

The Priestly Journey of St. Vincent de Paul The Beginnings: 1600-1612

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On the 23 of September of 1600 he (Vincent) was advanced to the holy order of priesthood. Since he lived until the 27 of September of 1660, one can deduce he was a priest of the church of Jesus Christ for 60 years. God knows what the dispositions and feelings of his heart were when he received the sacred character. If trees can be known by their fruits and causes by their effects, when one sees the perfection and sanctity with which this most worthy priest exercised his priestly functions, then one can believe with complete certainty that, in the moment in which he was consecrated a priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, eternal priest and prince of priests, poured out abundantly upon him (Vincent) the fullness of his priestly spirit, and that spirit gave him such lofty thoughts about that sacred character that he could always speak about it with wonder as something that could never be appreciated enough.¹

Few readers today subscribe to this idyllic Abellyan version of Vincent de Paul's accession to the priesthood. Nevertheless, one must grant to the good bishop of Rodez, despite his lack of critical judgement, that his vision possesses a quality which other writings on this topic frequently lack: it makes sense. At bottom, what Abelly does from the first pages of his biography is trace in his own way the profile or outline of the priestly journey of Vincent de Paul.

Our knowledge of the saint has advanced greatly since 1664. Because of that, in order to discover to what degree Abelly's description of his feelings at the moment of priestly ordination corresponds to reality or not, one must deal previously with some difficulties.

An Ordination under a Cloud

Curiously, the first of these problems arises from Abelly's narrative itself. Through it we know the idea of guiding the child Vincent towards the priesthood came from his father; and he did it for the purpose of gaining for him and, indirectly, for his other children, a social position that would better the precarious family economy.²

¹ L. Abelly, *La Vie du venerable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul, Instituteur et premier Supérieur Général de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 3 books, Paris, 1664. L. 1, c. 3, p. 25.

² L. ABELLY, *ibid.* L. I, c. 2, p. 32.

Here we have a sure fact to indicate the point of departure of St. Vincent's priestly journey: it was not begun because of a mystic or even, stretching the analysis, a strictly religious impulse. What motivated those who guided the young villager of the Landes towards the priesthood was a human — all too human — consideration of the benefits of the priestly state. This situation was not unusual either in that epoch or in succeeding ones: until well into the twentieth century, all over Catholic Europe, entering the ecclesiastical state was for many poor adolescents — and their families — almost the only way of rising above poverty. To reject as unworthy all these vocations begun because of a self-serving family consideration would be to condemn whole generations of priests. What we must ask ourselves is whether these same motives were the only ones that interested Vincent. Of course, we cannot know with certainty whether at the early age of twelve or fifteen the young Vincent was capable of his own thoughts on the subject. But neither do we have any idea of the evolution the young aspirant must have undergone in the course of his years of preparation and study in Dax, Toulouse and Saragossa.³ What seems most probable is that years later, after his father's death, when Vincent was on the threshold of sacred orders, he was conscious of the responsibilities he was assuming and quite aware of his motives. And there is no reason to doubt that his feelings had been purified in an ever more spiritual sense, without, however, discarding material aspirations and expectations. As Pierre Defrennes writes: "without trying to be subtle it can be said with all likelihood that he (Vincent) obeyed the promptings of fortune as well as those of the Holy Spirit."⁴

Next we must face the problem of the irregularity of Vincent's ordination at nineteen or twenty years of age. In 1922 Coste showed Vincent had not been born in 1576, but rather, as he believed, in 1581; and therefore he had been ordained at the age of nineteen, an irregular age according to the canons of Trent.⁵ This fact changed drastically the generally held perspective about St. Vincent's priestly ordination. The idea quickly took root that the young Vincent de Paul was a long way from being from the beginning the ideal priest his devoted first biographer painted.⁶

The problem of this irregularity must be judged in the light of the customs of that time and the juridic-ecclesiastic reality of the moment. We know, on the one hand, that in France at the beginning of the 17th century early ordinations were frequent; and on the other hand, that in 1600 the canons of Trent had not been promulgated in France, nor would they be until 1615. In these circumstances being ordained before the

³ Vincent's stay and studies in Saragossa, which we have always defended, have gained acceptance among recent authors, including Frenchmen, such as BERNARD PUJO: *Vincent de Paul, le précurseur*, Paris, 1998, 30-31; 314, notes 6 and 7. See also BERNARD KOCH, *La Bibliothèque de Saint Vincent vers 1611-1616*, 3.

⁴ PIERRE DEFRENNES, "La vocation de Saint Vincent de Paul : Étude de psychologie surnaturelle," Paris: *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* XIII, (1932), 391.

⁵ PIERRE COSTE, *La vraie date de la naissance de Saint Vincent de Paul, Dax, 1922*. In this case it makes no difference whether St. Vincent was born, as I think, in 1581 or in 1580. Cf. JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, "El nacimiento de San Vicente de Paúl: Preguntas en torno a una fecha," *En Semana Vicenciana de Salamanca* (10^o), Salamanca, 1981, 147-174. Both 19 and 20 years of age are irregular.

⁶ ANTOINE REDIER, *La vraie vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, Paris, 1927. There is a Spanish translation: *Vicente de Paúl, todo un carácter*; trans. from the 2nd French Edition by Luis Huerga, Santa Marta de Tormes, Salamanca, 1977.

age of 24 could perfectly well be understood as an act authorized by custom, and not as a transgression or a sin. Moreover there is the fact, still without a satisfactory explanation, that the dimissorial letters of both subdiaconate and diaconate, as well as those of priesthood expressly state that the candidate had the legal age.⁷ A conscious deception by the interested party before the authorities? A deliberate falsification by the signers of the documents? But could not one as well think about a hypothetical dispensation for age obtained from Rome? In reality, there is no evidence that allows us to favor one explanation over another. All the hypotheses elaborated to explain the fact, including the most favorable one we just mentioned, are no more than conjectures without documentary support. From Vincent's personal point of view, was not the authorization by legitimate authorities enough for his peace of conscience?

The third problem comes from the place of his ordination. We know for a fact the young deacon was promoted to priesthood in Château-l'Évêque by Bishop François de Bourdeille, Bishop of Périgueux who had his residence there.⁸ There has been much speculation about this fact. Why did Vincent go to be ordained in a place relatively far from his native Diocese of Dax, and from his then place of residence in Toulouse? A novelistic biographer, Antonio Redier, went so far as to affirm he had done so to better hide his irregular situation, and precisely before a "blind and dying" bishop. The allegation of blindness is no more than an exaggeration, and that of dying is just a manner of speaking. In fact Bishop Bourdeille would die a month after ordaining Vincent, on the 24th of October of the same year. But we have no reason to believe he was considered moribund a month before. The facts are: 1) Vincent's dimissorial letters were emitted a year earlier on the 13th of September of 1599, and they authorize him to be ordained by the bishop of his choice. There is no hint of a precipitous ordination. 2) The ordination did not take place in the bishop's private chapel, but rather in the Church of St. Julian, which served as the de facto cathedral, all of which gives the lie to a almost hidden ordination. 3) It was not a private ceremony, but rather a general and pontifical ordination with the presence of assistants to the bishop, canons, etc.

It would seem difficult to deceive so many witnesses simultaneously. Another well intentioned hypothesis points to a more or less close relationship between ordinand and bishop by means of students of the former related to the latter. More recently a thesis diametrically opposed to Redier's has become established — that Vincent sought out François de Bourdeille as a model bishop "of the group of irreproachable and combative prelates," the best patron for a young man in need of acquiring the reputation of an exemplary priest.⁹ We will continue to be uncertain of

⁷ SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL: Correspondence, Entretiens, Documents; Ed. published and annotated by Pierre Coste, Prêtre de la Mission, Paris, 1920-1925, 14 v. Cited from here on as SVP XIII, 3, 5 and 6.

⁸ SVP XIII, 7: The ordination in Château-l'Évêque has been studied from different points of view by various authors, to whom we refer for the lines which follow. ABBE GRANGER: Ordination de Saint Vincent de Paul dans l'église de Château-l'Évêque, New edition, Périgueux, 1884. The 1st edition is from 1872. F. CONTASSOT, "Saint Vincent de Paul et le Périgord," Annales (1949-1950) 161-203. JOSEPH DEFOS DU RAU: "Le jeune Vincent de Paul, s'est-il fait ordonner prêtre par surprise?" Dax: Bulletin de la Société de Borda, 3rd trimestre 1959.

⁹ PIERRE MIQUEL, Vincent de Paul, Paris, 1996, 80.

the reasons why Vincent went to Périgueux for ordination as long as we have no new data. But we can discount the possibility of his going there to hide or take advantage of the good faith of an old man.

Another circumstance we must take into account to evaluate Vincent's dispositions at the time of his ordination is his first Mass. Both Abelly and Collet inform us that before celebrating it, Vincent imposed a waiting period upon himself, thus complying with the norms the most reform-minded bishops of the time were dictating; and he sought out for the event a devout and recollected spot: the hermitage of the Virgin in Buzet-sur-Tarn on a mountain in the middle of a forest. He celebrated his first Mass with no other witnesses than the acolyte and the accompanying priest: the presbyterial assistant for liturgical language.¹⁰ All of this leads us to believe Vincent celebrated his first Mass with fervor, as tradition attests and the most serious contemporary study is inclined to believe. All of this goes against the idea of receiving ordination solely for human interests of ambition and gain.¹¹

In order to formulate a definitive judgement about Vincent's dispositions upon receiving the priesthood we must examine a final, but not less important, element: Vincent's own declarations referring, at least indirectly, to his ordination. Let us read the essential paragraphs: *"As for myself, if I had known what it was, when I had the temerity to enter into this state, as I found out later on, I would have preferred to remain working the land before committing myself to such a terrible state."*¹² *"This feeling is so much a part of me that, if I were not already a priest, I would never be one. This is what I frequently tell those who aspire to the priesthood."*¹³

It has been thought that these two texts clearly demonstrate that Vincent thought he had been ordained without having a vocation. The context of both citations allows us to evaluate them with some assurance. In both cases, the saint is trying to dissuade others (his nephew, the lawyer Fournier) from becoming priests. For this he has recourse to an argument from personal experience which may impress his hearers: if Vincent, whom everyone considers a saint already, thinks that about himself, how would I dare to enter into this state?

On the one hand, what the saint emphasizes above all, even more than his unworthiness, is the temerity which becoming a priest supposes in the face of the greatness of the priestly condition.

On the other hand, in 1639 Vincent had written to a young deacon of the Congregation, Jean Duhamel who was afraid to take the decisive step of priestly

¹⁰ L. ABELLY, op. cit., L.1 c.3 p. 11; P. COLLET, La vie de St. Vincent de Paul, instituteur de la Congrégation de la Mission et des Filles de la Charité. Nancy, 1748, 2 vol, Vol.1, 14.

¹¹ E. DIEBOLD, "La première messe de Saint Vincent (1600)," Annales (1957) 488-492.

¹² SVP, V, 568. Letter to the Canon of Saint-Martin, March 1656.

¹³ SVP, VII, 463. To the lawyer Dupont-Fournier, father of P. Fournier, C.M., who thought of becoming a priest at an advanced age, 1659.

ordination: *“I beg you by these lines not to give into the temptation that wishes to prevent you from receiving the holy order of priesthood, to arrive at which you have done almost everything you have done since you have been in the world. So, dispose yourself, please, to receive this ordination.... If you say you are not fit and that you never will be, I confess to you, sir, that is the way it is in relation to the infinite holiness of the work; but in relation to our misery, you may expect, sir, that Our Lord will be your fitness, as he will also be the sacrificer along with you.”*¹⁴ These lines also have the flavor of personal confession.

Reading together these and other texts that could be adduced brings us, by convergence, to the conclusion that, even as a twenty-year old, the young Vincent de Paul confronted the priesthood with sufficient consciousness of its excellence and of the dispositions necessary to receive it, no matter how much, from the vantage point of his old age — and his sanctity — it seemed to him an act of temerity. The utilitarian vision of the clerical state more than of the priesthood is not incompatible with the natural honesty, with the sense of duty and the will to fulfill the obligations acquired, nor with a true fervor, perhaps superficial, but nonetheless sincere. Untangling these two elements is going to be, as I see it, the constant task of the first twelve years of Vincent’s priesthood.

Twelve Years of Searching

Vincent’s priestly ordination signals the beginning of a new stage in his life, his youth, his years of pilgrimage and learning. It is also, naturally, a new stage in his priestly journey.

And here a new question presents itself: journey or career? We must keep the distinction in mind. A journey is the moving forward in the living out of a vocation. A career, “making a career,” is an understanding of priesthood as the occasion for personal advancement, for prosperity and achievement. In order to answer the question we must analyze the information we possess regarding his priestly activity during the twelve years between his ordination and his installation as pastor of Clichy.

The first thing we know about Vincent the priest is that he was named by the Vicar General of Dax as pastor of Tilh, a small village of the diocese not far from his native Pouy.¹⁵ Let us bear in mind that this first benefice obtained by Vincent ended in failure. The parish had been conceded in Rome to another aspirant, a certain Mr. Saint-Soubé, and Vincent, either willingly or perforce, had to renounce it. Abelly thinks it

¹⁴ SVP XV, 22.

¹⁵ L. ABELLY (op. cit., L.1 c.3 p. 11) says that the great vicars of Dax, vacant see, were the ones who provided Vincent with the parish at Tilh. COSTE (Monsieur Vincent, vol.1, 40), who discovered Abelly’s error about the situation of the See, considers himself authorized to interpret that the appointment was made by the bishop. This is not at all certain. Recently the hypothesis has been advanced that perhaps the assignment to Tilh was made before Vincent’s priestly ordination. (BERNARD PUJO, op. cit., p. 24), in which case Abelly would not be in error, since the diocese was in fact vacant.

was willingly, so as not to enter into litigation, given his repugnance for these processes. But this is to project on the young Vincent an attitude of his later years that nothing indicates to us that Vincent possessed in his earlier years. In fact he will soon become involved in a lawsuit over a less important matter. The most likely scenario is that Vincent saw it as a lost cause and gave up pursuing it. To confront Rome and perhaps his own bishop, now installed in his see and with no interest in upholding a decision made by others, was clearly a useless enterprise. What must be kept in mind from this episode is, above all, the idea that Vincent's first attempt to establish himself in his new priestly condition was to become pastor, that is, attain the only situation which would guarantee the full exercise of his priestly functions. This may seem natural in our days. But it was not so natural in an era in which very many ecclesiastics used their priesthood as a mere springboard to attain privileges that had little to do with priesthood. Of course a parish was, at the same time, a sure source of rents and incomes. We have no reason to suppose that Vincent did not aspire to both things at the same time; i.e., his priestly journey was at the same time for him the pursuit of a career.

The second episode we know about is of a different stamp. In the same year as his ordination or the following one, in 1600 or 1601, Vincent made a trip to Rome. There can be no doubt about this trip even though his first biographers know nothing about it. We know of it because on several occasions Vincent himself says he "had the honor of seeing" Pope Clement VIII.¹⁶ Now then: Clement died in 1605. Another reference helps us to be more precise about the date: in the letter of July 20, 1631 to Fr. Du Coudray then stationed in Rome, Vincent tells him he himself had been there "thirty years ago." It must have been, then, around 1601. On the other hand, we have no information at all as to the reasons for this trip. Various hypotheses have been put forth: that he went there to obtain a dispensation for his irregular ordination or to defend his cause in the dispute about the parish of Tilh, or simply to gain (the indulgence for) the Jubilee Year of 1600. All of these theories lack documentary support. What we do know fairly well are Vincent's interior dispositions during his stay in the eternal city. Such knowledge is of great value at the moment of reconstructing his priestly journey. What were these dispositions?

Let us listen to Vincent himself: "*At last you have arrived in Rome where the visible head of the Church militant resides, where are found the bodies of St. Peter and St. Paul and of so many other martyrs who in another time gave their blood and used their lives for Jesus Christ. How fortunate you are, Sir, to be able to walk that same land where so many great and holy figures have walked. This thought moved me so much when I was in Rome thirty years ago that, although I was weighed down with sins, I could not but be moved to tears, as it seems to me.*"¹⁷

These words are a long way from describing an excitable young man. They speak, on the contrary, of a pious youth, capable even of weeping for emotion at the

¹⁶ SVP, IX, 316-317, 468; X, 365 593; XII, 347.

¹⁷ SVP, I, 114.

vivid recollection of the saints. This is the image that the mature St. Vincent has of the youthful Vincent.

Back in Toulouse, Vincent again takes up his studies and finishes seven years of theology in 1604, obtaining a bachelor's degree with the right to explain the second book of Pierre Lombard's *Sentences*,¹⁸ and he renews his activity in the small school he directed while he continues to wait for a definitive placement.

He even seems inclined to expedite as far as he is able the gaining of this placement. This is the meaning of another action of Vincent's which we know of only by his allusion to it: his trip to Bordeaux to see to a matter whose "temerity" does not allow him to name it, and for which he needed a good deal of money.¹⁹ It has always been supposed that this matter would be Vincent's naming to the episcopal see. This hypothesis, formulated by Collet,²⁰ has in its favor a particular expression Vincent uses: the matter was a "temerity." The same "temerity" it would seem that was needed to be ordained a priest. Supposing the hypothesis to be correct, this anecdote once again reveals to us a Vincent who was looking for his "way" as well as trying to make a career.

Whatever they might have been, Vincent's aspirations were cut short by a chance occurrence. In July of 1605, on his way back from a trip to Marseille to claim an inheritance — the litigation we alluded to above — Vincent falls prisoner to a Turkish brigantine which carries him to Tunis where he is sold as a slave, a situation in which he will remain for two years.

We are not now going to enter into the polemic regarding the historicity of the captivity.²¹ What interests us here is what the account of the captivity can teach us about Vincent's priestly journey. What did St. Vincent learn about the priesthood during his two years in captivity? To respond to this question we have at hand a dozen Vincentian texts which have not received excessive attention from his biographers: his allusions to the behavior of the enslaved priests in Barbary. St. Vincent has some very clear ideas about this which do not come from his missionaries sent to Algiers and Tunis. Taken as a whole these ideas are unfavorable. Among the enslaved priests arise frequent scandalous dissensions;²² grave moral disorders occur which should be

¹⁸ L. ABELLY, op. cit., L.1 c.3 p. 12; P. COLLET, op. cit., vol 1, 11.

¹⁹ SVP I, 3.

²⁰ P. COLLET, op. cit. I, 15.

²¹ For a systematic exposition of this problem, see chapters IV and V of my biography of St. Vincent. The most recent historiography inclines in favor of the substantial truthfulness of Vincent's narration. Cf. PIERRE MIQUEL, Vincent de Paul, Paris, 1996, 90-91; BERNARD PUJO, Vincent de Paul, le précurseur, Paris, 1998, 39-48; and above all, the most recent study of BERNARD KOCH, C.M., "Un regard neuf sur Saint Vincent. L'expert en Droit et procédure. Nouvelle lecture des lettres de la captivité," in the Bulletin des Lazaristes de France, n° 168 (April 1999), 93- 104. This article restates on entirely new foundations the study of the historicity of the captivity and stands as a milestone as regards the solution of the problem.

²² SVP, IV, 22-23. Request to Fide for licenses for Le Vacher, May 1650.

corrected more with goodness than severity;²³ licentiousness reigns;²⁴ they do not worry about strengthening the faith of the other slaves; in fact they themselves are so dissipated that the validity of the sacraments celebrated by some to them could be called into doubt;²⁵ they need the authority of the Vicars General in order to gain their due respect.²⁶ Clearly the Tunisian experience gave Vincent many ideas about the greatness as well as the misery of the priesthood.

Did Vincent, during his captivity, fall into the disorders which he would later reproach in the enslaved priests? We have no authority for supposing he did. On the contrary, through the very letter about the captivity we know that up to the moment of his trip to Marseille he enjoyed an irreproachable reputation.²⁷ Only the sale of the rented horse — confessed by Vincent himself — and his repeated references to his debts throw the shadow of reasonable doubt on his conduct. But the first matter was a trick often played by needy travelers and the second was a constant worry of Vincent's which the very letter to M. de Comet was supposed to remedy.²⁸

From the moment of his return from captivity all we know about Vincent's priestly preoccupations center on his search for a placement. Thus his following Msgr. Montorio to Rome, his installation in Paris, his entrance into the service of Marguerite de Valois. Vincent himself will recognize all this in a letter to his mother, dated February 1610, in which he is hopeful of soon gaining a worthy employment and manifests his desire that one of his nephews study, just as he did, to escape from poverty.²⁹ Modern biographers unanimously censure this attitude of Vincent's as ambitious. Perhaps it was; but in any case they were small and, of course, legitimate ambitions. At bottom he seeks no more than what he proposed to himself from the beginning — a small ecclesiastical benefice which would allow him to see to his own and his family's needs.

In a certain sense he was going to achieve all of this in that very year of 1610. It was the year of his being named to the abbey of St. Leonard of Chaumes, which could be considered the "honorable retirement" to which he aspired. But, aside from the fact that the acquisition of the abbey resulted in failure, it was also true that a change was beginning to take place in Vincent's heart. To his search for a placement is going to be added with ever increasing intensity the search for a way of life in keeping with his priestly condition: "the purpose," says Abelly, "of leading a truly ecclesiastical life and

²³ SVP IV, 120-121, letter to Philippe Le Vacher, priest of the Mission, in Algeria, 1652.

²⁴ SVP, V, 82. Letter to Monsieur de la Haye-Vantelay, 25 February 1654

²⁵ SVP, VII, 117, Letter to Firmin Get, superior in Marseille, April or May of 1658

²⁶ SVP, XIII, 307, St. Vincent's advice to Fr. Nouelly and to Br. Barreau before their departure for Algeria [about the month of May 1646].

²⁷ "A copy of my title of ordination signed and sealed by the bishop of Dax is extremely necessary for me, along with his testimony, which he may obtain from an investigation among some of our friends, that I have always been know as a good man" SVP, I, 15.

²⁸ Cf. B. KOCH, *op. cit.*, 96.

²⁹ SVP I, 18-19.

of complying perfectly with its obligations.”³⁰ The idea of priesthood as a “journey” is taking over the idea of priesthood as a career. It is the beginning of St. Vincent’s conversion and it consists in this: the passage from a life of very mediocre spiritual aspirations to a life of Christian and priestly authenticity, more than the reform of depraved and sinful conduct which no one has ever been able to prove. Undoubtedly the accusation of robbery plays an important but not unique role in his conversion. It seems it was this, finally, which moved Vincent to change his residence and move into the residence of the Priests of the Oratory for a time. God had inspired in him, explains Abelly, the desire to place himself on a truly ecclesiastical path.³¹ It was precisely the path Pierre de Bérulle, founder of the Oratory, had marked out for his disciples. Along with more or less decisive external factors in the process of Vincent’s priestly growth, one must grant primary importance to his interior evolution which, unfortunately, we know only partially. In this evolution the meeting between Vincent and his first (spiritual) master plays a determining role.

This is not the place to comment upon the figure of the founder of the Oratory. What interests us above all is to recall that Bérulle is, in great measure, the restorer of priestly spirituality, and that the concern for priests was a key point in his pastoral activity, his doctrine and his life.³² In his school Vincent finds the direction to which the compass of his soul was more or less consciously pointing ever since his ordination. He untangles at last the intricate skein of noble aspirations and low interests with which he struggled since his ordination. With Bérulle Vincent enters definitively on his priestly journey.

The spiritual reality has almost immediately a material reflection. A couple of years after his meeting with Bérulle Vincent finally obtains, through him, his first specifically priestly employment: on May 2, 1612 he takes possession as pastor of Clichy.

In Clichy, where he will be pastor for fourteen years, Vincent lives out for the first time a wholly satisfying priestly experience. He senses himself in communion with his people whom he admires for their docility, their devotion, and even their artistic sense. He tries out a series of pastoral projects which will have their full development in the successes of his later life. In a word, he feels, lives and acts like a priest. And as a result he thinks not even the Archbishop of Paris nor the Pope himself are as happy as he.³³

³⁰ L. ABELLY, *op. cit.*, L.1, c.6, p. 24.

³¹ L. Abelly (*op. cit.*, L. 1, c. 6, p. 24) assures us Vincent lived in Bérulle’s house for two years. COSTE considers such a long stay impossible, based on Vincent’s known documented residences and on the fact that the Oratory was founded on November 11, 1611, and Vincent de Paul took possession of Clichy on May 2, 1612.

³² Yves Krumenacker, *L’école française de spiritualité : Des mystiques, des fondateurs, des courants et leurs interprètes*, Paris, 1998. Cf. especially 199-210; 350-369.

³³ SVP IX, 646.

But on Vincent's priestly journey, opposed to what he himself might think at some moments, Clichy was not, in any sense, the final stop. In reality, it was going to be the starting point. To the extent he discovers other elements in his full vocation, especially the call of the poor, which even then made itself felt in his visits to the Charity hospital and other encounters, he will take further steps on the journey he has mapped out for himself. It is therefore significant that Vincent will only give up the parish of Clichy at the moment in which, after the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission and the constitution of the community, he feels the need to break his ties with the past.

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