

# Monsieur Jean Martin and Saint Vincent

## A Friendship for the Mission as Seen Through their Letters

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The person of Monsieur Jean Martin<sup>1</sup> is very closely related to the establishment of the house in Turin in 1655, an event that occurred during the lifetime of Saint Vincent. In the archives of Turin there are 120 original letters that deal with the establishment of this house, letters that were exchanged between Jean Martin and Vincent de Paul. We discover in those letters a missionary spirit that united Vincent and Jean Martin in an apostolic friendship.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Martin, born in Paris on May 10, 1620, was not yet twenty-two years old. He had belonged to the Congregation of the Mission since October 9, 1638. It is written that Saint Vincent had sent him to the mission of Saint-Germain-en-Laye as a catechist and that the Dauphin was among his listeners, but that is not so, because the mission of Saint-Germain took place a few months before he entered Saint-Lazare. He was ordained in Rome on April 25, 1645, and that same year was sent to Genoa to begin a new establishment. Saint Vincent had, perhaps, no Missionary better gifted for drawing crowds and converting souls. In 1654, Jean Martin was recalled to France and placed in Sedan as Superior and Pastor. In 1655, Saint Vincent sent him to Turin to direct a new establishment founded by the pious Marchese di Pianezza, Prime Minister of State. There, as in Genoa and Sedan, the zealous Missionary won over the most hardened hearts. He earned the title "Apostle of Piedmont," and his confreres received the name of "Padri Santi" (Holy Fathers). In 1665, René Alméras offered him the direction of the house in Rome. It was a very painful sacrifice, but Jean Martin resigned himself to it. In 1670 he was sent to Genoa, in 1674, to Turin, in 1677 to Rome, in 1680 to Perugia, and in 1681 to Rome again, each time as Superior. It was in this last-named city that he died on February 17, 1694. We have a manuscript account of his life (Archives of the Mission, Paris), written by a contemporary. It has been published with some changes in volume I of the *Notices*, pp. 269-372.

## 1. Jean Martin, an important figure during the early years of the Company

Jean Martin, a Parisian by birth, was fascinated with the new institution called the Congregation of the Mission and joined this group as a very young man, at the age of eighteen. From the beginning Vincent held Jean in such great esteem that he sent him as a young cleric (22 years old) to the house in Rome. There we discover how he presented himself to Monsieur Codooing, the superior in Rome:

*[he] is candid, simple, gentle, obedient, regular, and has studied philosophy and theology in which he successfully defended his thesis just three days ago. He is good at teaching catechism, preaches well, and has a gift for the ordinands, although he is only twenty-two years old<sup>2</sup>.*

Jean's simplicity and kindness coincided with the spiritual maturity of Vincent who had made simplicity his gospel and meekness his great spiritual undertaking. The letter that they wrote to one another express a sensitivity and spiritual harmony:

*You give me special pleasure by consoling me with your letters, because of the effect they have on me. I never read any of them without being moved by gratitude to God and affection for you, seeing the sentiments of humility and confidence He gives you. From these springs the holy generosity with which you bear the burden of a seminary<sup>3</sup>.*

In the expressions of human warmth that are contained in these letters, we discover the grace of a shared vocation that was enriched by a friendly father-son relationship which evolved with the passing of time into a relationship of brothers. This relationship was based on their union with Christ who proclaimed the Good News to the poor people in the rural areas.

Since the Congregation of the Mission was newly established and was involved so dynamically in the mission, the emerging figures were valued even though they were very young. Monsieur Martin was one of these individuals and in fact Vincent sent Jean forth on his missionary adventure at a very young age: at the age of twenty-seven Jean was directing the seminary and preaching retreats to the ordinands in the house at Genoa. It was normal that Vincent would feel some type of paternal bond with Monsieur Martin:

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<sup>2</sup> CCD II, 251.

<sup>3</sup> CCD III, 155.

*Please God, Monsieur, you will be strengthened more and more, and be given the fullness of His Spirit to animate this little body and shape it according to the maxims of Jesus Christ. I never think of you without offering you to Him, thanking Him for the graces He gives you. Did I not see God's special assistance to you, I would think I was dreaming when I reflect that a young man like you directs several others so successfully, both interiorly and exteriorly<sup>4</sup>.*

## **2. A company modeled on an apostolic group**

We are not dealing with some simple accord between like temperaments. There was something else at the heart of this relationship: the spiritual experience of the birthing of the Congregation of the Mission. Vincent saw the Congregation as a company that was modeled on the apostolic group that accompanied Jesus. The first letter that Vincent wrote to Monsieur Martin and Monsieur Blatiron when he sent them to begin the new mission in Genoa reveals themes that would continually reoccur in their exchange of correspondence: humility, apostolic zeal, unity among the Missionaries, joy, allowing oneself to be guided by Providence, the art of leadership.

*O Monsieur, how very necessary is the humility and the spirit of a perfect Missionary for the place and duty you have! I ask our Lord once again to grant you a large share of this and the physical strength so necessary for you in the midst of such heavy labors. I cannot express to you my consolation at seeing you with good M. Blatiron. Oh! what a happiness for the two of you to be together, destined by God from all eternity to serve Him in the important duties in which His Divine Providence has placed you both!<sup>5</sup>.*

These themes are returned to over and over again. They formed the basic outline of the friendly relationship which Vincent codified in the *Common Rules*<sup>6</sup> as the method to be followed in the missionary proclamation. Vincent considered the good relationships among the Missionaries to be a prolongation of the friendship that Jesus had established with his disciples. For Vincent community was not understood as simply coming together for the mission. Rather community involved a community of spirit that was rooted in faith in the Lord Jesus who shaped the apostolic mission. The letters that were exchanged were a sign of this friendship and through this correspondence the

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<sup>4</sup> CCD III, 155-156.

<sup>5</sup> CCD II, 620.

<sup>6</sup> *Common Rules* VIII, 2.

physical distance that separated these individuals was overcome and their friendship was concretized in ways that sustained their apostolic activity. Monsieur Martin felt that he was accompanied interiorly by a spirituality of community that formed him in the two fundamental reference points with regard to the Mission: apostolic zeal and fraternal charity.

### 3. A disciplined and balanced missionary zeal

The first formational activity of Vincent consisted of moderating the missionary drive of Monsieur Martin who was very zealous. This reality filled Vincent with joy because he recognized the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in all of this movement. But everything had to be done in an orderly manner because such order is reproduced in the works of the individual and extreme positions become impediments to calm and balanced activity.

*I now have high hopes that your work load will be a little lighter, especially if Monsieur Blatiron explains to the Cardinal-Archbishop the danger to which he exposes you by obliging you to work so continually and, in so doing, causes you to act contrary to the usual custom of the Company and the recommendation I have so often repeated to you to take a rest from time to time. I ask Monsieur Blatiron to make him understand this clearly, once and for all<sup>7</sup>.*

The practical thinking of Vincent was reflected in his warning that individuals must be aware of the limitations of their strength in order to be able to serve the poor in the most effective way. Therefore, zeal does not mean that an individual wears oneself out in relentless activism... rather people must allow themselves to be filled with the spirit of Christ. Zeal is a form of fervent charity that impregnates the soul with a drive that leaves its mark on the soul. Thus the effectiveness of zeal does not depend on the amount of work that we are able to do but on allowing ourselves to be impregnated with the presence of God. In light of this reality we come to an awareness of the fundamental principle of allowing ourselves to be penetrated with the Spirit of Christ for it is in this way that we are able to cultivate the spiritual life.

*I ask Our Lord to give you the fullness of His Spirit, so you can share it with all those good seminarians whom His Divine Providence has given you to guide. Believe me, have great confidence in Him and do not be surprised at the sight of your own inadequacy. This is a good*

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<sup>7</sup> CCD III, 58.

*sign and a necessary means for the operation of the grace God has destined for you*<sup>8</sup>.

There is no doubt about Monsieur Martin's generosity with regard to the apostolate. His letters reveal this reality most clearly:

*The Visitor had no sooner left you than you are talking about returning to the mission to make good use of God's graces and not burying your talent. I am more consoled than I can tell you by your fine leadership and zeal for this salutary work, and your patience in the midst of troubles of mind and body. This is walking in the way of the saints, or rather, in that of the Saint of saints, Our Lord, to whom I will continue to offer you and your family that He may animate all of you with His Spirit*<sup>9</sup>.

It could be said that Jean's zeal ran the risk of becoming exaggerated. His biographer, the Marquis de Fabert, who knew him when he was superior in Sedan, makes it clear that he was the one who asked Vincent to remove him from that city for fear of the political repercussions of Martin's zeal for the conversion of heretics<sup>10</sup>. Vincent was very discreet in guiding young Jean in this matter. Activism is like a fire of straw. One must learn that the work of God is accomplished by fidelity to the situation in which Providence had placed one, thus there is a need for calmness and a need to surrender to the circumstances of life. In activism pride tends to become excessive and so as one does God's work there is frequently a secret desire to be esteemed. Monsieur Martin experienced this temptation when he arrived at the new establishment in Turin. There he wanted to begin showing the benefactors who had called the Missionaries to Piedmont that they merited this appointment because of their gift of preaching. He dreamt of giving missions immediately, thus repeating the success he experienced in Corsica and the Duchy of Genoa. But his companions did not have the same abilities as he, especially the ability to speak the language.

*It will seem difficult for you to begin in such a small way; for, if you are to win people's esteem, it would seem as if you should put yourself forward a little by giving a splendid, full mission, which from the outset would make the fruits of the spirit of the Company plain for all to see. May God preserve us from having such a desire! What befits both our poverty and the spirit of Christianity is to shun such ostentation in order to keep ourselves in the background and to seek*

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<sup>8</sup> CCD III, 106.

<sup>9</sup> CCD V, 611-612.

<sup>10</sup> CCD V, 261-262.

*contempt and humiliation as Jesus Christ did. So then, if you resemble Him, He will work with you*<sup>11</sup>....

*I am truly consoled by the fact that this first mission did not arouse great admiration, because you have more merit from this, and I hope God has received more honor from it*<sup>12</sup>....

*Begin with something small and have great love for your own abjection. That is the spirit of Our Lord; that is how He acted, and that is also the means of attracting His graces*<sup>13</sup>.

Vincent continued to offer suggestions to help Monsieur Martin maintain a low profile in his missionary ministry. One should not seek esteem because this is to act selfishly and thus God becomes hidden and our preaching becomes sterile:

*Please allow me to tell you that Missionaries should strive to remain lowly and unknown, and not to make a display and cause others to esteem them. Having a good reputation can be harmful to them not only because it is liable to disappear, but also because, if it puts the success of their work at six degrees, people will expect them to reach twelve and, seeing that the results do not correspond to the expectation, will no longer have a high opinion of them. God allows this to happen especially when this reputation is sought after; for whoever exalts himself shall be humbled. Mon Dieu! Monsieur, how I hope for the contrary, and pray heartily to God to give us all the grace of loving humiliation and shame, with Our Lord and our own wretchedness in mind! That is all we deserve; for, if any good is accomplished during the missions, it is He who does it, and He has no need of our reputation to touch and convert* hears<sup>14</sup>.

#### **4. Assimilation of the spirit of Christ**

Conformity of the missionary to the spirit of Christ is a characteristic of Vincentian spirituality and therefore it was natural for this theme to become part of the friendly conversation that took place between Vincent and Monsieur Martin:

*Often, and especially right now, I beg Our Lord to be entirely yours and you His*<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> CCD V, 477-478

<sup>12</sup> CCD V, 500.

<sup>13</sup> CCD V, 485.

<sup>14</sup> CCD V, 485-486.

<sup>15</sup> CCD III, 140.

*Our Lord... is the source of life and virtue of priests. This can be done by the practice of prayer and the grace of recollection, so as to continue subsequently the conquest of souls with new arms. Being taken from the arsenal of Holy Scripture, these arms will always be victorious, if they are used in the spirit of Our Lord<sup>16</sup>.*

*I ask Our Lord to be pleased to renew all of you in His Spirit so that all your operations may be His and the good results proceeding from them may be fruits of eternal life<sup>17</sup>.*

This reciprocity in the relationship with the Lord is the foundation for any possibility of success in regard to missionary activity and especially in regard to the formation of the clergy, a ministry that is characteristic of the Congregation. The Missionary's gestures and words ought to reveal the mysterious presence of the Lord who dwells within him:

*Oh! May your heart ever taste the sweetness of that of Our Lord! I ask Him to fill you with it in order to communicate it to those to whom you render service<sup>18</sup>.*

*My soul is deeply moved when I think of you and of the choice He made of placing you, young as you are, in such a lofty ministry as that of leading priests to perfection. I thank Our Lord for having merited this grace for you, and ask Him to fulfill in you His eternal plans. As for you, Monsieur, humble yourself profoundly, considering the virtue and competence needed to teach others and to train the children of the King of Heaven in the army of Christ. But trust fearlessly in Him who has called you, and you will see that all will go well<sup>19</sup>.*

*So let us work courageously and lovingly for such a good Master as ours; let us imitate Him in His virtues; above all, in His humility, gentleness, and patience. Then you will see good results in your manner of directing<sup>20</sup>.*

Monsieur Martin's sensitivity created within him an enthusiasm for missionary activity and in light of this he ran the risk of reducing the work God to something that was accomplished as a result of his own effort. From his own experience Vincent was very aware of situations that this could lead to especially when life does not correspond to what one imagines in one's own mind or what one has planned.

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<sup>16</sup> CCD VIII, 385.

<sup>17</sup> CCD VIII, 402.

<sup>18</sup> CCD III, 190.

<sup>19</sup> CCD III, 136.

<sup>20</sup> CCD III, 154.

Discouragement is an offspring of pride and Vincent saw this discouragement in the distressing words of Monsieur Martin. Therefore he delicately advises him:

*His guidance is to be adored; nevertheless, do not expect that you will always find persons so compliant and easy to direct; be hopeful, however, that in proportion as difficulties increase, God will increase His grace for you. And in order that you, Monsieur, may be armed on your part with all sorts of weapons, practice meekness and patience, virtues that are most suited to win over cantankerous and harsh persons. You can be sure that, for my part, I shall pray earnestly to Our Lord to obtain for you the fullness of His Spirit<sup>21</sup>.*

A Protagonist can easily become vain and Monsieur Martin was no exception to this rule. Therefore Vincent confronts this temptation directly:

*We should not want the Company to be talked about and esteemed for its extension. Humility and shame are more appropriate for us, and God does not need either the favor of men or our influence to call us where He pleases<sup>22</sup>.*

In general the suggestion is to follow the dictates of Divine Providence and the will of God. There is no need to be hurried about all of this since the works of God spring forth as if from nothingness and proceed slowly... they spring forth as a result of God's grace: *Things have to be done gradually. Grace has its small beginnings and its progress<sup>23</sup>.* When Monsieur Martin, in a conversation with the Cardinal of Genoa, wanted to insist on the matter dealing with the transfer of Monsieur Richard from Genoa to Turin, Vincent told him to propose this to the Cardinal and added a postscript inviting Jean to *be satisfied with making the proposal to His Eminence and not to pressure him. In this case, the Will of God will be clear to you to work with what He has given you<sup>24</sup>.* In the meantime he ought to put his trust in God and treat his confreres with meekness because they are suffering as a result of feeling humiliated in not being able to participate in the missionary endeavor as they would like to because they do not have the same facility with the Italian language:

*You should not be surprised, Monsieur, to note some sadness in those priests who are with you; still less should you attribute the cause*

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<sup>21</sup> CCD III, 136.

<sup>22</sup> CCD III, 171.

<sup>23</sup> CCD III, 157.

<sup>24</sup> CCD V, 502.



*of it to your leadership. It proceeds from the fact that they are unable to work at such a beautiful harvest. It stirs up in them a desire to do so, but ignorance of the language prevents this. That is why sadness will change to joy in proportion as they see themselves in a position to help you and to share with you the work and merit. Meanwhile, Monsieur, it is fitting for you to support them and, by supporting them, you will encourage them gently in their study and progress in the language. By always speaking Italian with them and obliging them to speak it, you will even help them advance in it, so that, by combining practice with study, they will profit more from this. I am sure that the acts of patience and forbearance you practice in their regard will bring down a blessing on them, and on yourself as well, and that this blessing will soon bring them to the point which God in His Providence demands of them to be of service to Him. Your leadership, which is already very good, thank God, will become gentler and stronger and, in the end, the work of the Lord will be, as always, better accomplished by gentleness than otherwise<sup>25</sup>.*

A year later Monsieur Martin became impatient over the fact that the house where he was living had been doing good work in the ministry of popular missions but had still not extended its ministry to include the formation of the clergy. Yet at that time the confreres still did not have their own house. Vincent listened to these concerns of Monsieur Martin and counseled him to be calm.... Vincent recognized Jean's impatience in all of this:

*It is difficult for a new house like yours to be able to take on so many different works all at once. It can do so with time, but you must await that time patiently. Meanwhile, try to be faithful in doing small things so that God may be pleased to set you over big ones, according to His word<sup>26</sup>.*

## **5. Trust in God, humility and cordiality**

Monsieur Martin was prone to restlessness and discouragement when confronting difficulties in the ministry, a sign of becoming lost in his thoughts which could easily become mistrust and moral depression. Therefore Vincent wrote to him in concise words: *For this reason, humble yourself and put your trust in Him<sup>27</sup>.*

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<sup>25</sup> CCD V, 544.

<sup>26</sup> CCD VII, 271.

<sup>27</sup> CCD III, 140.

*Did you have in mind anything more definite than to will invariably what God wills? I think not. What reason can you have then, Monsieur, for becoming discouraged when things do not turn out right for you? Up until now, you have had good reason to thank God for this, and I, on my part, certainly help you as best I can to do it, so grateful am I for the graces He has granted you. I know your fidelity and concern for God's work. So what remains for you except to be at peace? This is all He asks of you, along with the humble recognition of the success He gives to it, and I have no doubt that this is total in your heart. Why then these misgivings? You tell me your weaknesses; alas! and who is not filled with them? The important thing is to be aware of them and to love the humiliation coming from them, as you do, without dwelling on them except to lay on them the foundation of a firm confidence in God. Then the building is established on a rock, so that when the storm arises, it remains firm. So, do not be afraid, Monsieur; you are founded on that, I know. The fears and mistrust you experience come from nature, and only from a distance do they have access to your heart, which is much more generous than that. Therefore, let God do as He pleases with us and our works, even if the trouble we take for men is to no avail; and if the same men show only ingratitude and contempt toward us, we will not, for all that, fail to continue our occupation, knowing that through them we are fulfilling the law of loving God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves<sup>28</sup>.*

Vincent saw himself reflected in the young priest, Jean; he saw his own restlessness and his innate pride. Therefore he could do nothing less than share with Jean the journey that led him to abandon himself unreservedly into the hands of God: *Let us be steadfast in this precious trust in God, the Strength of the weak and the Eye of the blind<sup>29</sup>.*

*Even were we saints, as long as we are in this valley of tears, we will always experience what you are feeling. God permits this to keep us ever on the alert in the practice of holy mortification and humility. Let us be steadfast in this, and Our Lord will remain the victor over our passions, reign sovereignly within us, and through us, in the souls for whose service His Providence has destined us. So then, let us be steadfast, and always walk in the ways of God without coming to a standstill<sup>30</sup>.*

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<sup>28</sup> CCD III, 207.

<sup>29</sup> CCD III, 159.

<sup>30</sup> CCD III, 156-157.

*Although things may not go according to our views and way of thinking, let us have no doubts that Providence will bring them to the point necessary for our greater good<sup>31</sup>.*

Vincent invited Jean to cultivate three great virtues: trust in God, humility and meekness. These virtues practiced toward those good seminarians, will produce admirable effect in their souls because God Himself will animate your example and words with His own Spirit, and will fill yours with His light and strength. In the end, He will shower His eternal consolations on you<sup>32</sup>. The dynamics of the spiritual life that were suggested to Monsieur Martin were rooted in the gospel: empty oneself in order to allow grace to act. When the Missionaries began to have success in their preaching of missions in Piedmont – Pianezza, Savigliano, Bra, Fossano, Saluzzo – Vincent was attentive to the need to maintain alive in them (especially in Jean) a sense of humility so that vainglory would not take the place of God.

*I am indeed obliged to express the same wish for you, Monsieur, seeing how God has blessed your work, which is bringing you the praise and applause of men and making people want to have you with them to share with them the graces of a mission. I ask His Divine Goodness to give you this virtue so you will attribute all honor to God and all shame to yourself. I ask Him also to continue to draw His glory from your work and to inspire souls with the desire to profit from it<sup>33</sup>.*

*If anyone in this world has a greater obligation to humble themselves, it is you and I (I include also those who are working with you): I, for my sins, and you, for the good God has been pleased to do through you; I, at seeing myself unable to assist souls, and you at seeing yourself chosen to contribute to the sanctification of an infinite number of them, and to do it so successfully. Profound humility is needed in order not to be complacent about such progress and public applause; a great but most necessary humility is required to refer to God all the glory from your work. Yes, Monsieur, you need a firm and vigorous humility to bear the weight of so many of God's graces, and a deep sentiment of gratitude to acknowledge the Author of them<sup>34</sup>.*

Missionary zeal is weakened by discouragement and discouragement is nourished by a secret pride in light of success. When people respond in a positive manner to the proclamation of the gospel, the missionary becomes enthusiastic. But when people do not respond favorably the

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<sup>31</sup> CCD III, 159-160.

<sup>32</sup> CCD III, 166.

<sup>33</sup> CCD VI, 329.

<sup>34</sup> CCD V, 635.

missionary can easily begin to feel useless. These are the two extremes that Vincent counseled Jean to be on his guard against because both of them are harmful. The proclamation of the gospel demands an emotional balance and this balance can only come about as the result of a humble relationship with the Lord.

In reality Monsieur Martin had to endure several trials as he attempted to establish a house in Turin. The most difficult trial was the lack of missionaries. When Vincent saw the incredible success of the first missions he wanted this group of missionaries to be composed of a nucleus of individuals who were of one mind and one heart. As a result of the spread of the plague in 1657 which affected the people in Rome as well as Genoa and which claimed the lives of several missionaries, including Monsieur Blatiron, Vincent found it impossible to provide adequate personnel for the new establishment. Therefore the group of missionaries that were there had to manage as best they could and Monsieur Martin became the primary support for this house. The other missionaries were not able to speak Italian with ease, some were too young (seminarians were taking the positions of priests), and others felt inferior when they compared their own abilities to those of their superior. In the midst of this situation Monsieur Martin became discouraged and wrote to Vincent asking to be relieved from the responsibilities of being the superior.

*You urge me to relieve you of your office because you think you are the cause of the discouragement of your men, but I ask you to continue because I know it does not depend on you whether they devote themselves ardently to all that is required. You win them over to this through your advice and example, and if there are a few who are not keen on learning the language well and helping you, you must remember, Monsieur, that there is no Superior in the world who does not have a great deal to put up with from the persons he governs and that even Our Lord Himself had to endure much from His own men. Anyone taking your place would have the same difficulty as you and perhaps others you do not have, for you have the grace to avoid them. So, take courage, Monsieur! Trust in God, practice patience in peace, and rest assured that God is being honored in you and in your family<sup>35</sup>.*

Vincent was insistent and continually called Jean to cultivate the virtue of humility... not some theoretical humility but a practical humility that accepts the need to lower oneself to the abyss of humiliation. Vincent's ideas with regard to humility were the result of

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<sup>35</sup> CCD VI, 600-601.

a maturing process and he believed that humility of spirit could very easily be confused with some vague feeling of humility because individuals can very easily deceive themselves into believing that they are truly humble. It was for this reason the Vincent felt that it was impossible to become humble without the constant practice of the joyful acceptance of humiliations in one's life since it was these humiliations that created space for God to become present. Monsieur Martin needed to hear this counsel because he was brilliant in preaching missions and therefore as he listened to people praise him for his gifts he could easily fall victim to pride and vainglory:

*O Monsieur, what great reason you have to humble yourself before God to refer the glory to Him for this, and even before others, who may applaud you for it! What can you do without the grace of God? Or rather, what could this grace not do, if you did not put obstacles in its way? How many faults have you not committed amid the little good that was done? And how many are you not capable to committing, if God were to abandon you to the inclinations of corrupt nature? These are the sentiments you should have – even though they are not my own – for I esteem you highly and have great hope that the good use you make of God's blessings will always draw down fresh ones on you<sup>36</sup>.*

## 6. The unity of the missionaries among themselves

The missionary spirit, that is, missionary zeal, besides being the primary point of reference with its consequent virtues of balance, humility, abandonment to Providence, meekness, also needs a second element, namely, fraternal charity. For Vincent, unity among the missionaries ministering in different places throughout Europe and the world was fundamental for the mission and for sustaining the mission. When he spoke of sustaining the mission Vincent viewed this unity in Christ as an expression of the very heart of the Christian event. In other words this unity is an expression of the love of charity which constitutes the intimate mystery of God that has been revealed to us in the humanity of Christ:

*Please embrace him for me, as I embrace all of you in spirit, begging Our Lord to bind all of us together in His pure love, so that together we may love Him uniquely, strongly, and eternally. Mon Dieu! Monsieur, how my soul desires the perfection of yours! Yes indeed,*

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<sup>36</sup> CCD VII, 143.

*as much as its own advancement, since I do not know how to ask for one without the other*<sup>37</sup>.

On the occasion of the departure of Monsieur Blatiron and Dehorgny from Genoa in order to participate in the General Assembly of 1651, Vincent felt pressured to support Monsieur Martin who remained alone to deal with all the different ministries that the house was engaged in. In a series of letters that were written in a short span of time Vincent encouraged Jean through his personal interest in his affairs and also reminded him of the solidarity of the community with him during this time when he might feel so alone. On June 16<sup>th</sup> Vincent wrote:

*I have the consolation of writing to you alone, contemplating you holding the place of three persons. Yes, Monsieur, I am speaking to your heart alone with all the breadth and tenderness of mine, which indeed cherishes you dearly. However, I like to think that in writing to you I am also writing to Messieurs Dehorgny and Blatiron because you are substituting in their duties, and it seems to me that they are acting in you while they have come here to work for the good of the whole Company. This thought, joined to the attachment God has given you for the Company, will help you bear patiently the burden they have left you. I ask Our Lord, Monsieur, to redouble your strength, to sustain you with the essence of His Spirit, to gladden you with the hope of His glory and the success of your work, and to fill the family with peace and confidence in His divine guidance. These are my wishes, but only God can cause you to experience their ardor and effects. I often address them also to Him, particularly during the retreat I am now making, which I recommend to your prayers and those of your little community. Prostrate in spirit at their feet and yours, I embrace them in the spirit*<sup>38</sup>.

Then on July 7<sup>th</sup> he stated:

*Well! Is it not a great source of consolation and likewise an obligation to thank God that the absence of Superiors is causing no laxity in your family but rather an increase of piety and virtue? These are the very words of your letter, and they have filled me with joy and gratitude for the goodness of Our Lord, who, to take the place of the absent, has established Himself in the midst of your soul, where He diffuses spirit and life to all the members of that little body*<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> CCD III, 203.

<sup>38</sup> CCD IV, 214.

<sup>39</sup> CCD IV, 226.

The beginning of the establishment of the house at Turin was not easy and almost everything fell upon the shoulders of Monsieur Martin. The other missionaries who accompanied him were reluctant to preach missions during their first months in Turin because as we have stated previously, they did not have a grasp of the Italian language. Jean complained but for Vincent there is no substitute for the unity of the missionaries when speaking about strengthening and establishing the mission. Thus Vincent encouraged Monsieur Martin and reminded him of the need for tolerance and patience in order to preserve the bond of unity:

*If your letter of the second of this month greatly consoled me in this respect, it has, on the other hand, grieved me deeply by the little zeal for your exercises shown by the person you mention. Since neither the needs nor the devotion of that great crowd of people has moved him, I see nothing capable of touching him, except the prayers to which we must have recourse, that God may be pleased to make him recognize and grasp the great good he can accomplish and the wrong he will do if he loses this opportunity. I hope you will not grow tired of bearing with him, Monsieur, for it may be that the excess of your kindness will overcome that of his poor attitude. Actually, I fear that so much heavy work will overwhelm you; but I am confident that God will not permit that and will make use of you for the progress of the work that has begun. We will pray often and earnestly for this<sup>40</sup>.*

Excessive rigor can cause these bonds of unity to be broken. Monsieur Martin was motivated by his zeal and as a result was over demanding when dealing with his companions. He appeared as one who was a great model but when his companions compared themselves to him they felt inferior and this created a barrier in their relationships with one another:

*I can imagine that, instead of encouraging your men to make an attempt to preach, the grace God has given you for preaching discourages them because they are afraid that there is too great a distance between their conventional style and your too lofty one. I hope, however, that you will help them to determine to do so and to present their topics simply, in the manner with which Our Lord and the Apostles formerly instructed the people and inculcated in them the love of virtue and the hatred of vice<sup>41</sup>.*

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<sup>40</sup> CCD V, 598.

<sup>41</sup> CCD VII, 231.



## 7. The art of leadership

One of the considerations that Vincent was most insistent upon when dealing with Monsieur Martin was that of guiding him in his relationships with the other missionaries and thus helping him avoid the trap of rigorism. When Monsieur Martin began the project of establishing a house in Turin, he was only thirty-five years old. His vitality, that led him to desire to form an ideal community, was definitely dangerous and we have seen some of the significant interventions that Vincent made. Vincent, with more than seventy years of experience, was an expert in encouraging others in the area of living together as a community. He knew that a demanding attitude could be harmful; probably more harmful than a lax attitude which at least did not incite one to become arrogant. Vincent knew that the spiritual ideal is obtained through a process and said process could not be forced or imposed through astuteness or cleverness. Rather the heart is moved slowly through respect and dialogue thus allowing time for resentments and passions to be calmed. Jean found it very difficult to provide leadership to a group of young missionaries who were most zealous at the beginning of the missionary endeavor but who, with the passing of time, had to deal with friction among themselves as well as the harsh realities of the mission when seemed endless and from which there seemed to be no relief.

*You should not be surprised, Monsieur, at the malaise you detect in the little family; the same thing happens everywhere for the same reasons for which God allowed repugnance and changes among Our Lord's companions, namely, to try those who endure them and to humble Superiors. The remedy for that is patience, forbearance, and prayer that God will restore the men to their original serenity and the openness of heart they should have. You can also help in this by being the first to show them expressions of esteem, affection, and cordiality. What happens to an individual person happens also to a community; that is, it becomes downhearted, unfeeling, and turned in on itself. When you see others in this state, it seems you become just like them, and so boredom, then discouragement, take hold of you. Instead of giving in to this, however, as long as it lasts you must, first of all, strive to honor the acts of patience and resignation practiced by Our Lord in similar circumstances, especially when several of His disciples, disheartened by His holy leadership and admirable teaching, left Him. "Do you also want to leave me?". He said to His Apostles. It will be well to find out from someone the cause of the trouble and try to remedy it. Second, you should redouble your trust in Our Lord, making Him and regarding Him as the Superior of your house. Ask Him constantly to be pleased to guide it according to His*



*ways, considering yourself only a poor instrument which, if it were not in the hand of such an excellent Craftsman, would spoil everything*<sup>42</sup>.

There is an important psychology of sharing and compromising through listening and dialogue which underlies the exercise of authority. Concretely, what allows one to overcome the most obstinate resistance is uncalculated and genuine kindness. Kindness that anticipates the harsh reactions of individuals and that views these reactions with meekness is one of the greatest gifts of charity. This kindness does not arise from a temperament that is especially disposed in this way but rather it arises from a temperament that is formed and that guides the human heart. This kindness leads one to form a relationship with the Lord, creating space for the Lord to exercise the role of superior, the superior whom all those who exercise a role of responsibility in the community ought to serve as instruments.

*I am sure that you have made every gesture of kindness toward those whose hearts are set against you, so that when you open your fraternal, charitable embrace to them, they will have for you the respect and confidence due you. Do not be surprised at their coldness; all Superiors often endure something similar, especially those who are firm regarding the Rule and in waging war against the flesh. For all that, they keep going, and in the end God allows their patience and exactness to cause them to be honored and respected by everyone [...]*<sup>43</sup>.

On the one hand the art of leadership demands decision making in order to present the ideal, yet on the other hand it knows how to discover the fissures of the human heart and seeks to understand its wounds and darkness so as to lead people to the fullness of light through fraternal love. This is the art of relationships that Vincent revealed in his correspondence with Monsieur Martin.

## **8. A spiritual journey on behalf of evangelization**

The spiritual journey that the exchange of correspondence between Monsieur Vincent and Monsieur Martin has placed before us has clarified the missionary fraternity that is proper to the Vincentian spirit. At the center of this spirit is a missionary zeal that leads one outward to proclaim Christ to people who are poor... but this same zeal can be overshadowed by human temperaments. To protect Jean

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<sup>42</sup> CCD VII, 290-291.

<sup>43</sup> CCD VII, 312.

from vanity and discouragement Vincent proposed the cultivation of humility in its practical form of humiliation, lived as an emptying of self in order to affirm the presence of God in him. Thus humility is life-giving and helps one form a relationship with Jesus the Lord who clothed himself in this virtue and who is also the object of the missionary proclamation. This union with Christ is what enables an effective proclamation in the evangelization process. All those who are joined together by the same vocation are attracted to this fundamental relationship with the Lord even before they consciously make a willed decision. Thus the missionary community comes into existence in which the most diverse temperaments test the most secure personalities: in said community the members can practice the virtues of patience, meekness and acceptance... all of which lead to trust in God. The community itself belongs to God and we are called to follow in the difficult paths that he walked. As a result the community knows how to find the dynamics of unity, knows how to find the ways to penetrate the hearts of the poor with their charism, and knows how to proclaim the gospel of Jesus in the world today.

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