sacraments and in such conformity to God's will that the least trace of impatience never appeared either in his entire last sickness nor in any previous illnesses. I beg all the priests of your house to offer masses for his intention and have the brothers receive communion. <Ftn: CED IV:168-69.>

Monsieur Vincent had a fine epitaph placed in the choir of the church of Saint Lazare near the tomb of the prior as a permanent memorial. He further stipulated that on the anniversary of his death, on April 9, a solemn service in his memory was to be held in the church of Saint Lazare.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

The Help Given by Monsieur Vincent to the Poor of Paris and Several Other Places During the Troubled Times of 1652 and Later

We have spoken in an earlier chapter of the charity rendered by Monsieur Vincent to the poor of Lorraine, Champagne, and Picardy. New troubles arose in the kingdom in 1652, and these gave new opportunity for much wider scope to his charity. <Ftn: The battles of the second phase of the Fronde, occasioned by the return of Mazarin to the court, December 1651. The battles came to the area around Paris.> God willed that the merits of his faithful servant should be increased, as well as those of all the other virtuous people who cooperated in obtaining the spiritual good and the corporal relief of the poor. Here is how these things came about.

The stationing of the army near Paris caused great desolation and misery everywhere. The town of Etampes suffered particularly because it had been under siege for a long time, and would be again several times afterward. The people of the town and neighboring villages were in a pitiable state of depression and poverty. Most were sick and were reduced to skin and bones. No help was to be found, no one to offer even a glass of cold water. To add to the troubles of the town, it had been taken and retaken until finally the plague struck. This happened chiefly because of the corpses thrown on the dung heaps. The rotting flesh of both men and women, mingled with that of horses and other animals, gave forth such a stench that no one dared come near.

Monsieur Vincent became aware of the miserable condition of the town and its environs. He immediately contacted the Ladies of Charity, who responded with their usual generosity, and he sent several members of the Congregation to provide spiritual and physical help to these poor and abandoned people. One of the first things they did was to bring in some strong helpers with wagons, to clean up all the dung heaps and sweep up the city. All this cost a good bit, as can be imagined. In addition they gave a decent burial to the poor half-decomposed bodies and then perfumed the streets and houses so that they could again be lived in. They set up soup kitchens in Etampes as well as in some other nearby towns which the missionaries judged to have been badly treated by the army or where the people were in the worst straits. Besides Etampes, Guillerval, Villeconnin, Etrechy, and Saint Arnoult sent their needy to be fed. At Palaiseau the soldiers had been particularly vicious, requiring a soup kitchen there as well. Many of the parishes were without

pastors, who had either died or perhaps had fled. The priests of the Mission could not manage both the spiritual and corporal help so badly needed. Monsieur Vincent sent the Daughters of Charity to handle the soup kitchens and other bodily help, including the care of a great number of poor orphans of the region. These latter were housed together in a building in Etampes. Meanwhile, the fathers crisscrossed the area, visiting and consoling the poor, saying mass for them, giving instruction, and administering the sacraments, all done with the approval of the superiors.

All this activity in favor of the poor was given at a price. There was the extreme fatigue, not to mention the danger of contracting the very illnesses they were seeking to alleviate, due to the ever-present danger of infection. And so it happened. Several of the missionaries fell ill and soon succumbed. <Ftn: Jean David, who died at Etampes, Francois Labbe, and Edmonde Deschamps, were taken to the chateau de Basville near Etampes, and cared for by president Lamoignon. Jacques de Lafosse, the other missionary, was carried back to Saint Lazare by his companions on a stretcher. Others are mentioned in the saint's letters.> Who could doubt that their death was precious in the eyes of the Lord? These men who had striven so courageously for his glory, who had persevered in an inviolable fidelity to his holy will by their prompt and perfect obedience, and who had then happily finished their course, would certainly have received their crown of justice from the God of all mercy.

Several Daughters of Charity, after much suffering brought about by their service to the poor, also offered their lives with great courage to God and undoubtedly shared the glory of the same crown as the priests. <Ftn: In particular, Sister Marie Joseph, mentioned by Saint Vincent in a conference to the Daughters of Charity, June 9, 1658, CED X:510.>

While Monsieur Vincent was thus occupied with these matters, God allowed another situation to arise which gave him further opportunity to exercise his charity. The armies descended upon Paris, causing havoc in all surrounding villages and towns. When it was reported to this "father of the poor" that the people of Juvisy and the surrounding country were in a desperate state, he immediately sent some of his priests with alms to distribute to the most needy. When it became apparent that the desolation was widespread, for the region had been pillaged and the people very badly treated by the soldiers, and that most of the inhabitants were in a very grave and even extreme condition, Monsieur Vincent and several other men and women joined forces to help these poor people. In view of the

great expense involved in providing what was needed, their charity, or rather the God of all goodness, suggested to them that they should organize a storehouse for goods. People of all conditions were invited to bring furniture, clothing, tools, provisions, and whatever else they could spare. It was almost impossible for most families to donate money, for it was a time when money was very difficult to obtain.

We should not fail to mention that it was particularly Monsieur du Plessis-Montbard who should receive credit for this charitable storehouse. He was the first to propose the plan, and he saw to it that it was carried out. <Ftn: Christophe du Plessis, baron de Montbard, a lawyer of the Parlement of Paris, one of the most active members of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, and one of the most charitable men of his time. He contributed greatly to various hospitals, dying May 7, 1672. His *Magasin charitable* was also the title of a publication designed to inform the public and encourage contributions to this work. CED IV:540.> We shall speak more of this in Book Two. <Ftn: Ch. 11.>

These storehouses were an endless source of help to them for six or seven months. All manner of goods were distributed: clothes, linen, furniture, utensils, tools, medicines, grain, peas, butter, oil, fruit, and other things necessary for life. Even such things as vestments, chalices, ciboriums, liturgical books, and other sacred ornaments and linens were given out because many of the churches had been looted. All these items were centrally collected and then distributed in an orderly fashion. The fathers of the Mission went from village to village in wagons loaded with food and used clothing to be given according to each one's needs. Also, it should be added that a daily distribution of soup helped save the lives of innumerable starving families who did not even know how to begin to find bread to live.

The exertions of the missionaries were so extreme in this dedication to the poor, and the illnesses they contracted so serious, that four or five died and several others were sick for many years. <Ftn: CED IV:432-36.> Although Monsieur Vincent felt these losses deeply, for these good fathers were his spiritual sons, he nevertheless praised and blessed God that they had worked and suffered so much for the members of the body of Christ with such courage. They had completed their lives gloriously on the field of battle, their arms in hand. He knew full well that such a death is not death at all but entrance into a new and happier life in full possession of Him who is the source and principle of all true life.

Besides the help to those who lived in the villages outside of Paris, others were fleeing before the army and had come to the capital for refuge. Among these were many women and young girls, and even some religious women. Monsieur Vincent found a way to group a certain number of them together and to find places of refuge for them. He requested some Ladies of Charity to undertake this work with one group of women in each house. After seeing to their bodily nourishment Monsieur Vincent urged that those who cared for the displaced persons should use the opportunity to conduct a sort of mission for them. In it they would receive instruction, badly needed by some, on what was required for salvation and how to make a good confession, and how to put themselves in a worthy state to offer prayers for peace and tranquility in the kingdom. He advised also that a retreat for religious should be given as well. On this question he wrote of all the troubles of the times to a doctor of theology of the University of Paris, who at that time was in Rome: <Ftn: Jerome Lagault.>

I have no doubt that you are aware of how things are. I want simply to tell you about carrying of the shrine of Saint Genevieve in a solemn procession to beseech God to bring a halt to all public suffering through the intercession of this saint. This ceremony brought together more devout people than have ever before been seen in Paris. The result of this was that on the eighth day the duke of Lorraine, who already was in the city and whose army was at its gates, turned about just as the king's army was about to fire upon his men, and withdrew to his own lands. Meanwhile the discussions with other princes <Ftn: The Prince de Conde and the Duke of Orleans.> continue on the question of peace, and we hope, through the goodness of God, that these talks will be successful. We devoutly wish that his justice will be appeased by the great charity shown to the bashful poor of the city as well as to the poor country people who have taken refuge here. Every day fourteen or fifteen thousand people are fed who otherwise would have died of hunger. Besides, eight or nine hundred young girls have been gathered together in several houses. Some poor women religious refugees are being placed in houses also, even in some suspected places, it is said. A monastery is being used for this purpose where they will be well looked after. That is the news, Monsieur, and although it goes against our agreement to put nothing in writing, how could I not publicize

the grandeur of God and his mercies! <Ftn: CED IV:
400-03.>

We must not forget that it was the Daughters of Charity who distributed the soup, while the Ladies of Charity took an active part by their alms, sharing in all the great works of charity. Since the poor were spread out to all parts of Paris, especially the outlying districts, Monsieur Vincent had a particular concern for the welfare of those who lived near Saint Lazare. These people, some seven or eight hundred, came every day to his door both in the morning and afternoon to receive food and to participate in the same practices that are followed on the missions. After preaching to them, the men and boys were brought into the cloister of Saint Lazare and then divided into nine or ten groups or "academies." A priest was assigned to each group for instruction, while at the same time other priests spoke to the women and girls in the church. Monsieur Vincent himself participated in this work and shared in catechizing the poor.

It pleased God to shower his blessings on all these charitable activities begun by Monsieur Vincent, so much so that they have continued when other troubles arose, even after the death of this great servant of God. He seemed, like another Elijah, to have left his mantle not only to the members of his own Congregation but also to all the other virtuous people who joined him in fulfilling his mission of charity. Such an occasion arose in the beginning of 1661 when it was decreed that lace making would no longer be allowed. Previously, this had been a source of livelihood for many. Now, with its prohibition, many were reduced to great want and suffering. At the same time the price of wheat shot up. Also, in July and August of the same year an epidemic developed in the countryside which made it impossible for many to work at the harvest. As a consequence the price of bread and other foodstuffs increased significantly. The vicars general of Paris commissioned several priests of the Congregation of the Mission to make a survey of the entire diocese on the condition of things. They found that there were more than eight thousand sick in the eighty parishes they visited, and similar conditions existed elsewhere. These people, consequently, were mostly without any means of subsistence. Entire families were stricken and the scarcity of food was evident everywhere. In face of this, the same remedy was applied as during the lifetime of Monsieur Vincent. The Ladies of Charity led the way in collecting food and other necessities, and with the help of the alms they received they were able to aid the poor everywhere.

The famine of 1661 continued during the following year as well, not only near Paris but also in several other provinces:

Maine, Perche, Beauce, Touraine, Blaisois, Berry, Gatinais, and elsewhere. The Ladies of Charity felt in their hearts the same sentiments that had moved Monsieur Vincent to undertake the relief of the poor in all sorts of circumstances with indefatigable charity. These holy women carried out these projects, especially the feeding of the hungry. God blessed their efforts so that they, together with the help of the missionaries of Monsieur Vincent, rescued from death a large number of the poor of every age, gender and condition. Without it, they otherwise would surely have been lost. The alms they distributed from 1660, the year of Monsieur Vincent's death until now, 1664, came to more than five hundred thousand *livres*.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Monsieur Vincent in Service to the King and Kingdom during the Troubled Times Beginning in 1652

In dealing with wrongs, it is not enough to be concerned with effects, the causes must be addressed. All the charitable efforts of Monsieur Vincent during the war certainly alleviated much of the suffering of the poor. Yet, to deliver them permanently from this scourge and to avoid the unspeakable disorders and enormous sins committed during such times of trouble and division this great servant of God saw that a more fundamental remedy was necessary. Filled with prudence and zeal as he was, he understood that there would be no hope for success unless the root of the evils, that is, division and war, were attacked. An assured peace was the remedy, and this could come about only by the complete submission and obedience of subjects to their sovereign. The union of head and members, established by God for the body politic as well as in nature, was the path to order, and this to peace, which according to Saint Augustine, is simply the tranquility of order. <Ftn: PL 41, 19, 13:640.>

Monsieur Vincent realized that the conflagration was spreading to every region of the kingdom. He foresaw the enormous ills in store for the state and for religion itself should this evil go unchecked. He resolved, then, to use all his efforts to extinguish this unholy fire. First he had recourse to God. He invited all well-intentioned people he knew to do the same. He hoped that by their prayers, alms, fasts and other works of penance they might appease the divine justice, make reparation for the sins committed against his divine majesty, draw down his mercy, and gain peace. At the house of Saint Lazare he established the practice that every day three of his missionaries fasted for this intention--a priest, a cleric, and a brother. The priest celebrated mass on this occasion, at which the other two received communion. He himself took his turn at this devotion, although he was over seventy years of age at the time. <Ftn: CED XII:458 gives a different total: two priests or clerics, and two lay brothers.>

Once, when leaving the chapel after reflecting on the horrors of war not only in France but in several other Christian countries, and having just finished his mental prayer on the subject of the utility of suffering, he was moved to speak to his entire community:

Once again I repeat the recommendation I have so often made to pray for peace. May it please him to bring together the hearts of Christian rulers. Alas!

we see war on all sides and everywhere: war in France, war in Spain, in Italy, Germany, Sweden, in Poland, where they are invaded from three directions, in Ireland where the poor people are driven from their lands into the mountains and nearly inaccessible rocky regions. Scotland has fared no better, and everyone knows how bad things are in England. War everywhere and misery everywhere! In France such a multitude of people in such a deplorable state! O Savior, O Savior, how many suffer? If for the four months we have experienced the war here we have seen it bring such misery to the people who have flocked from all parts of the kingdom to Paris, the heart of France where we have provisions in abundance, what shall we say of those poor people who live in the frontier provinces, and over the space of twenty years have felt the scourge of war? If they sow, who knows who will reap? The armies come to harvest, to pillage and take away all. Anything the soldiers do not take the officers pick up. How can anyone go on? They are left to die. If any real virtue exists, it is found mainly among the poor. They have a lively faith, they believe simply, they are submissive to God's will, they have an extraordinary patience in their sufferings, and they endure all that the war brings upon them. Even in their ordinary occupation they work hard, exposed to the sun and all kinds of weather. These poor farmers and vine dressers live by the sweat of their brow, expecting that at least we others will pray to God for them.

Alas my brothers, while they wear themselves out in their labor, we seek the shade and take our rest. In our missions we are protected from the weather by our churches. We are not exposed to the wind, to the rain, nor to the rigors of the seasons. We who live off the labor of these poor people and with the patrimony of Jesus Christ ought to think each time we go to the refectory for our meals whether we have really earned the bread we are about to eat. For myself this thought has often given me much consternation, and I have said to myself, you poor creature, have you earned your bread today? This bread which comes from the work of the poor? At least, my brothers, if we have not earned it as they do, pray for them. Let no day pass that we do not beseech him to bestow the grace upon them that they will profit from their sufferings.

As we have said these past days, God is particularly attentive to the priests to stop the course of his anger. He waits for them to do as Aaron did, to take the censer in hand interposing themselves between these poor people and his own wrath. Like Moses they should become the intermediaries before God to avert the consequences of their sin and ignorance which perhaps could have been avoided if they were better instructed or had worked more towards their own conversion. We owe to these poor the exercise of charity, both to fulfill our office as priests and to thank them for what we receive from their labor. While they suffer and work hard against so many obstacles it is our duty, like Moses, to have our arms raised continually in prayer for them. If they suffer for their ignorance and sin, we ought to intercede for them before the mercy of God. Charity obliges us to do this. If we do not spend ourselves to teach them and aid them in this perfect conversion to God, even at the cost of our life, we are in some way the cause of all the ills they suffer. <Ftn: CED XI:200-05.>

This is how Monsieur Vincent urged his own family to pray, work, and suffer to banish ignorance and sin, as the chief causes of all the evils they experienced. In this way they would obtain from God a true and lasting peace. This was the surest remedy for all the evils of the times. He never stopped recommending to his community to continue their prayers to God for peace. He had the custom of praying the litany of the Holy Name of Jesus every morning. When he came to the words "Jesus, God of peace," he pronounced them more piously and with more devotion, and always repeated the invocation. Besides, he took every occasion that presented itself to recommend to everyone he knew to offer their prayers, their alms, their pilgrimages, fasts and mortifications and penances to obtain from God the peace so necessary and so much desired.

An older priest associated with Monsieur Vincent at Saint Lazare gave the following testimony of him.

If his charity was so great in his help to the poor ruined by the war, his zeal was no less to remove the root cause of all this suffering. While the Ladies of Charity and other helpers worked so hard at collecting alms and other contributions in aid to the devastated provinces, we know with what zeal and tenderness of heart he recommended that they join these works of mercy to their vows, prayers, fasts, mortifications, and other exercises of penance, their devotions, their

pilgrimages to Notre Dame, to Saint Genevieve, and other patrons of Paris and of France, their confessions and communions, masses and other sacrifices, to draw down God's mercy and appease his anger. We know how some women of delicate constitution followed his advice to mortify their flesh by hair shirts and disciplines and other instruments of penance. In this way, they joined his own penances and those of his community to obtain the peace so much longed for and which we happily enjoy today. Who can express his distress at the disorders of the army? How he was moved at the outrages committed everywhere and against all sorts of people, and sacrileges and profanations of the blessed sacrament and churches, all brought about by the army. How often has he said, speaking to the clergy, "My friends, if the Lord is to receive fifty lashes, strive to save him from some of them. Do something to atone for the outrages committed against him so that he will have at least some to console him in these persecutions and sufferings."

Besides his prayers and practices of penance, Monsieur Vincent felt it to be his duty to do all he could to influence those in power to work for peace. The way to this, he felt, was to have the authority of the king recognized by all subjects of the realm. There must be entire and perfect submission to his authority in all parts of the kingdom. This is the only way the civil war could end. Although he had always avoided political action, through either his humility or possibly his Christian prudence that suggested he concentrate his efforts on what concerned the service of God and the good of souls, in the present situation in which France would come to ruin if the wars continued, he felt it his duty to act otherwise. He was aware that love of country is a duty of charity and the service of the king is in some way service to God. As a result of these reflections he resolved to serve his country and his prince in this important and pressing matter.

His first efforts in this direction focused on bishops, several of whom were well disposed towards him. He wrote to persuade and encourage them to remain in their dioceses during these troubled times so that by their example and teaching they might confirm their people in their duty and oppose those who strove to weaken their allegiance to the king. <Ftn: A reference to Conde, a refugee in Guienne, who broke with the queen, and led the province into revolt.> He wrote to several prelates in similar terms, to some to congratulate them for having refused to let the towns of their diocese welcome the rebels. To others

he wrote in the hope of dissuading them from appearing at court to seek redress from damages suffered from the army. He thought that this was not the appropriate time. He suggested instead that they remain in their sees to console their people and to further the interests of the king, who would be mindful of their fidelity and make good any losses they may have sustained. We shall give here three extracts from such letters. One was addressed to the late bishop of Dax, <Ftn: Jacques Desclaux, named bishop of Dax in 1639, consecrated that same year in the church at Saint Lazare. He died in Paris, August 4, 1658, at age sixty-five. CED V:90-91.> the diocese from which Monsieur Vincent originally came.

I must say, Your Lordship, that I was very pleased to see you in Paris. Yet I must also say with regret that I think your visit here will have no worthwhile outcome in these unhappy times, in which the troubles of which you complain are almost universal throughout the kingdom. Wherever the armies have passed, the same sacrileges, robberies, and indecencies have occurred as has happened in your diocese, not only in Guienne and in Perigord, but also in Saintonge, Poitou, Burgundy, Champagne, Picardy, and in many other places, not excluding the environs of Paris itself. As a rule the clergy as well as the people have suffered the same fate, so much so that they have been sent out of Paris to the provinces to look for clothes and to seek alms just to keep alive. Only enough priests have remained to administer the sacraments to the sick. It is fruitless to request a reduction in tithes from the clergy for the official reply will surely be given that most dioceses will ask for the same thing. Everyone feels the effects of the war, and upon whom could this tax be transferred? God has pleased to lay this universal scourge upon the whole kingdom. And so, Your Lordship, you can do no better than to submit to his justice, awaiting the time his mercy shall bring an end to such terrible sufferings. If you should be elected to the general assembly of 1655 you will then have an opportunity to obtain some relief for your clergy. Meanwhile they will be consoled by your presence which is of such benefit to them and even for the service of the king.

This letter shows the deplorable state to which France had sunk and the efforts being made to help save the clergy so that there would still be those committed to God's service. Meanwhile the devil sought to bring the clergy to ruin. We can see the

prudent efforts Monsieur Vincent was making to dissuade this prelate from coming to Paris and to convince him to remain in his see. He could be of greatest utility there to the service of his Church and his king.

He wrote another letter to Jacques Raoul, bishop of La Rochelle, on the same subject: <Ftn: Jacques Raoul de la Guibourgere was named bishop of Saintes in 1632. On the advice of Saint Vincent in 1646 he was transferred to the see of Maillezais, to arrange for the suppression of this see and to make way for the erection of the see of La Rochelle, formerly a Huguenot stronghold. That same year he became its first bishop. He died in 1661 at age seventy-two.>

I received your letter as a blessing from God. It consoled me greatly in these troubled times. If those who threatened the peace of your diocese have not succeeded, I believe that after God the storm has been averted because of your wise direction in service of the king. I thank God for this and for the many other services you have rendered both in your episcopal city and elsewhere which have confirmed your people in their duty towards God, their Church, and their prince. Even the heretics observing your manner of acting cannot help recognizing the excellence of our holy religion and the importance and influence of the office of bishop when it is administered as it has been by your sacred person. I pray God, Your Excellency, to give us many prelates like yourself who work so hard for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the people. <Ftn: CED IV:429.>

It was Monsieur Vincent's practice, in writing to those in authority, to proceed by way of encouragement and of congratulations rather than by exhortation. This was because of his great respect for them, but also because it was more effective in influencing their thinking.

A third letter written to a bishop who is still alive shows better than the other two the appreciation Monsieur Vincent had for the service of the king and the prudence with which he expressed himself in this regard.

I am really disturbed that our unhappy times have deprived you of the benefits of your abbey. I cannot tell you how pained I am not to be able to help you, because of our troubled times. However, Your Excellency, it seems to me that you ought to put off your visit to the court until things have clarified. You are not alone in the troubles you experience. Many bishops join you in this. Monsieur N., <Ftn: Nicolas

Sevin, bishop of Sarlat; *CED* IV:429.> for example, has not only lost his regular revenue but also the provisions he has been setting aside for a long time. Even though he was well regarded at court, he received no satisfaction when he appeared there. Bishop N., who remained in his see, had the happiness of seeing his episcopal city return to its obedience to the king, even though it had at first gone over to the other side. He has received great praise from the court and has opened the way for some recompense for his losses. Even though you may not have the occasion to render the same service to His Majesty, your presence will aid notably in calming your region because of the esteem and confidence people have in you. This is greatly to be desired and will surely not go unnoticed. I most humbly beg you to accept my sincerity and promise of obedience. <Ftn: *CED* IV: 334-35.>

Monsieur Vincent wrote several other similar letters to other bishops.

Mindful that Saint Bernard and some other saintly persons who had led a life even more retired than his own had left their solitude and retreat to appear in the courts of emperors and kings when it was a question of healing division among princes, Monsieur Vincent resolved to do all in his power to bring about the reunion of the king and his nobles. He preferred the service of the king and the good of France to all personal advantage. He closed his mind to all mere human reasoning that might turn him from this course. What he actually did in this regard is not well known, for he acted in strictest secrecy. What is certain is that he appeared several times at court and conversed with the princes and delivered messages to them from the king. He also brought back their responses. After his death there was found the draft of a letter to Cardinal Mazarin, who at the time <Ftn: The beginning of July 1652.> was with the court at Saint Denis. We get some idea of his activities from this document.

I humbly beg Your Eminence's pardon for not coming to see you yesterday evening, as you had requested. Unfortunately I was not well. I have just received word from the duke of Orleans that he will send Monsieur d'Ornano <Ftn: A secretary of the duke of Orleans.> who will give me an answer which he wanted me to deliver to the prince [de Conde]. I told the queen yesterday that I had met both separately, and that both were respectful and gracious. I told Her Royal Highness that if the king's authority was to be

recognized, a decree ending the civil strife would have to be issued. <Ftn: By Cardinal Mazarin.> This would satisfy both sides. <Ftn: If Mazarin were to leave.> To bring these agreements about, it is difficult to negotiate through intermediaries. It must be done by those who have mutual respect and confidence, and who will discuss matters face to face. By word and gesture he assured me he was in agreement and assured me that he was going to discuss the matter with his council. Tomorrow morning, God willing, I hope to be able to bring his reply to Your Eminence. <Ftn: *CED* IV:423.>

The results of these negotiations are not known in detail, for nothing further was found in Monsieur Vincent's papers about the outcome of these secret plans. God must have blessed the matter, however, for shortly afterward this important matter was settled. <Ftn: Mazarin left. Saint Vincent wrote an important letter to Mazarin on the subject, September 11, 1652, *CED* IV: 473-78.>

The troubles in the kingdom were thus brought to a close through the mercy of God. At the house of Saint Lazare Monsieur Vincent continued to offer prayers, masses, communions, fasts and other penitential practices that he had previously ordained. Some tried to persuade him to bring them to a close for these practices wore heavily on the community. Besides, the civil war and public division which had occasioned the penances were ended. Monsieur Vincent replied, "No, no, we must not stop now, we must beseech God for His blessing of universal peace." In fact these continued until this peace <Ftn: The Peace of the Pyrenees.> so greatly desired was finally achieved in 1660, eight years after these prayers began and six or seven months before his own death. God willed to give him the great consolation of seeing the fruit of his prayers, his fasts, and of his perseverance.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Monsieur Vincent's Opposition to the Errors of Jansenism

The saints have always considered it an honor to live in humble dependence not only to the will of God, but also to the Church to which they have professed their submission. They have pledged their exact obedience to its laws, their reason itself to a belief in the truths proposed to them, and their understanding in honor of Jesus Christ, the Church's sovereign head.

Everyone acquainted with Monsieur Vincent acknowledges that he excelled in his submission to and dependence upon the Church. Once she had spoken either to establish some regulation or to define some truth or to condemn some error, he had nothing more to say. He did not dispute or even reason. He had ears only to hear and a heart to submit sincerely and perfectly to all that had been set forth.

This is what he did when the errors of Jansenism began to appear, and more so when the sovereign pontiffs condemned its doctrines.

When Jansenius's book *Augustinus* first appeared <Ftn: Louvain, 1640.> its novel opinions created a sensation among many learned persons. The faithful and prudent servant of God recalled the apostle's advice not to believe in any spirits before they had been tested and seen as coming from God. He was cautious in the face of this new doctrine, especially so because he was well acquainted with one of the originators of the Jansenist sect. <Ftn: Jean Duvergier (or du Verger) de Hauranne, the commendatary abbot of Saint Cyran, 1581-1643. He struck up a friendship with Saint Vincent about 1622, and may have had some role to play in the Community's possession of College des Bons Enfants and Saint Lazare. Their frequent meetings decreased after 1632 and ceased from 1634 on. The saint tried several times to reconcile his former friend with the Church. Saint-Cyran was imprisoned in 1638 at the Chateau of Vincennes, on the outskirts of Paris. Among his papers was found a copy of a letter from him to Saint Vincent. Richelieu had the saint summoned to a lay court, but he refused to testify. Later testimony, published by the Jansenists, seems to be altered or incomplete. Saint-Cyran was freed in 1643, but died scarcely eight months later. He is buried in Saint Jacques du Haut-Pas in Paris.> This man's spirit and actions gave good reason to make anyone hesitate. This particular point will be discussed in Book Two. <Ftn: Ch. 12.>

When Monsieur Vincent became aware that the Church had condemned these doctrines through the constitutions of Innocent X and Alexander VII <Ftn: May 31, 1653 and October 16, 1656 respectively. Saint Vincent explained his opposition to the Jansenists in letters, *CED* III:318-32, 362-74.> and the magisterium of the hierarchy in France, he felt that he not only was obliged to submit to this judgment of the apostolic see but also to do so formally and publicly. Putting aside all human considerations of political prudence he declared his entire opposition to the condemned errors and to those who obstinately sought to defend them.

He took this course of action with vigor and courage but also with prudence and moderation. He never spoke with dissimulation, but he spoke only when he considered it helpful. Perhaps he did so to strengthen those who had submitted to the Church's judgment or to win back those who had not or even to persuade those wavering in their loyalty to the Holy See. Whatever these reasons, the one guiding principle he followed was ever to seek the truth. He showed his great dedication to supporting the declarations of the sovereign pontiffs and dissociating himself from those who strove to prevent the execution of their decrees. Nevertheless, he still was able to distinguish between the error and the person holding the mistaken doctrine. He kept in his heart a true and sincere love for all people no matter what their beliefs. He spoke of them only with great reserve and compassion rather than with holy indignation. He even took steps, when occasion presented, to reconcile these people to the Church. After the proclamation of the constitution of Innocent X he visited Port Royale itself to enter into honorable communication with the dissenters. It must be said that the results of these initiatives were not as favorable as he had hoped.

He was particularly careful that the members of his own Congregation be free of these condemned errors, even that there should not be the least suspicion in this regard. If some lacked humble and sincere submission to Rome, he obliged them to leave the community.

His vigilance and charity extended to other sectors of the Church which he saw needed help or at least warning against these new errors. He was aware that those who were of this mind would try to insinuate themselves and their doctrines into monasteries and communities of women under the guise of the greater good. He knew also that these false prophets (as Jesus Christ warned us in the Gospel) would use every artifice to disguise their pernicious doctrines. Consequently, he did his utmost to protect these religious men and women. He saw to it

that these wolves in sheep's clothing would make no inroads into this privileged portion of the flock of Jesus Christ. He forbade them to have any access to the monasteries or convents, especially those under his direct care.

He exercised the same precaution in preventing any surprise in the Council of Ecclesiastical Affairs, lest any of those infected with this condemned doctrine, or even those rightly suspected of holding such views, should accept any office or benefice in the Church.

His zeal for unity in the Church and for the triumph of sound doctrine led him on several occasions to alert certain members of the hierarchy, to encourage them to be on their guard against these errors, or to advise how to combat this threat. In Book Two we will quote several letters he wrote in which we will see how this great servant of God respected the dignity of the bishops to whom he wrote. We will also see how anxious he was to serve these prelates. Humility, discretion, prudence, and charity marked his words as well as his deeds.

All efforts of the creature will have little effect if God on high does not sustain and bless them with his help. He put his principal trust in the goodness of God, offering constant prayers for this intention and had others do the same. He prayed that the Lord would look down with the eyes of mercy upon his Church and not permit the spirit of evil and lies to spread havoc among the faithful. He used to say that the best defense against the errors of the time was mental prayer and the faithful practice of the virtues contrary to the sentiments of the heretics. Profound humility and submission of mind must be opposed to pride and presumption of one's own independence. A love of abnegation and rejection must be preferred to vain praises and flatteries. A straightforward and simple heart must contrast with the deceits, falsehoods, and trickery used by the heretics to disguise their errors and conceal their real purposes. Finally, an ardent charity was required that would counteract all contradictions, slanders, and calumnies the evil spirit customarily uses to suppress the truth.

He was often heard to say sorrowfully that he feared that the corrupt morals and the dissolute life of Christians, so opposed to the maxims Jesus Christ left us in the Gospel, had caused this plague afflicting the Church in our kingdom. If we did not amend our ways and appease the just anger of God he feared that ours would be the same fate as the Jews, as recorded in the Gospel. The kingdom of God would be taken from us and given to others who would respond more satisfactorily. We must tremble with fright at seeing how other great kingdoms once so flourishing in religious matters, such as England, Denmark,

Sweden, and the greater part of Germany, were allowed to fall into heresy through the just judgment of God. The ills of our neighbors ought to warn us that faith is a gift of God, purchased for us by the blood of Christ. We must appreciate it and do all in our power to preserve it. <Ftn: *CED* III:34-36, for example.>

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

The Home for the Aged Poor Begun at Paris by Monsieur Vincent;
The General Hospital for the Poor Begun by Him in that Same City

Monsieur Vincent's charity seemed like a burning fire, ever ready to expand when the conditions were right. It probably would be preferable to say that he was consumed by that heavenly fire which Jesus Christ came to bring upon the earth, to respond to everything having to do with the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This faithful servant of God did not let any opportunity pass to serve the Church or work for the good of his neighbor. Despite his advancing years and the infirmities ordinarily accompanying old age, he still bore the principal burden of the many pious works he had established. Notwithstanding this he was always ready, even anxious, to begin new ventures for the glory of God. Rather than being overwhelmed by the burdens of new projects, on these occasions his vigor and strength seemed to increase.

This is illustrated on the occasion in 1653 when divine Providence used him for a new expression of charity. This led to one of the most significant developments in the Church in many years. This was the establishment of the general hospital for the sick poor at Paris, of which we can say without taking anything away from the many other virtuous people who contributed to its origin that Monsieur Vincent laid the first stone. Rather we should say that God used him without his being aware of the designs of Providence. Since its very inception, other zealous workers have generously participated in building this marvelous structure which flourishes even today.

This is a summary of events leading to the building of the hospital.

A citizen of Paris was moved by the desire to do something in the service of God. He went to see Monsieur Vincent, whose charity was well known to him. He stated that he wished to devote a large sum for works of charity totally at the judgment of Monsieur Vincent, but on condition that his gift remain completely anonymous. He wanted to do this solely for God's glory, without his identity being known to anyone besides God and Monsieur Vincent.

Monsieur Vincent received the gift as a deposit for the poor, since he did not think he could refuse. After mature deliberation before God he prayed for light to discern what good work would be most suitable. He discussed the question with the donor until the two agreed that the gift should be used to found a home for poor workers who because of age or infirmity were no

longer able to earn their livelihood. It was his experience that those reduced to begging often neglected their own salvation. By founding a home for these poor people he would be doing a double service for them: taking care of their bodily wants and at the same time looking after their spiritual welfare. He proposed this idea to the generous benefactor, who agreed wholeheartedly. He did so only on condition that the spiritual and temporal administration of the hospital would forever remain in the hands of the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission.

To carry out his project, Monsieur Vincent bought two houses and grounds in the faubourg Saint Lawrence in Paris. He furnished these houses with beds, linens, and everything else deemed necessary. He had a small chapel constructed, and even with this had enough left over to set up an investment that yielded an annual return. He was able to receive forty poor persons in the hospital, twenty men and twenty women, whom he housed and fed, and this has continued to the present. The income fell off these last years. A reduction in the number of guests would have been necessary had divine Providence not provided help from elsewhere. The forty poor were housed in two separate buildings, one for men and one for women. They were, however, so situated that both groups could attend the same mass, listen to the same reading during meals, but the tables were so arranged that the two groups were entirely separate, with neither able to see or speak with the other.

He bought tools and set up workshops so the forty could occupy their time and talent to the limit of their reduced strength. He wanted to avoid their falling into idleness. He commissioned the Daughters of Charity to care for these poor people and designated one of his priests of the Mission to celebrate mass, instruct them in the word of God, and administer the sacraments. He himself was among the first to offer this instruction. He recommended especially union among themselves, piety, and above all a gratitude towards God for having provided such a peaceful home where their bodily needs and the salvation of their souls were attended to. <Ftn: CED XII:156-63.>

He called this foundation the Hospital of the Holy Name of Jesus. <Ftn: This building had probably already been known as "Holy Name of Jesus."> He applied for approval to king, without, however, naming the chief benefactor, and this was given by letters patent. The archbishop of Paris approved of these matters, granting the entire direction of the hospital to Monsieur Vincent and his successors.

As soon as one of the poor patients died, another was brought in to take his place. All lived in great serenity, esteeming themselves happy to be cared for in life as well as in

death. Their chief care was to live such a Christian life that their death would be peaceful. Their well-ordered style of life appealed to others who hoped to succeed them in the hospital, so that soon there was a wait of several years before they could be accommodated.

Once he had established and organized this new hospital, Monsieur Vincent received visits from several representatives of the Ladies of Charity of Paris and other virtuous women of some standing. They visited all parts of the establishment only to be thoroughly edified at the good order and excellent management they saw. Everywhere peace and union prevailed. Murmurings and slander were unheard of, as were all other vices. The poor, busy in their small workshops, fulfilled their religious duties as much as their condition would allow. The whole hospital seemed to recall the life of the early Christians and seemed to be a convent or monastery rather than a home for seculars. <Ftn: This hospital survived the French Revolution, with various names and locations in later years.>

The sight of such a well-run enterprise gave rise in the minds of those who had visited the hospital the plight of the many poor who begged in the streets or in the churches of the city. These people for the most part live a disordered life, marked by vice and dissipation, but until now no one seemed able to help them. Several of the Ladies of Charity had the thought that perhaps Monsieur Vincent could rescue these poor from the streets. He possibly could do on a larger scale what he had so well accomplished on a smaller. God's grace and blessing could be relied on, and at Saint Lazare and with the Daughters of Charity some were available to help out, if only a place large enough could be found to receive these poor people.

The women who first thought of this mentioned it to several others who had visited Monsieur Vincent's hospital. Then one of the visitors gave fifty thousand *livres* to begin the building of a general hospital. Another woman gave an investment worth three thousand *livres* for the same purpose. On the day of the periodic assembly of these Ladies of Charity, at which Monsieur Vincent presided in keeping with his usual practice unless prevented by some unforeseen difficulty, they surprised him greatly, as he himself said, when they endorsed the project wholeheartedly. He could not help admiring the zealous charity of these good women for which he praised God and congratulated them. However, he stated that the matter was of such importance that it should be considered further and prayed over at great length.

At the next meeting these women appeared even more determined than before. They assured Monsieur Vincent that money for the project would not be lacking, for they had contacts with

several other wealthy persons who had promised considerable help. They pressed Monsieur Vincent to give his consent. He still hesitated, but his reluctance was no match for their ardent desire to begin this enterprise. A large enough house and grounds would obviously be required to house the number of poor they were considering. Someone proposed that the king be asked for the property known as the Salpetriere, near the river, opposite the arsenal. At the time the building and grounds were not being used. Monsieur Vincent spoke to the queen regent, who agreed and gave him the deed to the property. Some person claimed that he had an interest in the property, but was satisfied when one of the Ladies of Charity promised him an annual investment paying eight hundred *livres* to compensate his losses.

After all these matters had been taken care for, it seemed to the Ladies of Charity that it remained only to get started. Some of the more fervent were disappointed that the poor were not immediately gathered up and brought to the home. They let Monsieur Vincent know how they felt about the delay. Monsieur Vincent and the women could not agree about how the poor were to be enticed to come to this new home nor about how it was to be run. This led him to the painful position of having to slow down the project, for it was going far too fast for his taste. This explains what he said, in an effort to moderate their zeal:

The affairs of the Lord ordinarily develop little by little. They begin slowly and only then develop. When God wished to save Noah and his family he directed him to build the ark. This could have been completed quickly, but Noah was told to begin building a hundred years before the rains began and to work little by little on its construction. In the same way when the Lord planned to bring the children of Israel to the promised land he could have done so in a short time. Instead, forty years passed before they entered into Canaan. When God sent his Son to redeem mankind did he not delay three or four thousand years? God is never rushed. He does all things in their own good time.

When our Savior came upon earth he could have come at a perfect age to effect our redemption. He did not have to spend thirty years in a hidden, even superfluous, life at Nazareth, but he chose to be born an infant and grew just like other men to full stature. Did he not say on occasion that his hour had not yet come? This was to teach us not to be too hasty in those matters which depend more on God than on

ourselves. He could have established his Church throughout the world in his own lifetime. He preferred, however, to lay the foundation and leave the rest to his apostles and their successors. According to this way of acting it does not seem expedient to attempt to do everything at once or even to think that we have to act immediately to keep the good will of those who are anxious to start. What should we do, then? Go gently, pray much to God and act in union of heart.

He added:

It seems to me that we first ought to experiment with taking one, or even two hundred poor people, and afterward only those who want to come. If they are well treated there will be no lack of applications, and we can adjust the number we take to what resources Providence provides. We won't lose by following this plan, but if on the contrary we use compulsion and act precipitously, we run the risk of thwarting the designs of God. If the work we propose is from him it will succeed and endure, but if it is solely a human enterprise it will not do much good, nor will it last long.

Thus Monsieur Vincent expressed his opinion to the Ladies of Charity, who responded by tempering their zeal for the project. But what restrained them even more was that some of the leading civil officials would not approve the project, thinking it not well enough planned. <Ftn: The most opposed was the first president Pomponne de Bellievre, who had succeeded Mathieu Mole at his death, in January 1656. He was won to the cause before his death, and he provided generous gifts to the new establishment. Lamoignon succeeded him, and continued his charitable efforts.> The years 1655 and 1656 passed with no real progress, except that several proposals were made to solve the practical problems of administering the proposed hospital. Finally a group of well-placed and zealous persons worked out a plan of administration which included a board of directors, and with God's blessing this plan was accepted. The Ladies of Charity, who under the wise guidance of Monsieur Vincent had first conceived the project, were greatly consoled to see it finally approved by public authority, and willingly gave their support to the newly created board. Monsieur Vincent for his part turned over the Salpetriere to them, as well as the Chateau de Bicetre which had been given him several years before as a home for abandoned children.

Besides turning over these buildings in favor of the poor, the Ladies of Charity contributed notable amounts of money, a quantity of linens, beds, and other furniture, even some made in the shops of Saint Lazare, to prepare the hospital for its opening. The whole enterprise was not carried out as an experiment, as Monsieur Vincent had suggested, nor would it depend on a choice made by the poor. Instead, to put an end to begging, all the poor of Paris were offered the choice--either work to earn their livelihood or else go to the general hospital.

Monsieur Vincent wrote the following in March 1657 to one of his friends:

Begging is outlawed in Paris, and the poor are being brought together in suitable places where they may be helped, instructed, and given something to do. It's a fine scheme but difficult. It has begun well, and thanks be to God, has won the everyone's approval. Many people have helped by giving generously, and others have donated their services. We have already collected ten thousand shirts and other things in proportion. The king and Parlement have powerfully supported the project even without our asking. They have even appointed the priests of our Congregation and the Daughters of Charity to serve the poor under the authority of the archbishop of Paris. We have not yet undertaken the actual work for we do not yet know for sure if it is the God's will for us. If we do begin this work it will at first be an experiment to see how it goes. <Ftn: *CED* VI:245.>

Monsieur Vincent learned that the priests of his Congregation would be in charge of the spiritual ministry to the poor of the hospital, but in a matter of this importance he felt it should be thoroughly considered before God. Even though he was advised that it would be expedient to accept this appointment, he prayed and then called together the priests at Saint Lazare to discuss the matter fully. He pointed out the pros and cons of the case, and then they, for several great and serious reasons, decided to excuse themselves from this responsibility. Letters patent had already been issued assigning this right exclusively to the priests, so a formal legal document was drawn up which renounced this right, to enable other clerics to take up the work.

Since the hospital was just about to open, and the directors and administrators were anxious to begin as soon as possible, Monsieur Vincent persuaded one of the priests, who came regularly to Saint Lazare on Tuesdays, to accept the

assignment as rector of the general hospital. <Ftn: Abelly himself.> This was done to avoid any delay in the opening of the hospital which might have resulted from the refusal of Monsieur Vincent to take over the spiritual care of the poor there. It would also ensure that the poor were adequately provided for right from the beginning. After serving for some time with other priests of the Tuesday Conference of Clerics giving missions in the various parts of the hospital with others from various churches of Paris, the rector was forced by illness to resign from the difficult position he had assumed. He submitted his resignation to the vicars general of Cardinal de Retz, archbishop of Paris. He appointed, in turn, another priest of the Tuesday Conference, a doctor on the faculty of the University of Paris. He has served as rector of the general hospital for some time with great success, offering missions in all houses of the institution as an expression of his dedication to the poor. <Ftn: This hospital annually housed twenty thousand poor.>

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

A Census of the Houses of the Congregation of the Mission Founded During the Lifetime of Monsieur Vincent

God planted the Congregation of the Mission in his Church as a mystic vine which was to bear fruit through his grace to sanctify a large number of souls. He willed that it extend its branches everywhere. The new growth was in the establishment of other houses, which in truth should be attributed to the will of God rather than to any human intervention. The one most responsible for cooperation with this design of God was Monsieur Vincent, but only after he was convinced that not to do so would be to resist the action of God.

We have already spoken of the three houses in Paris, that is, the College des Bons Enfants, Saint Lazare, and Saint Charles.

The first house outside of Paris began in Lorraine in the town of Toul at the invitation of Charles Chretien de Gournay, bishop of Scythia. At the time, he was administrator of Toul and afterwards became its bishop. This mission was established in 1635 in the house of the Holy Spirit with the approval of the religious who lived there. It was formally joined to the Congregation of the Mission, and this action was authorized by the king with letters patent and ratified by the Parlement.

Three years later, in 1638, Cardinal Richelieu, as a memorial of his piety and as a sign of his esteem for Monsieur Vincent and his institute, founded a house of the Congregation of the Mission in the city of Richelieu. This foundation bore the obligation of having missions preached not only in the diocese of Poitiers in which the city of Richelieu is located but also in Lucon, where he formerly was bishop. <Ftn: Armand Duplessis, Cardinal Richelieu, was bishop of Lucon from 1607 to 1624. Named cardinal in 1622, he resigned his diocese to give himself entirely to affairs of state. He died December 4, 1642, at age fifty-eight.> While awaiting the coming of other priests of the Congregation to Lucon the priests fulfilled the obligation of giving missions and were able to offer various other services. The cardinal completed his gift by leaving a sum of money for their maintenance.

Some time later, after the purchase of a house in Lucon around 1645, Monsieur Vincent sent three or four of his priests in response to the earnest request of Pierre de Nivelles, bishop of Lucon, who gave them full faculties to work in his diocese. They have remained there since, to the credit of the missionaries of Richelieu, who gave them a small sum to help in

their upkeep, and thus enable them to serve many souls more fully.

In the same year, 1638, another house of the Congregation was founded in Troyes, in Champagne, by the good offices of its late bishop, Rene de Bresle and of the late Commander de Sillery.

In 1640 Monsieur Vincent sent several priests of his Congregation <Ftn: To Annecy> to work in the diocese of Geneva in Savoy. This was in response to the earnest request of Juste Guerin, bishop of Geneva, coupled with the insistence of Mother de Chantal, foundress and first superioress of the Visitation Sisters, in the city of Annecy. The bishop hoped to preserve in the diocese by means of the missions the great blessings brought by Blessed Francis de Sales. Commander de Sillery, moved by a singular dedication to the memory of this prelate, set up a foundation for the support of the missionaries, who have remained there up to the present. Besides giving missions for the sanctification of the country people, their commitment has been to reform and train the clergy. They did this by the usual ordination retreats and by founding a seminary. It began in October 1641 to train the clergy in knowledge and virtue.

In the same year, 1641, Dominique Segulier, bishop of Meaux, authorized a house of the Congregation in the city of Crecy in Brie, to conduct missions in his diocese. This was founded in the king's own name by Monsieur [Pierre] Lorthon, counselor to the king.

The following year, 1642, saw the foundation and establishment of another house in Rome through the generosity of the noblewoman Marie de Wignerod, Duchess d'Aiguillon, niece of Cardinal Richelieu. She was zealous for God's glory and charitable towards her neighbor, especially the most neglected poor no matter where they lived. This virtuous woman had a special esteem and affection of Monsieur Vincent, who in turn greatly appreciated her help and friendship.

This same duchess arranged to support seven priest missionaries to give missions in her territory of Aiguillon and in the counties of Agenais and Condomois. The bishop of Agen <Ftn: Barthelemy Delbene.> arranged for them to start a house at Notre Dame de la Rose in his diocese, near the town of Sainte Livrade.

This same lady was responsible for supporting the new establishment in 1643 in the city of Marseilles, chiefly for the benefit of the poor unfortunates condemned to the galleys of France. The priests were to do all their usual good works in favor of the poor. Several years later the work was expanded by

the duchess in favor of the Christian slaves of the Barbary pirates.

In the same year, 1643, Alain de Solminihac, the late bishop, baron and count of Cahors, whose memory is held in such veneration in all the Church because of the eminent virtues with which his life was graced, brought the Congregation of the Mission to his diocese. <Ftn: 1593-1659. Born in Perigord, he became abbot of Chancelade near his home town. He worked strenuously for the reformation of that abbey and of others. He was named bishop of Cahors in 1636. He established a seminary for the formation of his clergy and entrusted it to Saint Vincent. He died in 1659, at age sixty-seven. Pope John Paul II beatified him in 1981.> He himself was noted for his pastoral vigilance, his zeal for the glory of God and for the salvation of the people of his diocese. He was sensitive to the singular graces he recognized in Monsieur Vincent and in his institute. He judged he would do a great service to his diocese by inviting the Congregation of the Mission to open a house in Cahors.

The late king, Louis XIII of glorious memory, acquired sovereignty over the Sedan region, but unfortunately it was deeply infected with heresy. He requested Monsieur Vincent to send some members of his Congregation to conduct missions that would instruct and confirm Catholics in their faith. For the most part these people were poorly educated and in constant danger of losing their faith because of their frequent contact with heretics.

To further this project His Majesty ordered that a large sum be given to Monsieur Vincent to underwrite the work of the missions. After the death of this great monarch, Louis XIV, his successor now gloriously reigning, upon the advice of the queen regent, his mother, preferred that the remaining money should serve as a foundation for a permanent house of the Congregation of the Mission. This was done finally by Eleonor d'Etampes de Valencay, archbishop of Reims.

The house at Montmirail, a small village in Brie in the diocese of Soissons, was founded in 1644 by the Duke de Retz. <Ftn: Pierre de Gondi, the eldest son of Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, and a former student of Saint Vincent.> Monsieur Toublan, his secretary, contributed some of his inheritance to this foundation.

Jacques Raoul [de la Guibourgere], then bishop of that city, established the house at Saintes that same year with the help of the diocesan clergy for the purpose of missions and a seminary.

The following year, 1645, another house was set up in the city of Le Mans, at the insistence of the bishop, Emeric de La

Ferte, and the cooperation of Monsieur Lucas, head of the collegial church of Notre Dame de Coeffort, a royal foundation in the city. This was done with the consent of the canons, who turned over the church, the house and its appurtenances to the Congregation of the Mission. This was confirmed by royal letters patent, and ratified by the authorities of the town.

In the same year, 1645, Achille de Harlay, bishop of Saint Malo, requested priests of the Congregation to work in his diocese. Monsieur Vincent sent several, and they were soon given the abbey of Saint Meen to live in. It should be remarked that the bishop was also abbot of this monastery, and the religious there agreed to the invitation. In fact, the house and its benefice was ceded to the missionaries. This transaction was authorized by letters patent from the king and later was approved by an apostolic bull of our holy father the pope, Alexander VII. <Ftn: CED XIII:387-95. April 4, 1658.>

We must not neglect to mention the foundation made in 1645 and the two following years in several remote locations. Having been pressed by the requests of some zealous and virtuous persons, but more so by his own charity, he sent some of his priests to remote places for various works of mercy, after obtaining the necessary approvals from the apostolic see. He sent men to Tunis and Algiers for the spiritual and temporal care of Christian slaves who, whether well or ill, were in great need. He sent others to Ireland to instruct and encourage the poor Catholics of this region oppressed by their heretical masters from England. His zeal put no limits on his charity. He sent other priests all the way to the island of Madagascar then called Saint Lawrence, located below the equator. Here the people lived either in idolatry or with no religion at all. This is a vast region covered with brambles that this steward of the Gospel sought to reclaim by the indescribable labor of his followers, several of whom have already succumbed. We should mention that Monsieur Vincent displayed a remarkable firmness and constancy in supporting these apostolic efforts, particularly in this infidel island and in Tunis and Algiers. This took place despite the enormous difficulties in these missions, with the accompanying losses he suffered. We shall refer in Book Two <Ftn: Ch. 1, sects. 7-9.> to the blessings God has poured out on these foreign missionaries and to the fruits they reaped, aided by his grace.

In the same year 1645, Cardinal Durazzo, the esteemed archbishop of Genoa in Italy, learning of the services rendered to the Church by Monsieur Vincent and the Congregation of the Mission in various places, chiefly Savoy and Rome, set about procuring the same benefit for his diocese. In response to his

earnest request to have some priests of the Congregation in the city of Genoa, Monsieur Vincent sent several, and they were warmly received. The archbishop, with considerable help from local priests, Baliano Raggio and Giovanni Cristoforo Moncia, and from the local nobility, underwrote the enterprise.

In 1650 the Congregation of the Mission was set up in the city of Agen by the bishop. He also had the priests assume the direction of his seminary.

In 1651 Monsieur Vincent sent some priests of the Congregation to Warsaw in Poland in response to the invitation of the pious and generous queen. In Book Two we shall see what remarkable things took place in this foundation that reveal Monsieur Vincent's generosity, his truly apostolic zeal, and his personal self-abnegation. <Ftn: Ch. 1, sect. 10.>

In this same year, 1651, Monsieur Vincent sent some of his priests to the Hebrides Islands to serve the abandoned poor of this region, located to the north of the kingdom of Scotland.

The following year, 1652, the Congregation of the Mission was established in the diocese of Montauban where Bishop Pierre de Bertier handed over to them the direction of the seminary besides the missions to be given in his diocese.

The house in the city of Treguier in lower Brittany, in 1654, was due to the kindness of Balthazar Grangier, count and bishop. He was aided in this by Monsieur Thepant, lord of Rumelin and canon of the cathedral church of Treguier, who endowed it.

In the same year Monsieur Vincent sent several of his Company to the town of Agde in Languedoc at the request of the count and bishop Francis Fouquet, who later became archbishop of Narbonne.

The same year also, Monsieur Vincent sent priests to Turin, capital of Piedmont, at the request of the Marquis de Pianezza, prime minister of the duke of Savoy. This latter was a man of singular piety and had a great desire to further the glory of God and the salvation of souls by establishing a house of the Congregation in Turin.

In 1657 the court was in Metz. Moved by her usual concern to further the public good, the queen mother thought that inviting Monsieur Vincent to send some missionaries to the city would be the most effective way to achieve this goal. <Ftn: See *CED* XII:4.> Accordingly, she returned to Paris, summoned Monsieur Vincent, and told him of her wishes. She also told him she wanted him to send missionaries to give a mission in Metz. He replied:

Your Majesty is perhaps not aware that the Congregation of the Mission was founded solely for

service to the poor. Our community is in Paris or other episcopal cities only to direct seminaries, to prepare young ecclesiastics about to be ordained, or to serve as a base for missions into the countryside, and not to preach, catechize, or hear the confessions of its citizens. However, another group of clerics who meet regularly at Saint Lazare can, if Your Majesty wishes, fulfill your wishes better than ourselves.

The queen replied that she was unaware that the priests of the Congregation of the Mission did not serve in the larger cities. As she had no desire to turn them from their proper goal as an institute, if the priests of the Tuesday Conference of Saint Lazare were to come, she would find this satisfactory. This actually occurred in the Lenten season of 1658. Monsieur Vincent chose more than twenty priests, all capable men. He then requested the late Father de Chandénier, a man of singular virtue and of good repute, to take charge of this new foundation. <Ftn: See below, ch. 49. The total was probably less; see *CED* VII:76, 92.> He was successful in this, carefully following the advice given him by Monsieur Vincent. He observed all the usual practices of the missions to guarantee success. When this virtuous priest reported the condition of the house to Her Majesty, she was so pleased that she decided to found a house of the Congregation of the Mission in Metz itself, but this did not happen until after the death of Monsieur Vincent.

In 1659 he sent several of his priests to Narbonne at the request of the archbishop, Francois Fouquet, who founded the house there.

The late Father de Sery of the Mailly family of Picardy had informed Monsieur Vincent several times in the past that he wished to contribute to the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission in Amiens. However, before this project could be completed, our holy priest had passed from this world. The mission was established, however, by Francois Faure, bishop of Amiens, who gave the priests the perpetual direction of his seminary. The good priest survived Monsieur Vincent only a short time, having requested that he be buried near him in the church of Saint Lazare.

The late Henri de Baradat, count and bishop of Noyon and peer of the realm, wished to have the Congregation of the Mission in his diocese and wrote to Monsieur Vincent with this intention. Monsieur Vincent did not think it appropriate at the time to accede to the request. Divine Providence reserved the fulfillment of this wish to his worthy successor, Francois de Clermont. He was not long in his diocese before he followed up on the request to have the Congregation of the Mission come.

This was accepted, and when the priests arrived, they were given the perpetual direction of the seminary of the diocese. This occurred in 1662.

It should be remarked that other prelates besides those in France itself wished to have the Congregation of the Mission in their dioceses for giving missions, working with those about to be ordained, and directing seminaries. Monsieur Vincent could not honor all their requests, either for lack of personnel or for other good and sufficient reasons. He did not care to attempt anything before the moment willed by God or beyond his own capabilities.

The priests of the Congregation of the Mission reaped the fruit of their labors, even here in this life. They saw their numbers increase like the stars of heaven, and the Congregation quickly became rooted in short time in various parts of the world.

Since the most ardent desire of the heart of Monsieur Vincent was that God should be glorified and that souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ should be saved, he was moved to profound gratitude that Providence had used him, a poor and miserable creature (as he believed) to bring about these things. The thought of all the works in which his Congregation was engaged did not give him a sense of accomplishment but rather one of deeper and deeper self-abasement. He continually offered his thanks to God that notwithstanding his own unworthiness and lack of ability he had been chosen as the instrument of divine mercy to bring about such blessings upon the world.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Monsieur Vincent Gives the Rules to his Congregation. What He Said on this Occasion

In 1658 Monsieur Vincent finished his work on the rules and constitutions for his Congregation. His advancing years and nearly uninterrupted infirmities had made him realize that in all likelihood he would not have too much time remaining to complete this task. Just as he was ever moved by love for his fellow priests in life, he hoped before his death that he might give them a token of his affection by leaving his spirit embodied in his rules and constitutions.

On Friday evening, May 17, 1658, Monsieur Vincent assembled his community of Saint Lazare and spoke most paternally and affectively on the matter of obedience to the rules.

Several of those present recalled his words on that occasion. We give a few extracts to show the spirit that animated Monsieur Vincent and the prudence, moderation, charity, and zeal with which he had prepared the rules of the Congregation.

He began by speaking of the reasons why his Congregation should appreciate and observe the rules.

It seems to me, that by the grace of God the rules of the Congregation of the Mission preserve us from sin and even from imperfections. They help us to procure the salvation of souls, to serve the Church, and to give glory to God. Whoever observes them as they should be observed avoids sin and all vices. He puts himself thereby in a state as required by God to be useful to the Church and to render to our Savior the glory due Him. What motives, gentlemen and my brothers, to avoid vice and sin, as much as human frailty will allow, to glorify God, and contribute to having Him loved and served upon earth. O Savior, what happiness! Words fail me.

Our rules appear ordinary, but they will bring him who observes them to a high degree of perfection. Not only that, this observance will help destroy sin and imperfections in others as well, just as it has done in ourselves. If the Congregation has progressed at all in virtue, or if anyone has been freed from sin or advanced along the road to perfection, has it not been because of its observance of the rules? If by the mercy of God the Congregation has produced any good in the Church through giving missions and by service to

the ordinands, is it not because we have followed the customs inspired by God and now formalized in these rules? What motives do we not have to observe them scrupulously, and how happy the Congregation of the Mission will be if we are faithful to them.

Another reason to live faithfully according to the rules is that they are drawn almost completely from the Gospel, as you can see. It will help us to conform our lives to the life our Savior led on earth. It is said that our divine Savior came and was sent by his Father to preach the Gospel to the poor: *Pauperibus evangelizare misit me*. <Ftn: Luke 4:18, citing Isa 61:1.> *Pauperibus*: to announce the gospel to the poor, just as by the grace of God our humble Congregation attempts to do. It is a great subject of humiliation and confusion that we have never had any other purpose than to announce the gospel to the poor, and the most neglected of the poor. *Pauperibus evangelizare misit me*. Yes, that is what we were founded for. Yes, gentlemen and my brothers, our portion is the poor. What happiness for us, to do just what our Savior said he had come from heaven to earth to do, and through which we hope some day to find our way from earth to heaven. To fulfill our ministry is to continue the work of the Son of God, who went out to the countryside to seek out the poor. Our institute attempts to do the same, to serve and help the poor, whom we must recognize as our lords and masters. Our simple but blessed rules oblige us to leave the major cities to imitate the action of Christ by going out to the villages and towns in search of the poor. See the happiness of those who observe these rules and so conform their lives and all their actions to those of the Son of God. O Lord, what motives do we not have to observe our rules faithfully, which leads us to such a holy and desirable end.

You have awaited these rules for a long while, gentlemen and my brothers, and we have deferred long in giving them to you, in part to imitate our Savior who began to do and then to teach: *Coepit Jesus facere et docere*. <Ftn: Acts 1:1.> He lived virtuously during the first thirty years of his life and spent only the last three in preaching and teaching. So also the community has striven to imitate him, not only in what he did but also in the manner in which he did it. The Congregation could say that it first had done and then

had taught: *coepit facere et docere*. It has been a good thirty-three years or thereabouts since we began, by God's help. All during that time, by God's grace, the same rules have been observed as those we give you today. You will find nothing new in them which you have not already been observing, with much edification. If you were given rules you have not already been observing you might expect great difficulty, but as it is you will find only what you have already been doing, with much fruit and consolation, for many years. For the future you will find the rules equally useful and helpful. We must imitate the Rechabites spoken of in Holy Scripture. They were so faithful to the traditions handed down by their fathers, even though nothing was actually written. Now that we have a written and published text, the Congregation has only to continue what it has observed for many years and bring the same fidelity to the future as it has displayed in the past.

If we had been given these rules right from the start, before we had a chance to practice what they prescribed, it would have been said they were more human than divine, more the fruit of human design than a work of divine Providence. Gentlemen and my brothers, these rules and constitutions have come, I don't know how, little by little, without plan or forethought. Saint Augustine's maxim was that if you couldn't trace the origin of a good thing you ought to ascribe it to God, recognizing him as the source and author. According to this, should not God be considered as the originator of all our rules, which came into being, I know not how, nor can we say when or why? O Lord, what rules! From whence do they come? Have I thought them up? Never, I assure you, gentlemen and my brothers; I never thought of our Company, nor even of the word 'Mission.' The Lord has done all that; men have had no part in it. For my part, when I consider the way it has pleased God to form our Congregation in the Church, I am beside myself. It all seems like a dream.

No it does not come from us. There is nothing human in it, but it comes exclusively from God. Would you call man-made what never entered into the mind of man to conceive, or what was never planned in any way whatsoever? Our first missionaries thought no more of

this than did I. In fact, it turned out differently from our expectations and hopes. Yes, when I think of all the various occupations of the Congregation of the Mission, I think it all a dream.

When an angel took the prophet Habakkuk to the far-off lion's den to console Daniel, and then brought him back to the place he originally was, did Daniel not think that it all had been a dream? If you ask me how the various practices of the community have started, or how the exercises and commitments have come about, I have to say that I do not know and cannot understand. Monsieur Portail, like myself, has seen the beginning of the Congregation. He can testify that we never thought of these things. Everything came about of itself little by little, one thing after another. Our numbers began to increase, and as they did, each new member strove to live a life of virtue. Gradually pious practices were introduced into our common life, and we began to observe a certain uniformity in our ministry. These practices were honored by all, and even to this day are respected, by the grace of God.

Finally, it was considered appropriate to put these matters down in writing, to become our rules. I hope the Congregation will regard them as coming from the Spirit of God, *a quo bona cuncta procedunt* ["from whom all good things come"], <Ftn: From the collect from the Fifth Sunday of Paschaltide.> and without whom *non sumus sufficientes cogitare aliquid a nobis, quasi ex nobis* ["It is not that we are entitled of ourselves to take credit for anything." 1 Cor 3:5.]

Gentlemen and my brothers, I am so astonished at seeing myself here giving you the rules when I don't know what has led me here. I seem to myself to be back at the beginning. The more I think of the rules the more they seem to me foreign to all human intervention, and the clearer it is that God alone inspired them for the Congregation. If anything at all comes from me, I fear that it will be just those items that will not be observed in future, nor will they produce the fruit we hope for.

After all this, gentlemen, what remains for me? I must imitate Moses, who gave the law of God to the people and then promised all sorts of blessings for those who observed it: blessings in their bodies, souls, goods, everything. Just so, gentlemen and my

brothers, we must hope for all sorts of graces and blessings for those who observe these rules which he has given you: blessings on your person, in your thoughts, on your projects, in your ministry, in your guidance of others, in your comings and goings. In a word, blessings in all things. I hope that the fidelity with which you have observed these rules and your patience while awaiting its written form will obtain from God's goodness the grace to observe them more easily and more perfectly in the future. O Lord, give your blessing to this small volume. Bestow on us the unction of your Holy Spirit so that all those who read it will be kept far from sin, detached from the world, committed to virtue, and united to you. <Ftn: CED XII:1-14.>

When he finished speaking, Monsieur Vincent had the priests come up to receive from his hand a small printed copy of the rules. Out of devotion they accepted the book on their knees. He preferred to put off until the next day distributing copies to the other members of the community, for it was already late.

When the distribution was completed, the assistant superior of the house <Ftn: Rene Almeras.> once more knelt and begged his blessing upon the entire Congregation. Monsieur Vincent in turn knelt and said in an affecting tone of voice the following words, revealing the depth of his concern for those present:

O Lord, you are eternal and unchangeable law. You govern the universe by your infinite wisdom. You are the only true source of all guidance, laws, and rules of right living. O Lord, bless those who have accepted them as coming from you. Give them, O Lord, the grace to follow them always and inviolably, even till death. In full confidence in your help and in your name, despite my total unworthiness as a poor sinner, I pronounce the words of blessing over our entire Congregation.

These, in part, were Monsieur Vincent's remarks on this occasion. He spoke them in a moderate voice, humbly, gently, and devoutly, but they touched the hearts of all who heard him. It seemed to them that they were with the apostles listening to the last discourse of Our Lord on the eve of his passion, at which he too gave a rule--the great commandment to love perfectly.

It is easy to gather from what was said, and ever more so by reading the rules of the Congregation of the Mission, that it began from three chief motives: first, to work at one's own sanctification by practicing the virtues taught us by the words and example of Our Lord; second, to preach the Gospel to the

poor, particularly to the most abandoned country people; third, to help the clergy acquire the knowledge and virtues appropriate to their calling. These are the goals of the Congregation of the Mission, expressed in the rules which Monsieur Vincent rightly said came from God, since they prescribed only what already was in the Gospel. Monsieur Vincent insisted that he could not explain how the rules came into being, but the member of his Congregation were well aware that Monsieur Vincent himself was a sort of living rule, for they saw in him a true reflection of Jesus Christ and of his precepts. They strove to imitate his example and walk in his footsteps. The rules had been observed long before they were written down, for he practiced them before committing them to paper, and his goodness and example led others to imitate him.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

Other Works of Piety in Which Monsieur Vincent was Involved Besides His Usual Duties

People well acquainted with Monsieur Vincent, aware of his zeal and the many opportunities brought about by divine Providence to exercise this virtue, can truly say that for thirty or forty years there were few important works of piety or charity especially in Paris in which he did not play some part by his advice or cooperation.

The house of Saint Lazare was a sort of magnet drawing anyone wanting to begin some new venture in service to the Church. Here Monsieur Vincent could be found to advise, help, or offer the cooperation needed for success.

This great servant of God was consulted almost continually by various people anxious to become involved in charitable works. His concerns were not confined to Paris, which alone would have given him ample scope for his work, but extended to many other places as well. He received many letters, some from people totally unknown to him, but who had heard of his virtue and especially his charity. This often gave them confidence to write. Besides the ordinary meetings he held at Saint Lazare at least three times a week, which he was most faithful in attending, he was often called to other meetings, whether of the bishops, theologians, or religious superiors, or others, of all sorts and types. Sometimes these meetings were held to resolve some pressing problem or to organize some activity, or to bring a remedy to a difficulty. In short, they sought to find a way to further the glory of God and the good of dioceses, communities, or families.

He was called upon to help restore peace within several religious houses, whether of men or of women, or to intervene in disputes and even lawsuits between individuals or entire communities.

His charity urged him to visit the sick or sorrowing. Sometimes he was invited, and other times he went of his own accord to extend his sympathy or consolation.

He was in charge of the houses of the Visitation of Saint Mary, established in Paris and Saint Denis as we have shown in an earlier chapter of this book. <Ftn: Ch. 16.> He took this obligation seriously, making periodic visitations and looking after all the spiritual needs of the sisters.

To all the foregoing we must add his constant solicitude for the welfare of all the houses of the Congregation. He received many letters every day from all over which he was

obliged to answer. Despite all his duties and the unusual interruptions to his routine, he regularly arose at 4:00 A.M. He went to the church where he remained for nearly three hours, sometimes longer, to make his mental prayer, offer mass, and recite part of the breviary. He was remarkable for the serenity of soul in his preparation and in his thanksgiving after mass. No matter what the press of business he never shortened this period of prayer, or if he did so rarely, it was because of some extraordinary circumstance.

During the day he was overwhelmed with visitors, but evenings were reserved for interviews with those living with him. He listened to each one with great kindness and with such attention, as though he had nothing else to do. He had to go out on errands of charity nearly every day, sometimes twice a day, from which he returned late. As soon as he got back he would fall on his knees for the recitation of the office. He recited it always in this posture when was home, as long as his health permitted. Afterwards he received those in the house who wished to speak to him, then he would read the daily correspondence or attend to other business. All this forced him to retire late, but he remained faithful to his usual hour of rising, provided he was not sick or indisposed.

Every year he was careful to make a spiritual retreat, despite all other preoccupations he had. He was persuaded before all else to look to his own salvation and the sanctification of his soul. He encouraged others in this same practice to which he was so faithful, both to help them by his own example or to stimulate himself to continue faithful. He wished to draw from the heart of God the light, strength, and graces necessary to accomplish worthily all the great enterprises he was responsible for. In this he imitated Moses of old. Among all the cares of leading a whole nation, he had no more secure place of refuge than the sanctuary where he was secure from the importunities of the people. Here he could devote himself to pleading before God for the people for his divine help and protection.

This is how the days and years passed for this great servant of God. We can truthfully say, in the language of Holy Scripture, that his days were full. Indeed they were full. We should even say they overflowed with his virtues and merits.

Whoever would cast a glance at the countless works of charity, which God inspired Monsieur Vincent to initiate and which continue to this day, cannot help being impressed. The houses of the Congregation of the Mission set up in so many places. The countless missions given, the seminaries where his priests labored, the retreats for ordinands, conferences and retreats which contributed so much to the development of the

clergy and the laity, the founding of the Daughters of Charity, the establishment of the Confraternities of Charity in so many city and country parishes, the activities of the Ladies of Charity in favor of all sorts of good works, the creation of hospitals, the care of the abandoned poor, especially in the provinces overrun by war--whoever, I say, considers all these activities must realize that no one could possibly do all this. The hand of God was ever with his faithful servant to bring about these works of mercy.

Although all glory is due to God who ever remains the first and principal author of all good, we must honor and esteem his gifts and graces in his servants, who have cooperated so faithfully in his goodness. Although we confidently affirm that Monsieur Vincent was so worthy of esteem and praise, in his own eyes he was the unworthy servant. When he was congratulated for initiating so many marvelous works of mercy, his humility led him to answer that he was the vile and contemptible mud that God formed into the bricks used in building his kingdom.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

A Reflection on the Pains and Afflictions Endured by Monsieur Vincent

It is essential, as the holy apostle says, that those who wish to live virtuously in the service of Jesus Christ must endure contradictions and suffering. They must be identified with him in sharing his cross and crown of thorns to be worthy to be called his follower. Those who reign with him in eternity must have suffered with him here below.

Monsieur Vincent, who devoted himself with such fidelity to serve the King of glory and strove to imitate his Lord in all things, could not rightly be deprived of the honor of sharing in the sufferings of the cross. We do not speak here of the austerities and mortifications he imposed upon himself which shall be discussed in Book Three. <Ftn: Ch. 19.> Instead we will take up here what he had to endure at the hands of other people, or possibly because of a singular disposition of divine Providence.

Because Monsieur Vincent was such a model of prudence, caution, deference, humility, and charity in his actions, and involved, we venture to say, beyond anyone else of our time in all sorts of charitable undertakings, he caused less opposition than would normally be expected. He could not avoid all poisonous criticism and even calumny, however, because it is not always possible to please both God and man at the same time. Also, he served in the royal council as dispenser of benefices, in which office he was obliged occasionally to refuse or even oppose the unjust pretensions of some petitioners. This, of course, aroused the wrath of those who were unsuccessful and who took great offense at this. This led to complaints, murmurings, reproaches, and sometimes downright threats and injuries, even in his own house. Complaints and calumnies were spread abroad in many quarters against his reputation and his honor. All these things were not the chief cause of pain for him, since from being broken by them one of his greatest joys was to be allowed to suffer affronts and injuries for the love and service of Jesus Christ.

More than once he experienced great loss and damage, chiefly during war time, when he witnessed Saint Lazare and all the small farms depending upon it overrun by the soldiers. They drove off the farm animals, stole provisions of wheat and wine, and still he counted this as gain, for he recognized this as in the designs of divine Providence. He was happy to sacrifice all exterior things to conform his spirit more thoroughly to the

holy will of God which was his main, or better, his only treasure.

These persecutions and annoyances, attacking either his goods or his honor, were painful to human nature but these did not cause him the most pain. It was rather the sight of France and nearly every other country in Christendom ravaged by war. War was the source of murders, violence, sacrilege, profanation of churches, blasphemy, and attacks against the person of Jesus Christ in the blessed sacrament of the altar. Within the Church schisms and divisions arose among Catholics because of the Jansenist heresy, and this gave great comfort to the enemies of the Church. In a word, the impieties, scandals and crimes he saw committed everywhere were as arrows which pierced his heart. Since the ills of his time seemed to be spread over the whole world we can well imagine how his soul was plunged into a sea of bitter sorrow.

Another source of sorrow for him to which he was very sensitive was the death of fellow servants of God, men committed to the spread of the kingdom. The number of such people was limited, and the Church's need so great, that he appreciated nothing so much as a valiant servant of the Gospel. The loss, therefore, of some of the best missionaries of the Congregation, either in France or elsewhere, touched him deeply. Many of these men were of an age or disposition such that they could still be expected to give great service to the Church. Five or six died in Genoa attending the stricken during an outbreak of the plague; four died in Barbary where they had gone to minister to the Christian slaves; six or seven died in Madagascar in their efforts to convert the infidels of that island; two died in Poland, where they had been sent to preach the Catholic religion. We do not mention the losses incurred during the wars when, tired out by their services to the poor in Paris and in the frontier regions, several succumbed.

The most regrettable losses to him in 1660, a little before his death, were the passing of three of his closest friends. The first of these was Monsieur Portail, a gift of God to him for almost fifty years. He was the first to be associated with him in the work of the mission, the first priest of the Congregation, later his secretary and first assistant. He was the one most involved in the government of the Congregation and the one in whom Monsieur Vincent had the greatest confidence.

Another loss was Mademoiselle le Gras, foundress and first superioress of the Daughters of Charity. God had favored her with great graces of salvation and of concern for the neighbor. She had a special regard for Monsieur Vincent and had a great confidence in him, and he in his turn appreciated her virtues

and especially her insights about the poor. He used to write often to her about matters touching the Daughters of Charity, but seldom saw her, except when necessary. She was of uncertain health and almost always ill. Monsieur Vincent used to say that for her last twenty years she had survived only by a miracle. She feared dying without having had the opportunity to receive the last rites from his hands. Yet God did not allow this to happen, either to test her virtue or to increase her merits. At the time Monsieur Vincent himself was so feeble he could hardly stand. She asked him at least to send a few words to console her in her last hours, but he preferred not to do so. Instead, he sent one of the priests of the Congregation as a living letter with the words that she was going to heaven before him, and he hoped soon to see her there. She died soon after. <Ftn: March 15, 1660. Soon after, the saint presided at two conferences on her virtues; CED X:709-36.>

Though he was sorely afflicted by her passing, he had been so prepared by previous experiences of great trials that he was able to accept her death with submission to the will of God and with serenity of spirit. He had always delegated the supervision of the Daughters of Charity to Monsieur Portail, even though he himself was the founder and superior. After these two deaths the direction of that Congregation again fell to him, at a time when he could no longer go out or do much work. This caused him even more worry.

The third person whose death that same year caused him much grief was Louis de Rochechouart de Chandénier, abbot of Tournus. He had retired to Saint Lazare several years before to be with his brother, the abbot of Moutier-Saint Jean. <Ftn: Claude-Charles de Rochechouart de Chandénier, who died May 18, 1710.> These two had been received at Saint Lazare in return for some weighty considerations, even in face of the resolution previously taken by the community not to accept boarders to live with them. The exception to this rule was for those houses where a seminary was attached. The two brothers were the worthy scions of the family of their uncle Cardinal de Rochefoucauld, whose memory is still held in such benediction in all the Church. <Ftn: Francois de la Rochefoucauld, born in 1558, became bishop of Clermont, a cardinal in 1607, and later was named bishop of Senlis. He resigned his see to work to reform monastic life. He died in 1645, attended by Saint Vincent.> These two priests were privileged by birth, but more so in their exemplary lives. The modesty of the one still alive does not allow us to speak with the same freedom as we do of his older brother. This priest served as a living example of the reformed commendatary abbots of the kingdom: mental prayer was his ordinary nourishment,

humility his ornament, mortification his delight, work his repose, charity his usual occupation, and poverty his favorite companion.

He was among the clergy who came each Tuesday to Saint Lazare for the weekly conference. He had helped out in several of the missions in favor of the poor and had been in charge of the one established in Metz at the invitation of queen mother in 1658. He also was visitor general of the Carmelites in France. Several bishops spoke to him about their wish to cede their dioceses to him, with the thought that his promotion to the episcopate would be advantageous to the Church. He expressed his gratitude but felt that God was not calling him to this exalted state. He preferred and actively sought to be at the beck and call of others rather than to rule over them.

The two brothers committed a good part of their revenues to the many poor of their region. They were aware, however, that holding multiple benefices was neither in keeping with the sacred canons nor conformable to the mind of the Church. In keeping with this thought, both surrendered all except one benefice apiece to provide for the poor. They would thus give an example so rare in our day yet so worthy of imitation.

These two worthy brothers joined two priests of the Congregation of the Mission on a trip to Rome towards the end of 1659, as arranged by Monsieur Vincent. Our holy father the pope, Alexander VII, was pleased to receive them, and the entire Roman court was edified at their modesty and virtue during their three or four months in Rome.

At this moment, the abbot of Tournus, who had decided even before this trip to present himself to the Congregation of the Mission as a candidate for membership, fell sick. He urged the superior of the Mission in Rome <Ftn: Edme (or Edmonde) Jolly, 1622-1697, entered the Congregation in 1646 after experience in the French diplomatic corps. With his experience in Rome before and after his ordination, he rendered immense services to the Congregation by his negotiations with the Holy See. The general assembly of 1673 elected him as the third superior general.> to receive him into the Congregation. He feared the priest might die before having the happiness of being numbered among the missionaries. His request was not granted, however, because of his state of health. It was thought better to have Monsieur Vincent receive him in Paris, if he could manage to return there. He seemed a little better towards August of the following year, 1660. He took leave of His Holiness and, with his brother, left for Paris with the resolution of persuading Monsieur Vincent to accept him into the Congregation. God rewarded this holy and generous resolution to leave all for his service. He

developed a new fever on the way and had to break his journey at Chambery in Savoy. His condition worsened, and in a few days he was in extreme danger. Finally, God called him from this world by a saintly death, to bestow upon him the crown of life.

Here is what the priest of the Mission <Ftn: Thomas Berthe.> who accompanied him wrote to Monsieur Vincent:

I had alerted you earlier to the sickness of Monsieur de Chandénier, abbot of Tournus, and the grave danger he faced. I now must tell you that it pleased God to call him to himself yesterday, the third of May, about five in the afternoon. His end was fashioned by his life, that is, saintly. I will fill in the details later when I have a little more time. I will tell you only, Monsieur, that he insisted several times that I should receive him among our number and give him the consolation of dying as a member of the Congregation of the Mission. In any case he planned on entering the Congregation once he had returned to Paris. I could not refuse him, and so I gave him the cassock of our Congregation in the presence of the abbot of Moutier-Saint Jean, his brother. <Ftn: CED VIII:288.>

Let us hear Monsieur Vincent on the same subject. He wrote to one of his priests in Barbary:

Six or seven years ago the two brother priests, the Fathers de Chandénier, retired to Saint Lazare. This was a blessing for the Congregation, for they were marvelous in their edification. A month ago it pleased God to call to himself the older of the two, the abbot of Tournus, a man more filled with the Spirit of God than anyone I know. He lived as a saint and died as one of us, a missionary. He had gone on a trip to Rome with his brother and two of our priests. On his way back to Paris he died at Chambery, but not before insisting that he be received into the Congregation. This was done. Previously he had made the same request to me several times, but as his status and virtue were above us, I did not accede to his wish. We were not worthy of the honor. Only our heavenly home is suitable to receive him as a missionary. Our houses on earth have inherited the example of his saintly life, to be both admired and imitated. I don't know what he saw in our poor Congregation that made him want to appear before God clothed in our wretched rags, bearing the name and attire of a priest of the

Congregation of the Mission. But it is as such that I commend him to your prayers. <Ftn: *CED* VIII:302-03.>

The body of the virtuous abbot was brought to Paris through the good offices of the abbot of Moutier-Saint Jean, who cherished and honored him as a brother taking the place of a father who had been such a consolation to him. He was buried in the church of Saint Lazare, where he awaits the general resurrection. No doubt his death was a great loss for the Church, for the Congregation of the Mission and especially for Monsieur Vincent. So true was this that he wept, a thing he rarely did. Thus God crowned the merits of his servant in the last years of his life by sending him these great sorrows, or rather three great occasions to heighten his virtue, in taking from him the three persons he loved so tenderly, so religiously, beyond all others.

CHAPTER FIFTY

Monsieur Vincent's Illnesses and the Saintly Use He Made of Them

To perfect the holocaust of the life of this holy priest and to consume all in him that was not for the honor and glory of his sovereign Lord, bodily sufferings had to complete the sacrifice begun in his spirit. Having permitted him to be subject to different infirmities during his life, God sorely afflicted him in his last years to show his great patience and to give the crown of life to his perseverance and his love.

In one of the earlier chapters we mentioned his having a robust physique, but one subject to several afflictions dating from the time he served in the de Gondi household. He fell ill while there and carried with him a chronic swelling of his legs and feet.

Besides that, he was sensitive to changes in the atmosphere, which brought on a rather constant low fever lasting three or four days, and sometimes two weeks or more. This did not affect his ordinary routine, however, for he rose at 4:00 A.M. as did the others, made his meditation in the church, and tended to his usual duties and business as though he were in perfect health. He called this ailment his little fever. It was helped only by severe perspiration for several days running, especially during the summer. During the hottest times, when even a sheet was too much cover at night, he was obliged to sleep under three blankets. He also had two metal tubs filled with boiling water at his side, and he spent the entire night this way. In the morning his bed was soaked in sweat, but he insisted on changing it himself, not allowing anyone else to touch it.

The remedy was doubtless not quite so bad as the disease, but it still was most inconvenient to Monsieur Vincent, who bore it with courage. The brother who watched over him felt the treatment was excessive because it kept Monsieur Vincent awake the whole night, and because the excessive heat during the already oppressive summer weather was most painful to endure.

These long sweats and lack of sleep, which he never made up during the day, weakened him considerably. This in turn caused him to fall asleep even while speaking to visitors, sometimes to people of a high station. He did violence to himself to resist this tendency, but instead of speaking of its cause, the lack of sleep during the night, he would attribute it simply to his miserable nature, a term he ordinarily used.

Besides this low fever, he also experienced a quartan fever once or twice each year. <Ftn: A fever, probably malarial,

occurring approximately every seventy-two hours.> During these times God used him for some of his greatest deeds, as we have already reported. Instead of resting in an infirmary, he worked with even greater application and blessing in the service of the Church and for the benefit and salvation of the poor.

He had a serious attack in 1645. During this illness his devotion led him to receive communion every day. The severity of the fever caused several hours of delirium during which he repeated words from the abundance of his heart, which showed the dispositions of his devout soul. Among others, he repeated these words often: *In spiritu humilitatis, et in animo contrito, suscipiamur a te, Domine.* That is, Deign, O Lord, to receive us, who come to you with a humble spirit and a contrite heart. <Ftn: Saint Vincent used these words in response to Father Jean Baptiste Saint Jure, S.J., a close friend, who had come to visit him in his illness.>

One event during this serious illness deserves mention. Monsieur Dufour, a priest of the Congregation from the diocese of Amiens, was sick in the same house. <Ftn: Antoine Dufour, born at Montdidier, was received a young priest into the Congregation of the Mission at Paris, December 31, 1639.> Learning that Monsieur Vincent was in danger of death, he prayed the same prayer as did David for Absalom his son, that God would take him in place of the father of his soul. We mention simply that as Monsieur Vincent began to get better, the illness of this good priest took a turn for the worse, and shortly after he died.

On the night this priest died, those attending Monsieur Vincent heard, at midnight, three knocks on the door of his room but, going to see who was there, found no one. Monsieur Vincent called a cleric of the Congregation, asked for his breviary, and then had him recite a section of the Office of the Dead, as though he were aware of the priest's death, although no one had said a word of this to him.

When he was in Richelieu in 1649, he suffered from a tertian fever, <Ftn: A fever occurring approximately every forty-eight hours.> but did not allow it to interfere with his usual duties, despite the long and violent attacks.

In 1656 he had another illness, which began with a fever that lasted several days but which ended by a swelling of one leg, confining him to bed for some time. He had to stay in his room for nearly two months. He was unable to stand and had to be lifted in and out of bed to be near a fire. Only in this sickness could he be persuaded to accept a room with a fireplace, which gave him some relief in his sickness.

From this time on, that is, from 1656 until his death in 1660, he had frequent attacks of fevers and other sicknesses. One Lent he was especially ill, hardly being able to eat at all. In 1658 he developed an eye infection which would not clear up. He tried several remedies without effect, until the doctor finally suggested his putting the blood of a freshly killed pigeon upon his eye. When the brother surgeon of the house of Saint Lazare brought a pigeon, Monsieur Vincent would not allow it to be killed despite all remonstrances. He said that to him this innocent animal represented his Savior, and besides, if God wanted him to be cured he certainly knew how to do so. This indeed is what happened.

About the end of 1658, as he was returning from the city together with another priest, the axle of the carriage in which he was riding broke, throwing him to the ground, where his head struck the roadway. He was incapacitated for a long time, and to make matters worse the fever returned several days after his fall. This reduced him to a state in which he himself thought he might be in danger of death.

So as not to weary the reader with a listing of all the other illnesses suffered by Monsieur Vincent from time to time to prove his virtue, it is enough to say there were few sicknesses he did not experience. God so willed it to increase his sympathy for his neighbor, especially his spiritual children. He never failed to visit the sick in the infirmary, edifying, consoling, and making them happy at his every visit. When he came upon someone who was discouraged or, because of the length or nature of his sickness, feared he was going to die, he would say a word of edification to help him raise his mind to God. Then Monsieur Vincent would ordinarily say, especially to the younger men:

Do not be too concerned, brother. I had this same illness in my youth, and I survived. I had shortness of breath, but no longer; I suffered from rupture, but the Lord has cured me; I had headaches, but they have passed; difficulties with my lungs and a troubled stomach which I have overcome. Have patience (he used to say), your troubles will pass and God will find use for you. Let things develop, and resign yourself to him in peace and tranquility.

We might call the most serious of all the maladies of Monsieur Vincent a sort of martyrdom which finally claimed his life. Yet it brought him closer to Jesus Christ in imitation of his sufferings as he always had been in imitation of his virtues and good works. This condition was the swelling of his feet and legs, which troubled him for forty-five years. Sometimes the

pain was so severe he could not stand or walk, and at other times his legs were so inflamed he was obliged to keep to his bed. At this time, in 1632, when he began to live at Saint Lazare, he acquired a horse because Saint Lazare was some distance from the city, and at this time he began to be involved in a multitude of enterprises which continued until his death. This horse served him well until 1649, when the trouble with his legs increased greatly. It was brought on by the long trip he had made to Brittany and Poitou, and it became impossible for him to mount or dismount. He would have been forced to remain at Saint Lazare, as he had resolved to do, were it not for an order of the late archbishop of Paris which obliged him to use a small carriage.

This swelling of the legs increased, affecting even the knees by 1656, so he could stand only with great pain and walk only with the help of a cane. Later, in 1658, one of his feet developed an ulcer and this added to the difficulty with his knees, preventing him from leaving the house from 1659 on. For some time he continued to come down from his room for the prayers of the Church and to celebrate holy mass, as also to attend the Tuesday Conferences held at Saint Lazare. As to the mass, it came to the point that he could no longer mount the steps of the altar. He was obliged to put on and take off the vestments at the altar itself. This led him to remark with a smile that he had become a great lord, for only prelates dressed at the altar.

Towards the end of 1659 he was obliged to offer mass in the infirmary chapel. By 1660 his legs became so bad he was no longer able to offer mass. He continued to attend, however, until the day of his death, despite the pain he felt in going from room to chapel, walking with the help of crutches.

His strength lessened daily, for he ate almost nothing. He did not want anything special brought to him, especially anything fancy. His doctor and some well-placed and pious friends persuaded him to take some broth and chicken they had brought. After one or two times, however, he said these things did not agree with him, and that he preferred not to have them brought in future. All the same he continued to tend to business, and looked after all things according to his custom.

This good servant of God was reduced to walking only with the help of crutches and with indescribable pain. There was always the danger of falling, for he could hardly move his legs. In July 1660, he was urgently requested to allow the room next to his to be made into a chapel so he could hear mass without leaving his room. He would not hear of it and gave as his reason that such domestic chapels must never be created without

overriding necessity, which he did not admit to in his own regard.

He was prevailed upon to allow a chair to be made in which he could be carried from his room to the infirmary chapel to avoid such great pain of walking and to obviate the possibility of falling, as he went each day to attend mass. He resisted the suggestion of the chair until August, when he was no longer able to walk, even with crutches. He finally consented to having the chair made. He began to use it on the feast of the Assumption of the most blessed Virgin and continued to do so for about six weeks, until his death. He regretted the inconvenience he caused the two brothers who carried him, and he never wanted them to carry him any farther than the chapel, about thirty or forty paces away.

Certainly, if this venerable old man had no other illnesses than having to remain seated every day from morning till evening for two years, and especially the last year, practically without being able to ease his pains, it would have been enough to try his patience. If we add to this the trouble he experienced with his swollen knees and the ulcerated feet for which there seemed to be no relief we can appreciate the true martyrdom he endured. Besides all these difficulties, God allowed still another problem to make him resemble even more his Master, a man of sorrows. He experienced a great difficulty in passing his water during the last year of his life, and this caused him much suffering and inconvenience. He was unable to rise from bed or use his legs. His effort to rise by pulling on a rope attached to a bracket in his room caused him much pain. He was never heard to utter any complaint, but only some aspirations to God, such as "Ah my Savior! My blessed Savior!" or other like expressions which he pronounced devoutly, casting his eyes upon a small wooden crucifix placed near his bed to console him.

Amid all the suffering he endured throughout his hard and austere life, he never wanted to sleep on a soft bed. He preferred a straw mattress to pass five or six hours of the night, not so much to take his rest as to find a new source of suffering. Fluid drained from the ulcers on his legs during the day in such abundance that it sometimes left stains on the floor. At night it would settle in his knees, causing him great pain and leading to his increasing weakness.

Even in this condition he continued to apply himself to the direction of his Congregation and to the other groups he was responsible for. He had his priests represent him in places he was too weak to attend, but he would instruct them in what they were to do and say. He received a large number of letters which he read and answered. He called together the officers of the

house and his assistants to speak with them, either all together or in private as the situation demanded. He asked how things were going and deliberated with them and gave orders as he saw they were needed. He sent his priests to the missions, but not before calling them together to discuss how they were to make themselves useful and efficacious in their new assignment.

With all these efforts to continue his activity, and with his sufferings, his strength lessened so that he could apply himself and speak only with much pain. Despite this, he would still talk for a full half hour or more with such vigor and grace that those who heard him were astonished, they said later, for they had never heard him speak with such order and energy. What is most remarkable is that in the case of both his own confreres as well as those from outside who came to see him, he received them politely, with a smile and with agreeable words, just as though he were in perfect health. If asked about his illnesses he would make light of them, saying they were as nothing compared with the sufferings of our Lord, and much less than he deserved. With this he would turn the conversation to any ill his visitor might have, showing more concern for them than for his own difficulties.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

His Preparation for Death

Both Monsieur Vincent and his confreres were well aware of his approaching end, but with quite different sentiments. His brethren and all who loved him dreaded this separation and felt a deep regret at seeing it so near. On the other hand, this saintly old man, like another Simeon, awaited his last hour with joy. He showed this by his serene and even joyful countenance, accepting his sufferings in a spirit of penance and humility. He longed for that life in which he hoped to possess his God, invoking his aid in his heart and uniting himself interiorly to his holy will. He put his body and soul into God's hands to dispose of according to his good pleasure for time and for eternity. His whole life was a constant preparation for dying well, by his practice of the virtues, his exercises of piety, and the works of charity that filled all his days. These were steps along the way, leading to the final blessed hour of his death.

He had over a long period adopted the custom of reciting the prayers for the dying after his daily mass, preparing himself in advance for his own departure from this life. He made use of this practice every morning, as a remote preparation for death, and he did something similar in the evening, as the following episode will show.

Shortly before his death, a priest of the house of Saint Lazare wrote to another priest of the Congregation. He told him that Monsieur Vincent had not much longer to live, and it appeared likely that he would pass away soon. Without more thought he gave this letter to Monsieur Vincent to read before sending it off, as was the custom in the Congregation. Monsieur Vincent took the letter, saying he would read it later, which he did. He wondered why the priest would put this about his coming death in a letter he was sure to read. A person other than Monsieur Vincent would have focused on the imprudence of the author, but Monsieur Vincent thought perhaps this priest was attempting to do a good office towards him in alerting him to his condition. He even considered, in his humility, that he may have given the priest some reason for writing so, without knowing when or how. He called for him, thanked him for this warning, and begged him to have the charity to alert him to any other of his faults. The priest replied that he was not aware of any other. Monsieur Vincent responded:

As to the warning you gave me about my approaching death, I must tell you simply that God has given me

the grace to think little of this matter. I must tell you not to be scandalized in not seeing me make any extraordinary preparation for death. For the last eighteen years I have never gone to bed without putting myself into the disposition to appear before God that very night.

This priest once more excused himself for his indiscretion. He assured Monsieur Vincent he had no intention of warning him of his approaching end, but only that he had not thought of what his letter contained when he gave it to him. He reported on all that had passed between the superior and himself at a later time. He knew too well the virtuous life of Monsieur Vincent to have any doubts that he would be perfectly prepared for death, just as he was of his acceptance of God's will in all things. Since these events, a letter was found in Monsieur Vincent's own hand, written twenty-five years before, containing these sentiments:

I had a serious fall two or three days ago, enough to make me think about death. By the grace of God I adore his holy will, and I accept it with all my heart. Examining myself to see if I had any regrets, the only thing that came to mind was that we have not yet written our rules. <Ftn: CED I:291.>

As stated in the Gospel, Monsieur Vincent anticipated the coming of his Lord by having, for a long time, his loins girt and a burning torch in his hand. His last hour was almost constantly before his mind. Several years before his death he used to say to his confreres, "One of these days the miserable body of this old sinner will be put in the earth where it will return to dust, and you will walk upon it."

When he spoke of his many years he would say:

For how many years have I have abused the grace of God! *Heu mihi quia incolatus meus prolongatus est!* ["Woe to me that my dwelling has been prolonged."] <Ftn: Ps 120:5.> Alas, O Lord! I have lived such a long time because there has been no amendment in my life. The number of my sins has kept pace with the number of my years.

When he would announce to his community the death of one of his missionaries, he would usually add: "You leave me, O my God, and you call your true servants. I am those weeds which spoil the good grain of the harvest, and yet see me taking up space uselessly (*ut quid terram occupo* ["Why should I clutter up the ground?"]) <Ftn: Based on Luke 13:7.> But not my will, O God, but yours be done."

He often spoke to his confreres about death as a salutary thought, and exhorted them to prepare for it by their good deeds. He assured them that this was the best and surest means to ensure a happy death. He wanted this thought of death to be joined to a great confidence in the goodness of God, far from any anxiety or worry. This was the advice he gave to a person deeply troubled about death, and who had it constantly in her thoughts. He advised, in a letter he wrote on this matter:

The thought of death is good, and our Lord counseled and recommended it, but it must be moderated. It is neither necessary nor expedient that you have this thought constantly in mind. Two or three times a day would suffice, without dwelling too long a time even then. If you find yourself upset, you should not dwell on the thought at all but gently turn your mind away.

His long and serious illness became known in Rome, and also that even in this condition he continued to recite the breviary. As a result, the Sovereign Pontiff, Pope Alexander VII, aware of how much this great servant of God meant to the entire Church, sent an Apostolic Brief dispensing him from this obligation, even though he had not requested it. At the same time Cardinals Durazzo, archbishop of Genoa, Ludovisio, grand penitentiary of Rome, and Bagni, formerly nuncio to France, all whom were in Rome at the time, wrote urging him to take care of himself, showing the esteem they had for the person of Monsieur Vincent.

We give here only the letter of Cardinal Durazzo, because it was the first one received, and the others are much the same as his.

The activities of the priests of the Congregation of the Mission in favor of the neighbor derive from their following the directions and example of their superior general. For this reason all right-minded persons will pray God to prolong his life and give him perfect health to prolong the great good he has done. And since I take such keen interest in the happy progress of this holy institute and I have such a tender affection for your person, being informed of your age, trials, and merits, please take full advantage of the dispensation of His Holiness to give over the government of your dear confreres and to leave off all preoccupations which might prove harmful to your valued life and continued service of God. From Rome, September 20, 1660. <Ftn: *CED* VIII:456-57.>

All these precautions came too late. The victim was about to be consumed. God willed to relieve this faithful servant of

all the pains and troubles he had experienced in rendering all honor and service to his divine majesty during his long life. Before finally calling Monsieur Vincent from this life, he gave him the grace of leaving the Congregation of the Mission and all the other companies he had established in the best possible condition.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

Events Surrounding the Death of Monsieur Vincent

This faithful servant of God in his lingering illness awaited, like another Simeon, the happy hour when his divine Redeemer would deliver him from this body of death that held his soul in captivity. If this was deferred, it was only to fill up his merits by continuing to exercise his patience and other virtues he practiced so worthily, and to complete the crown prepared for his faithful life. When this was accomplished, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation willed to give him the supreme prize, the death of the just. To put it better, this would end his dying here below to begin the true life of the just with the saints in a blessed eternity.

Sacred history tells us that when God called Moses to the summit of Mount Nebo, he commanded him to die there. The holy patriarch submitted to the will of God. He died that very hour, not through any sickness but purely through his obedience. "And he died," says Holy Scripture, "by the mouth of the Lord," <Ftn: Deut 34:5.> that is to say, receiving death as a singular favor, a kiss of peace, from the mouth of his Lord and God.

If it be permitted to compare the graces God gave to his saints to what he gave his dearest servants, leaving aside any judgment about their merits, we may say that by a special mercy he conferred a similar gift upon his faithful servant Vincent de Paul, who had ever lived in entire and perfect dependence on his holy will. His death was not so much the result of fevers or other serious illness but rather a sort of obedience and submission to the divine will. His death was so peaceful and tranquil that it seemed a gentle sleep rather than a death. To express what occurred with this holy man, we might say he fell asleep in the peace of his Lord, who willed to anticipate the choicest blessing of his divine compassion and to place on his head a priceless crown of glory. This was the reward God wished to give for his life of fidelity and zeal. He had consumed his life in the cares, labors, and fatigues of God's service, but completed it happily in peace and tranquility. He voluntarily deprived himself of all repose or satisfaction during his life to procure the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and the advancement of his glory. In dying he found a true repose by entering into the joy of the Lord. This is how it came about.

Seeing his end approaching, Monsieur Vincent disposed himself interiorly for this last passage by continuing to practice those virtues he considered most agreeable to God. This was detachment from all created things, as much as charity

permitted, to raise his heart more perfectly to the Principle of all good. On September 25, towards noon, he slept in his chair, something that was happening now more often because of his lack of sleep during the night, as well as his great weakness, which seemed more pronounced. He thought of this sleep as a sort of advance guard of his approaching death. When someone asked why he slept so much he remarked with a smile that it was the brother coming to meet the sister, by which he meant sleep as the brother awaiting sister death.

On Sunday, September 26, he had himself carried to the chapel for mass and communion, as he did every day, but when he returned to his room fell into a deeper sleep than usual. The brother attending him awakened him after some time, spoke to him briefly, but saw that he immediately fell into the same deep sleep. He alerted the director of the house, who had the doctor called, but he found Monsieur Vincent in such a weakened state he felt no further remedy would be effective. The doctor advised the administration of the sacrament of extreme unction, but before leaving he was able to awaken his patient. In his usual way he responded with a smiling and affable countenance, but was so weak he could say only a few words, but unable to finish what he wanted to say.

Later, one of the principal priests of the Congregation came to see him, asking for his final blessing upon all members of the community, both those present and those absent. He attempted to raise his head and said the first part of the blessing in an audible voice, but it trailed off in the second. Towards evening, as he became increasingly weaker and apparently lapsing into the last agony, he was administered the sacrament of extreme unction. He passed the night calmly, in almost constant communion with God. When he lapsed into unconsciousness only a word addressed to him could rouse him, while all other words seemed to have no effect. Among the pious aspirations suggested to him from time to time, he seemed to respond best to these words of the psalmist: *Deus in adiutorium meum intende*, ["God come to my assistance"] which were often repeated. He would respond *Domine ad adjuvandum me festina* ["Lord make haste to help me"]. <Ftn: Ps 70:2.> He continued to do this until his last breath, imitating the great saints, fathers of the desert, who regularly used this same short prayer to show their dependence on the sovereign power of God, the constant need they had of his graces and mercy, their hope in his goodness, and the filial love which moved their heart. They proved their desire to seek God always as their good Father, never fearing to weary him by their insistent prayers, but showing a great and perfect confidence in his infinite love.

A virtuous priest of the Tuesday Conference, a great friend of Monsieur Vincent, was at Saint Lazare at the time on retreat. <Ftn: Father Le Prestre, one of the most zealous members.> He heard of the extremity to which Monsieur Vincent was reduced and went to visit him in his sickroom shortly before he expired. He asked for a blessing upon all members of the conference, to leave his spirit with them, and to obtain from God that their group never depart from the way of virtue inspired and communicated by Monsieur Vincent. The response was in his usual humble way, *Qui coepit opus bonum, ipse perficiet* ["He who has begun the good work in you will carry it through to completion"]. <Ftn: Phil 1:6.> Shortly after, he quietly passed from this life to a better one with no agitation whatsoever.

On Monday, September 27, 1660, at 4:30 A.M., God called him to himself, just at the hour his confreres were beginning their meditation to attract God to themselves. This was the very hour and the very moment he was accustomed, for over forty years, to invoke the Holy Spirit upon himself and his confreres. At that hour, this same adorable Spirit brought his soul from earth to heaven, as we so confidently hope from the infinite goodness of God, considering his holy life, his zeal for the glory of God, his charity for the neighbor, his humility, his patience, and all the other virtues he practiced right up to the time of his death. His life gives us good reason to believe in the infinite goodness of God. This faithful servant of his divine majesty could well say in this hour of his death, in humble thanks for his graces, and in imitation of the holy apostle, that he had fought courageously, had completed his course, had preserved an inviolable fidelity, and there remained only that he receive the crown of justice from the hand of his sovereign Lord.

After breathing his last, his appearance did not change. He retained his usual gentle and serene expression, seated in his chair as though sleeping. He had been sitting there, fully clothed, the last twenty-four hours of his life, for those present felt there would be more harm done if they attempted to move him.

He died without a fever, without any single significant event, but by a seeming gradual weakening of nature, like a lamp going out as the oil is used up. His body did not become rigid but remained pliable as before. An autopsy removed all the principal organs, all of which were found to be healthy. A growth, the size of an *ecu*, had formed in his spleen, which the doctors and surgeons found quite extraordinary. This suggested an intervention of divine Providence in his favor, for this growth was spongy and soft, serving as a reservoir for melancholic humors. Normally, when these discharge, they release

such vapors to the brain that the imagination is flooded with illusions, and sometimes the judgment is adversely affected. God, who destined Monsieur Vincent for such signal services to his Church, seems to have exempted Monsieur Vincent from this natural process. God never allowed false lights or erroneous impressions to influence him. He was above all such weaknesses. He had a sound judgment and knew well how to discern in all things the good and the evil, the true and the false, the certain and the doubtful, as we saw throughout his life.

He was waked the next day, September 28, until midday, in the meeting hall and then in the church of Saint Lazare, when the divine service as celebrated, followed by his interment. In attendance were the Prince de Conti, Archbishop Piccolomini, papal nuncio and archbishop of Caesarea, and several other prelates, several pastors of Paris, and a great number of priests and many religious of various orders. <Ftn: Among these were Jacques Benigne Bossuet and Armand de Montmorin, archbishop of Vienne. This latter requested permission to look one last time on the saint's face before the slab was fixed on his tomb. As he did so, he kissed Saint Vincent's hands.> The Duchess d'Aiguillon and several other lords and ladies honored his memory by their presence, not to mention a large crowd of the people. His heart was preserved in a silver urn, given by the duchess. His body was placed in a leaden coffin, enclosed in another of wood, and was buried in the middle of the choir in the church of Saint Lazare. This epitaph was placed on the stone: *Hic jacet Venerabilis Vir Vincentius a Paulo, Presbyter, Fundator seu Institutor, et primus Superior Generalis Congregationis Missionis, nec non Puellarum Charitatis. Obiit die 27. Septembris anni 1660. Aetatis vero suae 85.* ["Here lies the venerable Vincent de Paul, priest, founder or institutor and first superior general of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity. He died September 27, 1660, at the age of eighty-five"].

The priests of the Tuesday Conference of Saint Lazare whom Monsieur Vincent brought together and directed for so many years, held a solemn service some time later in the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois at Paris. Bishop Henri de Maupas du Tour, formerly of Le Puy and now of Evreux, had a special veneration and affection for the great servant of God and gave the funeral oration with as much zeal as learning and piety. He was listened to with a singular admiration and edification by all his audience, composed of a large group of prelates, clergy, religious, and an enormous gathering of other people. He could not say all he wanted, even though he spoke for over two hours.

As he said himself, his subject was so vast he would have required a whole Lenten series to do it justice.

Several cathedral churches, Reims among them, offered solemn masses for his happy repose, as did many parish churches and religious communities. Many individual priests of Paris and other places in France also offered masses in appreciation of his charity and in thanks for what he had given to the entire Church.

End of Book One

