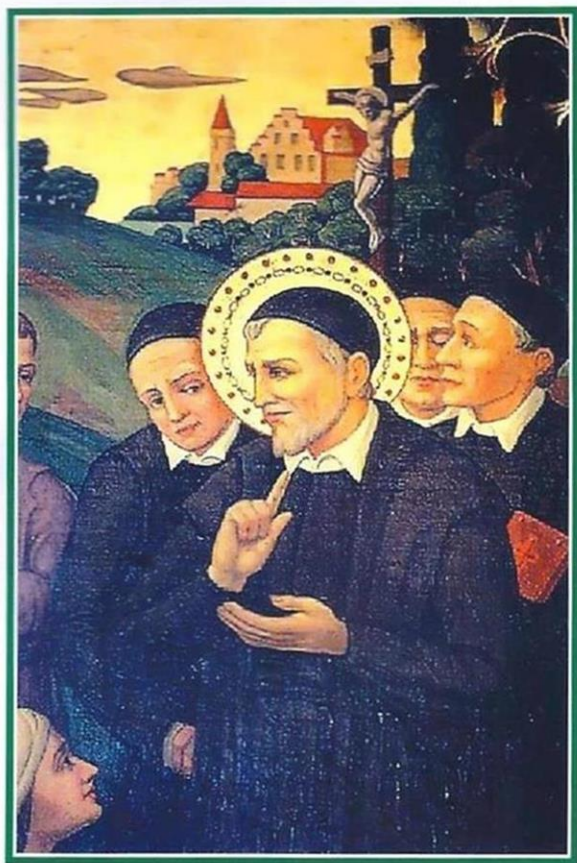


VINCENTIANA

55th Year - N. 2

April-June 2011



First Companions in the Mission

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

GENERAL CURIA

TEMPO FORTE CIRCULAR

(7-10 June 2011)

Rome, 23 June 2011

To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

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

1. Our **on-going formation session** this *tempo forte* was a sharing with the members of the Community in Dialog, an apostolate of confreres of the province of Rome, a 20 year-old program helping people deal with their addictions and giving them the opportunity to choose to live their life freely rather than enslaved by the world of drugs and alcohol.
2. We did **updates** on the following activities at the level of the international congregation.
 - We reviewed the **New Visitors Meeting** that will take place in January 2012.
 - We worked on the project of the **Ratio for Parishes**, dialoging at length over the results of the interviews of the questionnaire that was sent out. The two Assistants responsible for this project, Father Eli Chaves and Father Stanislav Zontak, will be readying a response to the Congregation regarding our reflection.
 - We dealt with a report from Father Stanislav Zontak and the committee that has been formed to renew the **Ratio Formationis**. The committee met in the Curia a few days prior to our *tempo forte* meeting to organize their activities. Those members are Jerry Luttenberger, Eastern Province USA, who was chosen as the coordinator of the team; Father Orlando Escobar, Colombia, the secretary; Father Jan Martineck, Sts. Cyril & Methodius; Father Joy Thuruthel, Southern India; Father

Robert Petkovsek, Slovenia; and a new member chosen to represent Africa, Father Dominique Iyolo, the former Visitor of the Province of Congo. Their plan is to do work and research at home and then return in 2012 to put together a concrete statement on the *Ratio Formationis* to be reviewed in the 2013 Visitors Meeting.

- We had a report from Father Javier Alvarez who was our representative on the new commission that has been formed regarding the **International Center for Vincentian Research** in Paris.

3. **General Curia.**

- An update on the situation of our modified **Statutes**. They will be sent to all the provinces in Latin, Italian which is the working language, French and Spanish. English is being translated at this time. Our intention is to send a digital copy of the Statutes.
 - Father Javier gave us an update on the most recent meeting of the **Union of Superiors General**.
 - We decided to have a special formation session on how to promote the **Patrimonial Funds project**.
 - We reviewed two programs that are being prepared by **SIEV** for 2012 dealing with helping to form Vincentian researchers.
 - We studied the minutes of the meeting of the **Commission for Systemic Change** and their project for the next five years. The General Council has decided in the next *tempo forte* to study more deeply the meaning of the systemic change and try to understand why there exist pockets of resistance to the concept.
 - We studied and approved the execution of a workshop regarding **Wise Money Management** for 2013 in Paris.
4. We received a report from the Director of the **Vincentian Solidarity Office**. Because of the smaller amounts of donations given to matching funds, we have cut drastically our support to provinces with special projects. At present we are not able to give further assistance for Vincentian Solidarity Office projects until 2013.
 5. Regarding **financial questions**, Father Geders shared with us a report from the **Curia Finance Committee** that met here at the Curia in May.
 6. With the assistance of Father Varghese, the Assistant for Missions and Father Geders we did the **Mission Distribution Fund** for 2011.

7. With regard to the **international missions**.

- We discussed two reports done by the Superior General on his visit to the mission in **El Alto and Cochabamba, Bolivia**. Then we reviewed a number of different correspondences that we had received from the mission superior in the **Solomon Islands**. The confreres there are involved in a project for building a center for formation for the Vincentian candidates.
- We received a **request from the Diocese of St. Ignatius of Velasco, Bolivia** for missionaries. That letter, written by the Vicar General, will be edited and published in the Mission Appeal letter of October.
- We reviewed the requests of two candidates for international missions.

8. **The Vincentian Family.**

- We reviewed the minutes of the **Executive Committee meeting of the Vincentian Family** that was held in January, including commentaries made by the Superior General.
- Father Eli Chaves gave an update on different activities of the Vincentian Family focusing principally on the **General Assembly of AIC** that was held in Spain and in which he participated together with the former delegate, Father Manny Ginete.
- He also gave us an updated report on the meeting that will be held in Rome in January for the **leaders of the Vincentian Family**. The program will be focused on the person Frederick Ozanam today related to the social teaching of the church and the millennium goals of the United Nations.
- The Superior General gave a report on the virtual meeting that was held of the new **Commission for Vincentian Leadership**. That Commission will have a meeting in Rome to organize and coordinate the different materials that have been published in the Vincentian Family on Leadership. The members of that Commission: Father Manny Ginete for the Congregation of the Mission; Mr. Mark McGreevy from DePaul International; Mr. Eduardo Almeida of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; Natalie Monteza, AIC; Yasmine Cajuste the international President of Vincentian Marian Youth; Sister Denise LaRock for the Daughters of Charity; and Denise Khoury of the Vincentian Marian Youth. Any materials published on Vincentian Leadership are welcome (cmcuria@cmglobal.org).
- We studied and commented on a report received from Father Jean-Pierre Mangulu who is the newly appointed member from

- the Province of Congo working with the Vincentian Family and the **project Zafen in Haiti**.
- We named the new **National Director of Vincentian Marian Youth in Spain** replacing Father Juan José Gonzalez. I thank Father Juan José for his many years of generous service as the National Director of Vincentian Marian Youth in Spain. The new National Director is Father Oscar Miguel Muñoz from the Province of Barcelona.
 - The Superior General gave a report on the activity of the Vincentian Family that he participated in during his most recent visit to **Central Africa**.
 - Our Secretary General gave us a report on his participation in the **MEGVIS** meeting of the different members of the Vincentian Family from the German-speaking world
9. We heard different reports from the General Assemblies of the **Conferences of Visitors**.
- APVC given by Father Varghese Thottamkara;
 - CEVIM given by Fathers Stanislav Zontak and Javier Alvarez;
 - COVIAM given by Father Zeracristos. At the same time, the Superior General shared with the Council a report on his visit to the new mission in Chad which is being sponsored by the Conference of Visitors of Africa and Madagascar (COVIAM) and the General Curia. We studied the reports of the **Delegate for the Formation of COVIAM**, Father Sy Peterka with reference to his visits to Rwanda-Burundi, Madagascar and Mozambique;
 - The Superior General gave his report on his participation in the meeting of the three Councils of the Provinces of the United States (NCV).
10. We had an interchange of our **calendars** for the months of July, August and September. I mention briefly here the activities of the Superior General. 13-21 August I will be in Madrid for the Vincentian Family Youth Gathering and the World Youth Day. 22 August I will collaborate with the Daughters of Charity from the Slavic provinces at the Rue du Bac in Paris. At the beginning of September I will visit, with the Director of the Daughters of Charity of the Province of Los Altos Hills, Magadan in Russia as well as California, Alaska and Utah. In the latter part of September I will visit Madagascar for the 100th anniversary celebration of the Province.
11. Following the *tempo forte* meeting there was a special session on Saturday 11 June during which the General Council discussed in

greater depth the responsibility of carrying out **canonical visits** in a way that would help to promote the internationality of the Congregation as well as know the reality of the individual provinces.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "G." and "C.M." clearly visible.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FEATURE

First Companions in the Mission

Presentation

Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

The Superior General, in his circular of May 13, 2009 (*Vincentiana*, 2009, n. 3) officially announced the celebration of a Jubilee Year, the 350th anniversary of the departure of St. Vincent and St. Louise for their heavenly mission. Since then, we thought VINCENTIANA should highlight the collaborators who have grown and developed the mission of our founders on earth.

In 2009, VINCENTIANA #5 was devoted to the fruitful collaboration between Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. We then referenced those events which providentially coincided with the 350th anniversary such as the centenary of the Pontifical Approval of the AMM and the Year of the Priest. These filled two separate issues of VINCENTIANA (*Vincentiana*, 2009, n. 6; *Vincentiana*, 2010, n. 1). Issue #2, 2010, entitled “350 Years and the Mission Continues”. VINCENTIANA took up the valorous example of Vincentian cooperation given by two members of the C.M., a priest, Fr. Antonio Portail, and a brother, Bertrand Ducourneau. The continuing mission became more visible in *Vincentiana*, #3, 2010, dedicated to the 41st General Assembly which convened the C.M. precisely under the theme of “Creative Fidelity to the Mission”. Along the same lines, Issue #4, 2010 with the publication in a single issue of 12 articles to provide further reflection on fidelity to the Vincentian Mission today.

Now in 2011, VINCENTIANA reflects on what the Jubilee year has meant worldwide. This issue, returns to the theme of those first collaborators who helped St. Vincent to introduce the idea of mission, whether in France or in the places that Saint Vincent sent missionaries. Certainly not all people, nor perhaps the most important, but these

are certainly significant and worth including in our memory and our thanks.

Finally, with this issue, VINCENTIANA will finish another chapter in its own history. Beginning with the next issue for the third quarter of 2011, the new editor for VINCENTIANA will be Fr. John Maher C.M. from the Eastern Province of the USA. We wish him success in his new service to the C.M. As I leave, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the many good collaborators I have found. And as our holy tradition teaches us, I humbly apologize for any mistakes made in my performance of this office entrusted to me four years ago.

Translation: JOSEPH C. GEDERS, C.M.

Marguérite de Silly, the Wife of Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi

The first woman who could not do without Vincent de Paul

Vicente de Dios Toribio, C.M.



Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi and Marguérite de Silly

Silly-Gondi

Marguérite de Silly and Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi were married in the year 1600, the same year that Vincent was ordained a priest. They were approximately the same age. They did not know one another and there were no similarities between them. But the paths of life and the hand of God drew them together into a relationship of understanding and collaboration.

Nothing is said in the books of the life of Marguérite de Silly about her life before her marriage in 1600. She was the eldest daughter of Antoine de Silly (Count of Rochepot, Squire of Commercy, Sovereign Lord of Euville) and Mary de Lannoy, Lady of the Manor of Folleville. The titles of nobility were so much used and exhibited during that era that it is best not to mention these as we move forward. The list of titles of the de Gondi family would fill several pages.

We do not know any details regarding the encounter of Philippe and Margu rite. However it was, they met and married and truly loved one another. They lived in Paris, first at Rue de Petits Champs and later at Rue de Pav e. But they spent prolonged periods of time (at least when the military campaigns of Philippe Emmanuel as General of the Galleys permitted it) in their country residence which included extensive land holdings.

The first de Gondi who arrived in France came from Florence to Lyon and was named Anthony de Gondi. He was a banker and his interests were financial. In Lyon he married a woman named Mary Catherine de Pierre Vive. During a trip of Queen Catherine de M dicis to Lyon, the queen took a liking to them and as a result Anthony changed his profession from banker to politician. Thus began the French saga of the de Gondi's.

Anthony and Mary had two children, the first generation: Albert, who dedicated himself to the military and Peter, who dedicated himself to the Church.

Albert and Catherine de Clermont had four sons and several daughters, the second generation: Charles and Philippe Emmanuel were dedicated to the military and Henri (the first cardinal of Retz) and Jean Fran ois (the first archbishop of Paris) dedicated themselves to the Church. Two of their daughters became religious at the Abbey of Poisy but the most renowned, Claude-Margu rite, the Marchioness of Maignalais, who as a widow for twenty years, consecrated her life and her inheritance to religion and charity.

There was a third generation, the children of Margu rite and Philippe Emmanuel: three sons, Pierre (dedicated to the military), Henri (dedicated to the Church and died prematurely), and Jean Fran ois Paul (who succeeded his brother and became known in history as the cardinal of Retz).

First Interlude – Clichy

As nobles during that era, they lacked for nothing. The more pious nobles had chaplains in their residences who provided for the religious care of their family and servants. The de Gondi's asked Pierre de B rulle, a famous and influential priest and their friend, to recommend someone as their chaplain. B rulle chose Vincent de Paul, neither famous nor influential, but one who had begun to reflect on his life and under the direction of B rulle had embraced a process of healing and interior conversion. In 1612, Vincent was pastor at Clichy and felt completely happy. He was at this parish because B rulle had asked him to go there and now B rulle asked him to go to the house of de Gondi-Silly as chaplain.

It could be supposed that he did not go willingly. He lived in this house during two different periods: 1613-1617 and 1618-1625 (interrupted by his famous escape to Ch tillon-les-Dombes). His stay in this house would be more important for his future life than he could have imagined.

First stay with the de Gondi's – The missions (1613-1617)

During this first period he fulfilled his duties as chaplain and tutor. He was the tutor of two children because the third, a new born, was not placed under his care. The two oldest, Pierre and Henri, were instructed in Latin and basic Christian knowledge. He also provided for the religious needs of the servants of the house. Since he had to accompany the family on their journeys to the villages on their lands, he took advantage of this opportunity to catechize, preach and hear the confessions of the villagers. He also was able to influence the family, for example, he convinced Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi to withdraw from a duel and he began to form Madame de Gondi's conscience so that instead of depending on him she began to focus on the poor and works of charity.

An event occurred, however, that would prove to be decisive for Vincent's life as well as the life of Madame de Gondi. This event took place in January, 1617 in Folleville. It was the confession of a poor peasant in Gannes, a nearby village. After his confession this man made public to his neighbors, to Madame de Gondi and to Vincent that his previous confessions had been sacrilegious because he did not have the courage to confess all his sins. Madame de Gondi was horrified and could not imagine such a situation. She asked her chaplain: *What is the remedy for such a state of affairs?* So they established a plan. Vincent would later say: *this lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church of Folleville to urge people to make a general confession, which I did, pointing out to them its importance and usefulness. Then I taught them how to make it properly.* The result was miraculous. So many people came forward to confess their sins that *Madame sent someone to ask the Jesuits of Amiens to come to assist us.* The Rector himself came and later Father Fourch . *Next we went to the other villages belonging to Madame in that area, and did the same as in the first one. There was a huge crowd, and God gave His blessing everywhere. That was the first sermon of the Mission. From the success God gave it on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, he certainly had a plan in mind on that day.*¹

¹ CCD, XI: 3-4.

Around the same time a similar event occurred. *The late wife of the General of the Galleys went to make her confession to her Pastor and she noted that he did not give her absolution; he mumbled something between his teeth. So one day she asked a monk who came to see her to give her the formula of absolution in writing, which he did. And when the good Lady went back to confession, she asked the Pastor to say over her the words of absolution written on the paper [...] When she told me this, Saint Vincent was recalling this moment, I was on the alert and paid special attention to the priests to whom I made my confession. I found that this was indeed true and that some of them did not know the words of absolution.*²

We know that Vincent was not satisfied during his first stay on the de Gondi estate. It could be that he longed for the happy days in Clichy. It could be that he was not having much success as a tutor of the de Gondi children. It could be that on the estate he could not evade the worldly noise and the movement of persons of intrigue and politics. It could be that something inside told him that his path had to lead to Gannes or Folleville. Whatever the case, we are told that when he was on the estate of the de Gondi's he was a recluse, like a Carthusian and did not appear to be happy, a prisoner of a somber and melancholy temperament. On more than one occasion Madame de Gondi had to admonish him. This brought about a change in Vincent's life but he was helped by Francis de Sales, a person who would soon enter his life.

Even though Vincent had to leave the de Gondi estate, he would speak well about the years 1613-1617, a time in which he was able to focus on the path that God had revealed to him. He experienced the misery of the poor peasants and the incredible ignorance of the majority of the French clergy. He shared these two experiences with Madame de Gondi, apparently fragile but very strong at the moment of truth. The best biography of Vincent de Paul writes: *without knowing it Marguérite de Silly was the first of several women who had a powerful influence in Vincent's life. She was God's instrument who revealed to Vincent the true path for his priestly life. In this regard it could be said that she had a decisive influence on his life.*

Second Interlude

Among the first letters of Saint Vincent's correspondence that are preserved, five are related to Maguérite de Silly. The first is from Vincent and he communicates to Madame de Gondi that he had been

² CCD, XI: 162-163.

absent from her household because he decided to exercise parish ministry in some other place. The second is from Madame de Gondi to Vincent written after she was informed by her husband that he had received a letter from Vincent. The third is from Vincent to Madame de Gondi encouraging her to submit to the will of God. The fourth letter is from Madame de Gondi to Vincent expressing the hope that Vincent's journey to Paris will bring him back to their house. The fifth letter is from Vincent to Charles du Fresne, secretary of de Gondi; Vincent told him that he was travelling to Paris and that *according to the enlightenment that God gives him, he will make a final decision concerning his return to Ch tillom-les-Dombes or the De Gondi family.*³

All of these letters were written during the brief period of three month during the year 1617. Obviously the most interesting letter is the second one, the letter of Madame de Gondi to Vincent, which is the only one that we have in its entirety (the others are summaries). Therefore we cite here that letter:

September 1617

Monsieur,

I was not mistaken when I feared losing your assistance, as I mentioned to you so many times, since I have indeed lost it. My anguish over this would be unbearable without a very special grace from God which I do not deserve. If it were only for a time, I would not be so upset; but when I think of all the occasions on which I shall need to be assisted by direction and counsel, either in death or in life, my grief begins anew. Consider then whether my mind and body can bear the grief for long. I am not able to seek nor receive assistance elsewhere, because you are well aware that I am not free to reveal the needs of my soul to many people. Monsieur de B rulle promised me that he would write to you, and I am calling upon God and the Holy Virgin to give you back to our home for the salvation of our whole family and of many others toward whom you will be able to exercise your charity. I entreat you once again to practice it towards us for the love you bear Our Lord, to Whose goodness I entrust myself on this occasion, although with a great fear of not being able to persevere. If you refuse me after that I shall hold you responsible before God for whatever happens to me, and for all the good that I shall fail to do for want of being helped. You are putting me in danger of being very frequently deprived of the sacraments in various places because of the great difficulties which may befall me there and the few people who are capable of assisting me. You know very well that the General has

³ CCD, I: 21.

*the same desire as I, which God alone is giving him by His mercy. Do not resist the good that you can do by assisting in his salvation, since he is destined one day to assist in that of many others. I know that, since my life serves only to offend God, it is not dangerous to place it in peril, but my soul should be assisted at death. Remember the apprehension in which you saw me during my last illness in a village; I risk falling into a worse state. The mere fear of that would do me so much harm that, were it not for my former excellent health, I think it might possibly cause my death.*⁴

This letter, both marvelous and also filled with apprehension, reveals the soul of Madame de Gondi, delicate and scrupulous, exaggerated in speaking about her weaknesses, clear and yet at the same time obdurate in using every argument to convince Vincent to return to her house. It also reveals the deepening of a spirituality that Vincent had inspired in the family. It is easy to find a response to her behavior since Vincent himself spoke about this matter later when he was addressing the Daughters of Charity: *When it pleased God to call me to the home of the wife of the General of the Galleys, I looked on the General as God and on his wife as the Blessed Virgin. If they ordered me to do something, I obeyed them as if I were obeying God and the Blessed Virgin. I do not remember ever having received their orders except as coming from God, when it was the General of the Galleys who was giving me the command, or from the Blessed Virgin, when it was his wife; and I do not think I ever did anything contrary to that, by the grace of God. I also venture to say that, if God had been pleased to give some blessing to the Company of the Mission, I dare say that it has been in virtue of my obedience to the General and his wife and of the spirit of submission with which I entered their household. "Be His the glory and be mine the shame!"*⁵

In order to know more about Marguétite de Silly, Madame de Gondi, let us look at the testimony of various biographers of Vincent de Paul.

ABELLY: *This virtuous lady deeply loved promoting the welfare of her family and her subjects, and was moved by the grace of God who had given her a priest who was all she could hope for as a spiritual guide. Beside 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.*⁶

⁴ CCD, I: 19-20.

⁵ CCD, X: 311; cf. also CCD, IX: 7.

⁶ LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul*, translated by William Quinn, F.S.C., New City Press, New York 1993, Vol. I, p. 56.

COSTE: *It would have been hard to find a more virtuous woman. Her naturally quick temper inclined her to acts of impatience which she immediately regretted. Whenever she forgot herself, she went down on her knees, even before her domestic servants, and begged pardon. Her chief fault was a tendency to scrupulosity and this weakness entailed even more suffering on her confessor than on herself.*⁷

*If the confessor was deeply edified by the delicacy of conscience of this chosen soul (for she abhorred even the shadow of sin), he had, on the other hand, much to endure for her tendency to scrupulosity. She wished to have him beside her both in the house and on her travels. When he was absent, she feared lest an accident or an illness had deprived her of him, and kept urging him to return. To combat this excessive attachment, Vincent de Paul introduced her to an excellent spiritual guide, a priest of the Order of Recollects, whom she consulted when her usual confessor was not at hand.*⁸

CALVET: *Madame de Gondi was as lively but more restless than her husband. Her untiring imagination continually represented to her both past and future so that she tortured herself with scruples about the one and fears for the other. She was very devout and felt compelled to carry out the promptings of her heart, and thought herself damned when she failed to do so. She was destined to become as great a torment to her directors as she was to herself. At the outset she took special notice of her son's new tutor. When she saw in him a man of God she put herself in his hands and gave him the keeping of her conscience. This was no sinecure. She would wear him out with difficulties that had been solved several times. She desired to have him constantly at her side to have recourse at once to his ministry if some scruple troubled her. Vincent took his first steps as a spiritual director with no common case. He held Madame de Gondi and the exceptional graces bestowed on her by God in reverence. It seems that his patience was so greatly taxed by her and by the great pomp surrounding her that in 1616 he decided to make his escape.*⁹

HERRERA: *Margu rite de Silly – angelic piety and a heart of gold – who at times forgot meekness, but when she became aware of this fault she knelt down before her servants and asked for their forgiveness.*

⁷ PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, translated by Joseph Leonard, C.M., The Newman Press, Westminster (Maryland) 1952, Vol. I, pp. 61-62.

⁸ PIERRE COSTE, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 65.

⁹ JEAN CALVET, *Saint Vincent de Paul and His World*, revised by Msgr. Wm. J. Doheny, C.S.C. (no publisher or date of publication is noted in the book), pp. 75-76.

Her primary defect was scrupulosity which tormented her and also her confessor [...] In the house of de Gondi Vincent did not receive special attention or honors. Madame de Gondi was indecisive in her decisions and even worse was too attached to Vincent's direction. When he was absent, uneasiness and anxiety tormented her. When she left the house he had to accompany her [...] thus Vincent planned his departure from the de Gondi household.

ROMAN: *M. and Mme. De Gondi began to look on their chaplain as a man sent by Providence, someone truly sent by God for the salvation of their family. It was the wife who first realized this. Marguérite de Silly was a troubled, complex soul. She was beautiful and she was delicate. Her fragile beauty was like that of the lady of Ghirlandaio and she was so pious that she told Father de Bérulle she would rather her sons be saints in heaven than great lords on earth. God, to her, was more of a judge than a father. She tormented herself, and her confessors too, with her unfounded scruples.*¹⁰

CORREA: *A beautiful, sensitive woman with a delicate conscience that bordered on scrupulosity, deeply religious, a faithful wife and very Christian mother who was not, however, very successful in the education of her children. She suffered from a permanent temptation of insecurity. Feminine to the point of exaggeration, she felt incapable of living an independent spiritual life without the obsessive support of a spiritual director.*

MEZZADRI: *If during the time of Châtillon Madame de Gondi had feared losing him, now the situation had changed. She understood that she was not able to mortify the generosity of the man of God. If she had been able to keep Vincent beside her, he would have been there as a hostage. So that she would not lose him completely, she decided to support his aspirations, approving the work of the missions. These missions would be given on the lands of the de Gondi estate. In this way she guaranteed the work of her esteemed chaplain.*

Second stay with the de Gondi's – The Confraternities and Missions (1618-1625)

A woman like Marguérite de Silly was not one to simply remain with her arms folded. Pierre Coste, the illustrious biographer of Saint Vincent states: *Madame de Gondi asked for the prayers of the principal*

¹⁰ JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, translated by Sr. Joyce Howard, DC, Melisende, London 1999, p. 112.

*religious communities in Paris for her intention and, early in October, dispatched a messenger to Ch  tillon. This was an old friend of the Saint's, Charles du Fresne, formerly secretary to Queen Margu  rite of Valois and now secretary to Philip de Gondi. He set out provided with a bundle of letters, from Cardinal de Retz the Bishop of Paris, from M. de B  rulle, from Madame de Gondi, her children, her nearest relations, from the chief officers of her household, from doctors of divinity, members of religious communities and from many persons of rank and piety.*¹¹ She was impossible to resist. Vincent left broken and resolved to seek guidance from Father Bence, superior of the Oratorians in Lyon. From Lyon he left for Paris but not before saying farewell to the parish of Ch  tillon, doing so in the midst of the tears and grief of the parishioners.

On December 24, 1618 Vincent entered for a second time the house of the de Gondi's. Abelly, according to his style, says that Madame de Gondi received him *like an angel from heaven*. Even though we do not know the exact words that Vincent directed to her, it seems that he made it clear that this second stay on the estate would be different. He did not come as tutor (one of his followers, a seminarian named Antoine Portail who Vincent came to know in Clichy, would take on that role). Vincent would be their chaplain. He placed conditions on his role and Madame de Gondi made concessions. What was most important for her was that she had her director and chaplain close at hand. Besides this she was willing to accompany Vincent in the works that he proposed.

Vincent proposed two works: the missions which he had initiated with her in 1617 in Folleville-Gannes and the Confraternities which were constitutive elements of his ministry from his time at Ch  tillon. That event is well known. Vincent was about to celebrate Sunday Mass when he was told that a family who lived outside the village was in extreme need. Everyone in the family was sick and there was no one to help them. He explained this situation in his homily and his listeners heeded his word. As Vincent was walking to visit the family he met parishioners coming and going to help the family. When he arrived at the house he saw the amount of material assistance that had been gathered and he discovered that the Christian community was very generous, but their generosity lacked organization. As a result of this he established the first group of the Ladies of Charity who, in their own way, went forth to confront the different situations of poverty. Naturally this work had to continue in Ch  tillon and Vincent's primary collaborator was Madame de Gondi. Between the two of them they established the Confraternities in Villepreux, Joigny, Montmirail and

¹¹ PIERRE COSTE, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 91.

in almost all the villages on the de Gondi estate. Each Conference had its rule, a rule redacted by Vincent that was detailed, meticulous and orderly with regard to the spiritual as well as the community life of the women... many details with regard to serving the poor and the ill, the distribution of alms, food, medicine, etc. Madame de Gondi was very generous in providing for the Confraternities in which she intervened. In Volume X of the *Obras Completas de Vicente de Paul* (Volume XIIIa and XIIIb in the English edition) we see Madame de Gondi as the founder and a member of the Confraternities at Joigny, Montmirail, Folleville, Courboin. She is the most renowned of the Ladies of Charity.

Together with the Confraternities was the work of the missions. In reality all the missions concluded with the establishment of the Confraternity of Charity. One of the conditions that Vincent placed upon his return to the de Gondi house was the freedom to dedicate himself to the missions among the peasants who lived on the lands of the de Gondi's and to establish in these villages the Confraternities as he had done in Châtillon. He was able to do this with the blessing of Madame de Gondi until the time of her death in 1625.

This blessing reached the point that Madame de Gondi decided to guarantee the work of the missions and the Confraternities. We know that the first sermon of the mission was preached in Folleville on January 25, 1617. We know about the missions that Vincent personally conducted during his stay at the de Gondi house. But this was not enough for Madame de Gondi. She wanted to guarantee the continuation of these works. Coste states: *Madame de Gondi conceived a project of putting aside 16,000 livres for a community that would undertake to give missions on all her estates every five years.* Vincent spoke about this matter with Father Charlet, the Jesuit provincial and to Bourdoise and de Bérulle and since no community could be found that would accept this offer *Madame de Gondi made a clause in her will by which she left the sum assigned for the foundation to Vincent himself, leaving him the choice of where the missions should be given and the means whereby they could be preached.*¹²

Now the time had come to culminate this work. Once again the benefactor was Madame de Gondi. Vincent attributed to her not only the financial support that she provided but also the inspiration that gave rise to these works. On April 17, 1625, five people gathered together in the de Gondi house on Rue de Pevée: two notaries from Chatelet, the de Gondi's (Philippe and Marguérite) and Vincent de Paul. Here the contract was read and signed. As a result of this contract

¹² PIERRE COSTE, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 70.

the Congregation of the Mission of Saint Vincent de Paul was born. Of Saint Vincent de Paul? Yes, from the outset. But Madame de Gondi was also part of this Congregation and when Vincent spoke to his missionaries about this event he called her *our first founder*. This was not some affectionate concession that Vincent made to pay homage to this woman; he was speaking the truth. Without her the Congregation would have risen up in the Church because as Saint Vincent said the only founder is God. But in fact, the first founder was Margu rite de Silly, Madame de Gondi. The de Gondi's gifted this new institute with financial support: 45,000 livres. One year before this, through the mediation of the de Gondi's, her brother, the archbishop of Paris, gave Vincent the property and buildings of the College des Bons-Enfants. In Vincent's name, Antoine Portail, took possession of this property on May 6, 1624. This would be the first house of the future Congregation of the Mission.

She was able to die

Once her work was accomplished, Madame de Gondi could die. She had been a good disciple of her director and gave the impression that she had become freer and was able to give herself to the poor in accord with the spirit of Saint Vincent. We can also see in Vincent a rapid progress in holiness and human maturity from 1617-1625 and Madame de Gondi played a role in this. She died on June 23, 1625, just two months after she had signed the foundational contract. At the time of her death, as she had always desired, she was assisted by Monsieur Vincent. She was forty-two years old. She wanted Vincent to remain at the house and attend her husband and her children. But Vincent, forty-four or forty-five, was being called by the voice of his newly established Congregation. He had to give the General (who was in Marseilles with the galleys) the news of his wife's death. The General also embarked on a new path and entered the Oratorio of B rulle, where he was ordained a priest. The friendship and mutual assistance between Vincent and the de Gondi family was always preserved. Vincent de Paul was indebted to Madame de Gondi for having shown him the true path for his life.

Father René Alméras, C.M.: Second Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission (1661-1672)

Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.



Father René Alméras, C.M.

Presentation

I present a brief article about Father René Alméras, C.M.¹. He was the second superior general of the Congregation of the Mission and the immediate successor of Saint Vincent de Paul. He was elected on January 17th, 1661 and continued in that office until his death on September 22nd, 1672.

¹ LUIGI MEZZADRI - JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *Historia de la Congregación de la Misión* (1), *Desde la fundación hasta el fin del Siglo XVII (1625-1697)*, La Milagrosa, Madrid 1992, pp. 87-101.

1. Origins

René Alméras² was born in Paris on February 5th, 1613. He was one of six children of the second marriage of his father. His father, also named René, was secretary to King Henry IV of France and his wife Marie de Medici and later he became general controller of the mail. He had a position that in seventeenth century France was considered somewhat prestigious. He was originally opposed to his son entering the Congregation of the Mission but then, impressed by the life of Vincent's missionaries, he himself, at the age of eighty-one, entered the Congregation. He died at Saint Lazare on January 4th, 1658.

In 1637, at the age of twenty-four and after a significant experience as consultor in Public Administration, René Alméras entered the Congregation of the Mission. After his ordination he dedicated himself to ministry with great apostolic zeal which at times meant neglecting his health. He was given the task of visiting various houses of the Congregation and was superior in Rome from 1647-1651. Then he returned to France and was named superior of Saint Charles Seminary. Later he was entrusted with the distribution of alms to the poor in Picardy and Champagne. In the following years he was appointed Assistant General and Visitor of the province of Poitou.

Father Alméras was very out-spoken but also very open. He was candid in sharing his point of view and at times during meetings openly disagreed with Vincent³ but was always willing to respect the decisions that were made. He would maintain this characteristic throughout his life.

2. Election as superior general

At the time of Vincent de Paul's death there were two hundred fifty members of the Congregation of the Mission. For administrative purposes the Congregation was divided into six Provinces (France, Poitou, Champagne, Aquitaine, Savoy and Italy). These were not rigid divisions and the Visitors did not necessarily reside in their own

² For his biography: S.A., *La vie et les vertus de M. René Alméras. Deuxième Supérieur Général de la congrégation de la Mission et des Filles de la Charité*, Debécourt-Canuet, Paris 1839, 115 pp.

³ In the Assembly of 1651 he disagreed with Vincent on the matter of the vows: he was opposed to the members of the Congregation taking vows. But when Vincent's position prevailed, he submitted and then became a convinced defender of the vows. CCD, XIIIa: 374 ff.; SVP XIII: 333 ff.; ES X: 395 ff.

provinces and the confreres were generally moved from one province to another.

The need for a smooth transition of governance was foreseen and Vincent de Paul had named René Alméras vicar-general who was entrusted with the administration of the community until the election of Vincent's successor.

The principal duty of Alméras was the celebration of the General Assembly which took place in Saint Lazare, Paris and began on January 15th, 1661⁴. Nineteen Missionaries participated in the Assembly (three from each of the six provinces in addition to the secretary of the Assembly). They were called together to elect a superior general, a successor to Vincent de Paul.

During Vincent's retreat (October 2-10, 1659) he had written on a piece of paper the names of two confreres whom he considered most suited to succeed him as superior general. That paper was folded and sealed and lock in a small box which was then placed inside a larger box. Two keys were necessary to open the inner box and one key was given to Fr. Antoine and the other to the oldest confrere of the house. During the Assembly, on January 17th, the box was opened and the names of the two persons were revealed: René Alméras and Thomas Berthe. In the same document⁵ Vincent also noted that the members of the Assembly were not obliged to follow his suggestion. When the election was held Father Alméras was elected on the first ballot with eleven votes (two more than needed for the required majority).

3. Alméras as superior general

Alméras had poor health and this fact, together with being the immediate successor of the founder to govern the Congregation, could have led him to simply continue the policies that were already in place. His administration, however, was not simply a prolongation of that of Saint Vincent.

Jean Dehorgny, Thomas Berthe and Edmund Jolly were elected assistants and Dehorgny was also elected director of the Daughters of Charity. With the collaboration of these confreres, Father Alméras took some important steps for the Congregation.

First, he initiated the preparation of a biography of the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, Vincent de Paul. This work was

⁴ RAYMOND CHAUMEAU, *Les assemblées générales*, in *Vincentiana*, 18 (1984), p. 743.

⁵ The document is dated October 9, 1659, CCD, XIIIa: 484-485; SVP XIII: 410-412; ES X: 555-556.

entrusted to Luis Abelly, a personal friend of Vincent and was published in 1664, four years after Vincent's death⁶.

Then in 1666 Father Alméras published a document on preaching. The document indicated that Alméras viewed the sermon to be composed of three parts: a beginning, the body of the sermon and a conclusion. The body of the sermon contained the motives, the definition of the theme, and the means. He also published document on liturgical ceremonies and the norms of office and made a series of recommendations to the houses of the Congregation concerning the Act of Consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary (to be made on the feast of the Assumption) and the Act of Fidelity to Jesus Christ (to be made on January 1st, New Years Day). He insisted on the cultivation of the spirit of poverty and gave detailed directives concerning the spending of money.

In 1668 Father Alméras convoked the second General Assembly which began on July 16th and concluded on September 1st. Twenty-two confreres participated and there were thirty sessions. Among the decisions and resolution of the Assembly, we highlight here those that concern the missions and seminaries (the two fundamental works of the Company). We also mention here a Memorandum on the means to preserve the primitive spirit of the Congregation. The Assembly also approved decrees concerning the superior general, the governance of the Company, rules for Visitors, local superiors, consultants, admonitors and procurators. The *Constitutiones Selectae* concerning the superior general were submitted in 1670 to the Holy See and were approved by Pope Clement X⁷. The Constitutions of this Assembly would guide the life of the Congregation until 1954 when their content would be included in the Constitutions that were approved by Pius XII⁸.

4. Some difficult decision

Among the questions that Father Alméras had to confront during his tenure as superior-general, there were some that would have a great influence on the Congregation.

⁶ LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, New City Press, New York 1993.

⁷ CLEMENT X, *Ex injusto nobis* (June 2, 1670), *Acta Apostolicae*, pp. 33-39.

⁸ For more information about the historical development of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, consult CARLO BRAGA, C.M., *The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission: Historical Notes*, in *Vincentiana*, 4-5 (2000) pp. 289-307.

A difficult decision involved the cessation of sending missionaries to Madagascar. This was a work that Vincent held in high esteem. The Congregation had sent nine groups of missionaries to Madagascar and the majority of the confreres died during the ocean voyage. Those who survived did not have much success in their missionary efforts. Many years later, however, missionaries of the Congregation were able to return to Madagascar and today it is a province of the Congregation with about eighty members.

Another decision was to continue the work in seminaries. While Father Alméras was superior general seminaries were established in Metz (1661), Alet (1661), Amien (1662), Troyes (1662), Noyon (1662), Saint-Brieue (1666) and Narbona (1671)⁹. Even though the bishops asked the Congregation to minister in their seminaries Alméras did not accept all these requests and in fact rejected a number of their petitions because the conditions were not favorable.

A third question revolved around the acceptance of royal chaplaincies and parishes. The first situation arose when Anne of Austria, the queen-mother, petitioned the Congregation to accept the parish of Fontainebleau. Initially Alméras was determined to resist the pleas of Anne but eventually on November 27, 1661 the Congregation assumed responsibility for this royal parish. Then in 1672, Louis XIV, seeing the good work of the Congregation in Fontainebleau, petitioned Father Alméras through the Archbishop of Paris to assume ministry in the parish at Versailles. This was not finalized during the time of Alméras but the tendency to become involved in these works continued during the time of his successor, Father Edmund Jolly, and in later years this would have serious consequences for the Congregation.

Conclusion

Father René Alméras was a worthy successor of Saint Vincent. He found the Congregation in a time of growth and he left it in the same condition. During his eleven years of administration 210 priests and 120 brothers entered the Congregation. He encouraged the promotion of vocation and protected the Congregation from possible desertions.

He avoided adventures but he did not simply maintain the status quo. He never enjoyed good health and during the later years of his life his health became even worse, but he never lost his ability to judge clearly the situations that were placed before him.

⁹ *Annales de la Mission*, Tome LXII, Année 1897, Imprimerie D. Domoulin, Paris, pp. 155-158.

Upon the death of Father Alméras, on September 22, 1672, Father Edmund Jolly succeeded him as superior general. This would mark another important chapter in the history of our Congregation.

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Brother Mathieu Re(g)nard

A Missionary who Worked Wonders

Jaime Corera Andía, C.M.

The man about whom we are going to talk inherited from his father a last name which included the “g”. When Mathieu was an adult many of his admirers, including the queen of France, eliminated the “g” from his last name and so he became known as Renard, which in his native language, French, means fox. This was not done to insult him but rather was seen as a tribute of their admiration. Moved by this same sentiment, another of his admirers, Vincent de Paul, spoke of him in one of his letters and said: *Brother Mathieu is working wonders*¹. Here Vincent used the word “brother” in the technical sense: a member of his Congregation who was not ordained.

Mathieu Regnard was born in 1592 into a respected and wealthy family who lived in Brienne-le-Chateau² in the arrondissement of Aube, not far from the city of Troyes. He was twelve years younger than Vincent. Nothing is known about him prior to his entrance into the Congregation of the Mission in 1631, when he was almost forty years old. Very little is known about his life in the Congregation (except for what will be said here) aside from the details that appear in the personnel book: he pronounced his vows in 1644³ and died in 1669, nine years after the death of the founder of the Congregation.

Everything that is known about him is based on writings that are no longer in existence, writings of Brother Mathieu which were done at the request of the authorities of the Congregation who were looking at the possible canonization of the Founder. In reality, the writings

¹ CCD, 1: 582.

² In CCD, IX: 70 note 4 the birthplace of Mathieu is also referred to as Brienne-Napoléon. This was the site of a military academy where during the final years of the eighteenth century the young Napoleon studied the art of war.

³ The practice of taking vows at the conclusion of the two years in the Internal Seminary became a practice as a result of the 1641 Decree of the Archbishop of Paris (CCD, XIIIb: 315-317). Thus Brother Mathieu took vows thirteen years after his entrance into the Congregation.

of Brother Mathieu do not speak about the virtues or the actions of the founder but rather narrate what he (Mathieu) was able to do. His writings describe what a member of the Congregation could be when motivated by the man who founded the Congregation.

Apart from the details of the official registers, the testimony with regard to Mathieu's life and his character appear in the 1639 letter of Vincent that was mentioned above. Vincent stated: *Brother Mathieu, who is working wonders in that regard by a very special grace Our Lord has given him [...]*⁴. Brother Mathieu has a special grace that comes from God and is revealed *in that regard*. In the context of the letter *in that regard* refers to a program directed by Vincent, a program of material and spiritual assistance for the people of Lorraine who were overwhelmed by the wars between France and the troops of the Empire.

The devastation of Lorraine continued for some seven years, until 1643, the year for which we have another testimony of Vincent and the last one that we find concerning Brother Mathieu. This last testimony describes in a concise way the quality of the soul of the one *who did marvels*: *A few days ago, Brother Mathieu wrote to me from Lorraine, and his tear-stained letter informed me of that province's misfortune [...] The sorrow in my heart is so immense that I cannot express it to you without weeping because of the extreme poverty of those people*⁵.

Little more is known about the quality of this man's soul, even though in this regard it would probably be very similar to that of the various priests of the Congregation of the Mission of Monsieur Vincent who also worked in Lorraine during the same years and for the same reasons as Brother Mathieu. Like him they were engaged in an activity, that though never letting aside the spiritual needs of the people, was mainly centered on helping people whose material situation had been shattered by the movements of the army.

In the letter cited before in which Vincent speaks of Brother Mathieu and praises him, Vincent also mentions the missionaries, in this case priests, who were sent to *Nancy, Verdum and Bar-le-Duc and are going to send others to Metz to assist corporally and spiritually the poor country people who have been given refuge in those cities*⁶.

The dedication of these priests in alleviating the needs of the people in this devastated area is made known to us through sources outside the Congregation. It is an account written by a Jesuit in whose house one of the missionaries had been lodged, a missionary who died of

⁴ CCD, I: 582.

⁵ CCD, IX: 70.

⁶ CCD, I: 582.

exhaustion at the age of twenty-eight. About six hundred poor people participated in his funeral, people who *really owed him this recognition. He had become ill healing their diseases and lightening the burdens of their poverty. [...] He would hear their confessions with such assiduity, both morning and afternoon.*⁷ The Jesuit priest concludes his account with an impressive phrase that he applied to all the missionaries whom he saw working in Bar-le-Duc: *Your men are flexible and docile about everything, except the advice they are given to take a little bit of rest. They believe that their bodies are not made of flesh, or that their life is supposed to last only a year*⁸.

Besides the dedication which was like that of his brother priests, Brother Mathieu was also gifted with a sagaciousness and cunning (not to say astuteness) that led his admirers to remove the “g” from his last name and name him Renard which is the way his name appears in the books that deal with the history of the Congregation of the Mission. But what distinguishes the ministerial action of Brother Mathieu is the fact that on more than one occasion he took risks that could have resulted in his death.

Abelly, the first biographer of Saint Vincent, who personally knew him and also Brother Mathieu, refers to his exploits in two places but does not mention his name. He refers to him as *the missionary who carried the money to Lorraine*⁹. He concludes the second reference by saying: *God gave him a cleverness, and favored him with special protection, either to avoid the robbers or to escape from them when he was taken. Even the queen delighted to hear of his adventures, and several times had him recount his experiences and the innocent stratagems he used in avoiding difficulties. For his part, he always attributed his good fortune to God's protection of him, and because of the faith and the prayers of Monsieur Vincent*¹⁰.

Innocent stratagems? Certainly all of them were innocent in the moral sense, and innocent also if speaking from a strictly strategic point of view. Thus Mathieu and Abelly probably had reason when they attributed this incredible immunity that Mathieu seemed to enjoy to the prayers and faith of Saint Vincent. In some cases he was protected by tricks that appeared to be very obvious. But on other occasions it could be said that he was protected by his surprising ingenuity which led his admirers to remove the “g” from his last name.

⁷ CCD, II: 29-30.

⁸ CCD, II: 30.

⁹ LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul*, New City Press, New York 1993, Vol. II, p. 330.

¹⁰ ABELLY, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 331.

The biography written by Abelly is dated 1664, just four years after the death of Saint Vincent. No other major biography was published until 1748, eighty-four years later. This new biography was written by Pierre Collet, a theologian and a member of the Congregation of the Mission (Abelly was a member of the diocesan clergy). In Collet's account Renard's name is mentioned but in a footnote and only to say that he was *the one who carried the money* to Lorraine. Saint Vincent collected more than two million libras in Paris and then forwarded this money to Lorraine. But later, when Collet narrates the events that we are going to examine, he does not mention him by name and only says that their protagonist was *a brother of the mission*. It would seem that in Collet's account, different in this point from that of Abelly, he did not consider Brother Mathieu a *missionary* because he was not a priest but a brother. Later the reader will see why this question is raised.

Whatever the case may be Collet says that brother Mathieu made fifty-four trips from Paris to Lorraine, carrying great sums of money that on one occasion amounted to more than fifty thousand libras. These trips occurred between 1639-1649 and it appears that the written accounts of Mathieu are limited to a description of the eighteen "more dangerous" trips.

Another century would pass before Michel Ulysse Maynard, a canon from Poitiers, would publish the third great biography of Vincent de Paul in 1860. In his work he does justice to Mathieu Renard, referring to him by name, using the altered form of his last name, and in four pages narrates in detail some of his exploits. He states that all this was *an odyssey of a new type in which neither marvelous deeds nor adventure was lacking [...] an odyssey in which there is constant divine intervention to free the humble hero from danger*. In this case the *divine intervention* is Vincent himself since brother Mathieu attributes his safe deliverance from peril to the prayers and merits of the saint.

We admit that the pen seems to have slipped from our good cannon or perhaps his hand slipped. Without a doubt his Christian name Ulysse suggested to him a classic model that was well-known, a model to which he compares his humble hero. The comparison, however, is not precise but can be understood since Collet was a writer during the Romantic Age, well-formed as a canon and knowledgeable in classic mythology. It must be admitted that the comparison of Vincent's action with some pagan divinity is not what one would reasonably expect from a canon.

Maynard is the first author who gives an account that appears to complete the writing of Mathieu or at least the more interesting and more important aspects of his writing. None of the biographies that have been written since the time of Maynard provide any additional information regarding the transfer of money from Paris to Lorraine.

Coste, in his biography, refers to another type of transfer in the opposite direction, from Lorraine to Paris. Vincent speaks about this activity in the letter mentioned at the beginning of this paper and informs Louis Lebreton that *he [Brother Mathieu] brought in a hundred [people] last month [September, 1639], among whom were forty-six young women, some from good families, and others. He fed them and accompanied them right into this city where the greater number have already been placed*¹¹. Coste adds other details, particularly the action of Brother Mathieu that enabled *one hundred and sixty young girls escape the dangers that awaited them*¹².

Thus Mathieu Renard never lost time and never traveled empty-handed, neither going to nor returning from Lorraine. How he was able to make these trips without losing a single libra and without any young woman being sexually assaulted (this is known with certainty as an historical fact) is due to his fearlessness and imaginative ability, to his astuteness, if you will, or if that word sounds too harsh when applied to a saint, then we can say it was due to his imagination, his ability to invent openings in seemingly impossible and extremely difficult situations. What escapes the notice of history is the truth that is found in the conviction of the protagonist, namely, that his actions were possible because he was protected by the prayers and merits of Vincent de Paul.

Historically it can be stated that Mathieu was motivated by the spirit of Vincent de Paul. In other words, his person and actions were powerfully influenced by the person and actions of the founder of the Congregation. The opposite is also true since Vincent saw in Mathieu a living example of how one ought to be and act as a member of the missionary Congregation that he founded five years prior to Mathieu's entrance into it. Mathieu did not enter the Congregation to be a priest, but to be a missionary among poor and impoverished people. In this regard there was no difference between him and his brother priests. His brother clerics added priesthood to their missionary identity, ministerial functions that Mathieu could not exercise. But these priests had to know that even though they were priests they had joined the Congregation to be missionaries of the poor and not primarily to exercise their priestly ministry among whatever class of people. Therefore the priests had to be very careful and not allow the reality of their priesthood to prevent them from caring for the poor in material

¹¹ CCD, I: 582.

¹² PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, translated by Joseph Leonard, C.M., The Newman Press, Westminster (Maryland) 1952, Vol. II, p. 393.

needs. This should be the fundamental character that should inspire every other dimension of their priesthood.

A few years after the campaign in Lorraine was completed, the missionaries began a similar campaign that involved two hundred villages in the area of Champagne-Picardy. There was a time when the original number of eighteen priests and brothers was reduced to three, and the three were brothers and among them was Brother Mathieu. We have testimony about the activity of these three men from a woman in Paris, a Lady of Charity, who stated: *If the Brothers of the Mission are so successful in doing the good we have just heard, what will the priests not do!*¹³.

This woman seemed to understand how the vocation of the priests of the Mission should be lived. The fact that it was possible to live this style of missionary-priest is proven by the lives of the priests who worked in Lorraine during the same time that Mathieu was there; they were all missionaries and Mathieu was a missionary-brother.

Here we are not going to speak about the many exploits of brother Mathieu since these can be found in the better known biographies of Saint Vincent. We do highlight, however, some events that seem almost incredible and yet at the same time are most significant. The truthfulness of these events is based on the moral character of him who lived through and wrote about these events. Brother Mathieu is certainly credible even when he writes about himself and his actions.

One day Mathieu was carrying 34,000 libras in his saddle bags when he came upon an individual mounted on horse with a pistol in his hand. He made Mathieu walk to an out of the way place where he could then easily rob him. At first Mathieu thought there was no way to escape this situation. But then it occurred to him to play the role of the fool. He began to look askance at the thief, hoping for some distraction. Suddenly the would-be-robber turned his head and Mathieu took advantage of this opportunity to hurl his saddle bags into the nearby grass. After a short distance Mathieu turned his back and began to bow down and reverence the thief, dragging his feet and doubled over. The rider began to think that his victim was out of his mind. In fact, however, Mathieu was marking the recently ploughed field so that he would be able to find his saddle bags. The rider continued to push Mathieu toward the edge of a cliff but when he searched Mathieu the only item he found was a knife Mathieu remained unharmed because he was thought to be insane and the rider simply moved on. Mathieu was then able to recuperate the money that he had hidden in the grass.

¹³ CCD, XI: 307.

Mathieu made many trips over the course of the years and he was known throughout the region and awaited by soldiers and scoundrels, not however, to escort him. On one occasion it became known that he was in the Castle of Nomeny and carrying a large sum of money. A group of mercenaries, aware of this fact, took up position on all the roads that led to the castle and waited for him. Mathieu asked that a sally port be opened and he left before dawn and escaped on a secret path that was little used.

There were many such episodes and these became so well known that he was admired by even those people who wanted to rob him. There was one thief who admired Mathieu because he put his life in jeopardy in order to save the lives of hundreds of poor people and as a result he would not allow Mathieu to be robbed. On one occasion, this captain, with his band of men, was hiding in the forest near Saint-Mihiel, when he was informed that Renard was near-by. When he saw that his men were preparing to leave and rob Mathieu he took out his pistol and spoke in a tone of voice that left little doubt: *I will split open the head of anyone who harms a man who does nothing but good.*

With these words of a thief: *a man who does nothing but good* for poor people and the words of a saint: *Brother Mathieu is working wonders*, do we not have a faithful characterization of the life-style of a missionary as envisioned by Saint Vincent? Do not these words reflect the type of man, the type of Christian, that Vincent de Paul wanted to inspire when he founded the Congregation of the Mission?

Conclusion

The historical figure of Mathieu Renard that is presented to us does not correspond in any way to the official definition that Vincent de Paul himself left us concerning the role of the brother in his Congregation. Notice that here we refer to the official definition, not to the high esteem that Vincent expressed on more than one occasion concerning the non-ordained members of his Congregation. Indeed, on one occasion he said that the brothers imitate Christ in what he did during thirty years of his life while the priests imitate Christ in what he did during only the last three years of his life¹⁴.

The official definition states: *The lay members help in these ministries like Martha in whatever way the superior wants them to. This help includes prayers and tears, mortification, and good example*¹⁵.

¹⁴ CCD, XI: 99-100.

¹⁵ *Common Rules*, I: 2.

In the history of the Church there has always been a common understanding about the difference between Martha and Mary. Martha prepared the meals and cared for the house. Without a doubt Brother Renard accommodated himself to this role and it can be supposed that he did so with complete docility when he resided in Saint-Lazare and was not traveling to Lorraine. The image of traveling with large sums of money does not coincide with the image of Martha; we will be honest: it breaks the Martha image into thousands of pieces.

Yet the same man who wrote the Common Rules sent Renard and later Parre and other brothers to risk their lives in order to assist people impoverished by the wars. And these were not the only brothers who do not appear to fit the official description. Vincent had brothers as personal secretaries, Ducournau and Robineau, and their activity in no way coincides with said role of Martha.

In later times during the history of the Congregation, little was known for many years, in fact for two centuries, about the true history of the brothers, but everyone knew what was stated in the Common Rules. Thus, with few exceptions, the model of the brother that came to predominance in all the provinces was that of the brother modeled on the person of Martha, the diligent woman. The truth is this is not a bad model and it has produced not only many anonymous saints but also in many cases the regular well-being of the community depended on the brothers who cared for it. The fault resides in making this model of the brother the only model. The founder himself knew and promoted other models.

Another important aspect that arises in the life of Renard refers to the activity of the priests of the Congregation. In the Common Rules I, 2 the proper ministries of the ecclesiastics of the Congregation are listed. These are normal activities and it could be said that they are the activities of any priest in the Catholic Church, with the exception of establishing the Confraternity of Charity wherever missions are given.

But some of the activities of the priests in Lorraine and later in Champagne-Picardy, as some of the activities of the priests in Paris, had nothing to do with the establishment of the Confraternity of Charity and were not mentioned among the ministries listed in the Common Rules. In this case the same occurred to the priests as occurred to the brothers. The Rules were known but the history was not and in the Congregation a type of priest came into predominance that in its pastoral activity was basically a duplicate of a "normal" priest in liturgical, sacramental, devotional and bureaucratic parishes.

Note: we said came to predominate. There was never lacking in the entire history of the Congregation of the Mission (and in some cases

predominated, especially in mission countries) the type of missionary that was similar to the missionaries in Lorraine, Picardy and Paris, missionaries dedicated to serving people not only in their spiritual needs but also in the material or physical needs. And yes, like the missionaries at Lorraine, some of them also died of physical exhaustion.

The definitive text of the Common Rules was distributed to the members of the Congregation of the Mission on May 17, 1658, two years before the death of their author. Vincent began to comment on the Rules in weekly conferences. Even though there was not sufficient time for commentary on all the rules, we have only to read the conferences that we have in order to understand the richness of Vincent de Paul's spiritual vision for the Congregation. What is not found in the Rules is found in his oral teachings, in his letters, and in his own activity as well as the activity of his confreres. Indeed, among these confreres, and no less an example, we see the activity of one who was baptized Mathieu Regnard and died as Brother Mathieu Renard.

On December 6, 1658, a few months after the distribution of the Rules, Vincent gave a conference in which it could be said that the Founder corrects what he had written in the Rules. He adds a fundamental aspect that does not appear in the Rules. This text, often cited and well-known today, could be viewed as the final definition, a type of testimony concerning what a missionary of the Congregation, priest or brother, ought to be. We conclude with this text as a summary of all that we have desired to say in this study concerning the amazing example of brother Mathieu:

So then, if there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others¹⁶.

¹⁶ CCD, XII: 77.

Jean de la Salle (1598-1639)

“The Ardor of His Zeal Compensated for the Short Span of His Existence”

Vicente de Dios Toribio, C.M.

The Congregation of the Mission began in Folleville (January 25, 1617) and continued with the assistance of Madame de Gondi, Marguerite de Silly, “our first founder” (*What remedy can we put in place?*); with the foundational contract to establish a missionary association, a contract that on April 17, 1625 was signed by Vincent de Paul and the de Gondi’s. This formal ceremony took place on the de Gondi estate and was witnessed by two notaries. The Congregation continued when three other priests signed a contract of affiliation and when on April 24, 1626 ecclesiastical approval was received from the Archbishop of Paris, Jean François de Gondi¹.

Here for the first time we find the name of Jean de la Salle in what is considered a primary source (his name does not appear very often). Who is this missionary? He was born in Seux, in the diocese of Amiens on September 10, 1598. After completing his studies at the Sorbonne he was ordained in 1622. Four years later he joined Vincent and together with Monsieur Portail and Monsieur DuCoudray signed the document that joined the four of them together. Vincent was recognized as the superior of this new foundation².

¹ A curious case of a community being approved before it existed! In fact, just four months later, on 3 September, the first three companions signed in the presence of a notary, the act of affiliation to the infant congregation, company or confraternity. These were Fr. Portail and two priests from the diocese of Amiens: François de Coudray and Jean de la Salle who had been living with Vincent since March and April respectively. JOSÉ MARÍA ROMAN, C.M., *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, Medisende, London 1999, p. 180.

² Coste says: Two names are missing from the foot of the Act of Association, namely, those of Berlin and Louis Calon, Doctor of the Sorbonne. All that we know of the former is what Saint Vincent tells us in a letter dated December 16, 1634, of which we have an extract. According to the biographer of James Gallelant, Louis Calon was one of those priests “in whom sanctity, knowledge, zeal and simplicity were happily combined.” He entered the College des Bons-Enfants on July 1, 1626, with the intention of sharing the life and works of

In Vincent's letter of 1626 we find a more complete description: *Jean de la Salle, whom Saint Vincent calls a "great missionary" and whom the Bishop of Beauvais considered the "most gifted expositor" he had ever known (Conference of Saint Vincent, August 5, 1659 – cf. vol. XII, no. 210), was born in Seux, (Somme), September 10, 1598, and offered his services to Saint Vincent in April 1626. In 1631, he was preaching in Champagne; in 1634, 1635, and 1636, he was working in Gironde and the surrounding areas. When the internal seminary of Saint Lazare opened in June 1637, he was entrusted with its direction. The following year he returned to his missions, after which he was engaged in the ordinands' retreats until the end of his life. He died October 9, 1639, much regretted by Saint Vincent, who lost in him one of his best workers*³.

In 1626 Vincent was forty-five years old; Du Coudray was forty, Portail was about to turn thirty-six and Jean de la Salle, with twenty-eight years, was the youngest. He would only live another thirteen years before he would die in 1639, but *the ardor of his zeal compensated for the short span of his existence*⁴.

While he was the youngest he was not the most intellectual of the group. This was not because he was lacking in intelligence as we have seen from the testimonies of the bishop of Beauvais as well as Vincent's evaluation. Rather his two companions were older and were more intelligent.

What were Jean de la Salle's ministries and virtues? His first ministry was preaching missions; then, he was appointed director of the internal seminary and lastly was involved in the ministry with the ordinands. We add here that in the beginning of his ministry he was very influential in establishing the Confraternities of Charity.

The Confraternities

The establishment of the Confraternities was not a ministry that was expressly entrusted to him but resulted from a relationship of mutual esteem on the part of Louise de Marillac and Jean de la Salle. On more than one occasion Louise asked Vincent to send Jean to one place or another to establish the Confraternity or to speak to groups that were

his associates, but was soon forced to abandon the idea on account of ill-health. He returned to Aumale, of which he was parish priest, but for all that he never ceased to belong to the Congregation and to labor at the work of the missions. PIERRE COSTE, C.M., The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul, The Newman Press, Westminster (Maryland) 1952, Vol. I, pp. 153-154.

³ CCD, I: 30, note, 1.

⁴ PIERRE COSTE, C.M., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 153.

already formed in order to renew their initial fervor. In the exchange of correspondence between Louise and Vincent there are frequent references to Jean de la Salle. *Notices* has preserved a letter that Jean wrote to Louise on February 9, 1630 in which he responds to the questions that she had formulated. Here are some of his words:

Madame, I praise God for having given you such a good beginning and for not denying you the gifts of his Spirit and all that is needed to achieve His great glory. I assure you that I leave everything in your hands. I am pleased with the zeal and the devotion of the Ladies of Charity [...] Here is what I am able to say. I fully recommend these good Ladies and particularly the individuals who will hold official positions. Give them encouragement and I promise to remember you and them in the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Remain in the love of our Lord and of his blessed Mother. Your humble servant.

Many years later Saint Vincent would write to Saint Louise and as occurred on many occasions he speaks to her about her son Michael. He tells her that her son spoke to Father de la Salle and told him that he aspired to the priesthood because that was what his mother (Louise) desired. Vincent tells us that this should not be her desire: *Allow God to lead him; He is more his Father than you are his mother and loves him more than you do. Allow Him to guide him*⁵.

The Missions

For Saint Vincent the missions were the most important and unavoidable ministry of the Congregation, all the rest was complementary. It appears that Jean held and lived this same conviction. Certainly all of Saint Vincent's missionaries preached the missions; this was why they entered the Congregation. It is admirable to read the list of the places where the missions were preached and it is moving to listen to the testimonies of so many personal conversions. The missions that Father Jean de la Salle and Father Jean Brunet preached in the Diocese of Bordeaux were commented upon: *they spent part of the years 1634 and 1635 in the diocese of Bordeaux. Whenever a mission was announced the faithful poured in, sometimes from great distances*⁶. In a letter that the two wrote to Saint Vincent they stated: *The faithful come from far away. They are so anxious to make a general confession that they wait their turn for weeks at a time without returning home and would rather die than lose this opportunity of making their*

⁵ CCD I: 506.

⁶ PIERRE COSTE, C.M., *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 35.

peace with God. There are some who accuse themselves quite loudly so as to humble themselves more⁷. On December 7, 1634 at the request of Jean de la Salle, Saint Vincent wrote to Jean de Fonteneil, vicar-general of the Diocese of Bordeaux the following solemn letter:

M. de la Salle has written me several times about the fondness Our Lord has given you for our modest way of life, for himself, and for M. Brunet, and about the ardor with which you work for the salvation of the poor, and for us when the occasions arise. Now, for all that, Monsieur, I thank you most humbly and beg Our Lord Himself to be your thanks and reward and to shed upon you more and more abundantly His graces and blessings.

O Monsieur, how my heart is filled with consolation every time the above-mentioned M. de la Salle writes to me about your zeal for the salvation of souls, your diligence in winning them over, the blessing Our Lord is bestowing on you, and the solid virtue you possess! I assure you. Monsieur, all that gives me a joy I cannot express to you and a very special fidelity in asking God to be pleased to continue for you and to increase the same graces within you.

That, Monsieur, is the reward you may expect from us for the many, many acts of charity you incessantly perform for us there. I add to that the offering I am making to you, Monsieur, of the Little Company and its services, and my own in particular, with all the affection and humility of which I am capable. This gives me the confidence to recommend myself to your holy prayers, I am, in the love of Our Lord, Monsieur, your most humble and obedient servant⁸.

Father de la Salle became seriously ill during the missions in Bordeaux and was confined to bed for an extended period of time. When he was able to walk he returned to Paris where he initiated another ministry: director of the internal seminary.

We present here some anecdotes that reveal different aspects of the personality of good Father de la Salle:

We have selected two. Jean went to give a mission in Mesnil, Champagne. Faithful to the practice of giving missions gratuitously he refused to accept a donation from Monsieur de Gondi, a priest of the Oratory. Saint Vincent reprimanded him: *There is no objection at all to accepting alms from Father de Gondi. If you have already refused them, offer your apologies to M. Ferrat. Father de Gondi is our founder. We have no right to refuse what he gives us for the love of God any more than we would refuse a gift from someone who was not*

⁷ CCD, I: 271.

⁸ CCD, I: 268-269.

*from the place where we were giving a mission. He then places before him the example of Saint Paul who never accepted anything from the place where he was working, but he took from the other churches in order to work in the new ones when the toil of his own hands was not sufficient*⁹.

The second anecdote refers to the different times that Saint Vincent remembered and praised Father de la Salle in his conferences to the Missionaries when he spoke to them about the virtue of chastity: *never give the mission to nuns, and do not receive any letters from nuns afterward, under pretext of advice they may request, etc. Tell them, as the late M. de la Salle told the nuns in Crécy, where he had gone one day to give the mission, "Do not write to me"*¹⁰. He elaborated on this in another conference:

*Before the foundation of the Company, the Bishop of Geneva, whom we had the honor of knowing and with whom we had the honor of conversing, obliged us to take on responsibility for the Visitation Nuns, and so we were bound to do this; it is a sacred pledge, what can we do about that? But, Messieurs, [...] I recommend that the Company never accept any ministry that might oblige it to direct, guide, and converse with nuns. Speaking of this, I can tell you that, at the beginning of the Company, we gave a mission in a village or hamlet where there were some nuns. They asked us to give them a few sermons and hear their general confessions, since we were hearing the confessions of the good people, which we did. Good M. de la Salle was there. After his return here, those good nuns wrote to him several times. As soon as he noticed that there was some attachment in that, M. de la Salle, who was a man with common sense, replied to them that they should be satisfied with what he had written to them and even said to them when he was in that place, that he had nothing more to say or to write to them*¹¹.

Was Saint Vincent so rigid and mistrusting as he appears here? He was not and in fact he was always surrounded by women. But from the beginning he did not consider the spiritual direction of religious women as one of the ends of the Company which was dedicated to the service of the poor. To attend to both matters would result in one of them not being fulfilled in the proper way.

⁹ CCD, I: 133.

¹⁰ CCD, XI: 161-162.

¹¹ CCD, XII: 343-344.

The internal seminary

In 1637 Saint Vincent decided to establish the internal seminary in the Congregation. In the first years of the Congregation's establishment the members were ordained priests who immediately began to preach missions or preach retreats to the ordinands. Other aspirants, those not ordained, lived at Saint Lazare and were inspired by the example of the older missionaries, especially Saint Vincent, who, for all practical purposes, was their director. But as Abelly says, Saint Vincent on *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 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 [...] the seminary began 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*¹².

We know little about Father Jean in this ministry. Saint Vincent asked him to spend some months in the Jesuit Novitiate in order to understand his role as director and to adapt the practices of the Jesuits to the Congregation. *When he was in charge of the seminary he managed, in barely a year, to create such a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere that the older missionaries regretted that they and their contemporaries had not been able to enjoy such benefits*¹³. Why then did Father de la Salle remain in this position for only one year? We do not know. Perhaps he longed to preach missions or perhaps Vincent needed him for the missions in Saint-Germain-en-Laye which had been requested by King Louis XIII and which would begin in February, 1638.

The royal court resided in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Saint Vincent would have preferred that this mission would be preached by others since his Missionaries were dedicated to the poor and not the "great and influential individuals of the century." But Louis XIII asked for his Missionaries and Vincent had to cede to the king's wishes. The mission was difficult in its development but none the less successful. Among other things the missionaries had to combat scandalous nudity of many women of the royal court and in confession exhorted them to practice Christian modesty. The Missionaries were openly criticized but they continued to preach the gospel. Conversions occurred and because of their evangelization of the poor which those

¹² LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God: Vincent de Paul*, New City Press, New York 1993, p. 179.

¹³ JOSÉ MARÍA ROMAN, C.M., *op. cit.*, p. 283.

missionaries preached, those who before insulted them now wanted to join the Confraternity of Charity and made concrete proposals to contribute their support. *Notices* tells us *that almost everyone in the royal house made an effort to take advantage of the opportunity to share in the grace of God that was given in such abundance*. This explains the letter that de la Salle sent to Father Jean Dehorgny, another great missionary who succeeded him as Director of the internal seminary: *Tell them in the seminary that without the mission of Saint-Germain-en-Laye thousands of souls would have been lost*.

When the mission in Saint-Germain-en-Laye was concluded Father de la Salle returned to Saint Lazare where he would undertake another ministry in which he would continue until his death.

Retreats for the ordinands

Saint Vincent was dedicated to and dedicated his missionaries to giving retreats for the ordinands in order to provide the Church with better prepared priests. Later he dedicated himself to the ministry of seminaries in order to prepare priests who would be concerned about the poor. In 1628, with the help of three priests, he directed the first retreat for ordinands: *the retreats for ordinands were, in fact, a sort of professional sandwich course [...] It was a case of applying an urgent remedy to a state of affairs that called for immediate action*¹⁴. This retreat was very successful and was adopted in many dioceses as well as in Rome.

Saint Vincent wrote: *We have about seventy retreatants [...] M. Hopille explains the Pontifical and M. Hiobier gives the morning talk. Messieurs de la Salle, Dehorgny, Soufliers, Cuissot, and some of our young theologians help with the retreat. It is being held at the Bons-Enfants where things are working out better than we had dared to hope*¹⁵. We have a lengthy letter of Saint Vincent written on June 14, 1638 which reveals to us the ministry with the ordinands during these years. Vincent had been away and so spoke with Father de la Salle about many administrative details concerning Saint Lazare: rent, keys, individuals asking to become members of the Company, the purchase of fabric, money, a flock of sheep who would be spending the night in the stables of Saint Lazare, greetings for different people [...] as if Jean had substituted for him during Vincent's absence¹⁶.

¹⁴ JOSÉ MARÍA ROMAN, C.M., *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁵ CCD, I: 516.

¹⁶ CCD, I: 478-480.

Father de la Salle continued in the ministry with the ordinands until the end of his life. We could say that this was his last work, the last flower joined to a crown that was already filled with much merit and many good works.

The end

In October 1639, Saint Vincent, in a letter to a priest of the Mission and certainly to all the Missionaries in a circular letter, communicated the death of Jean de la Salle: *It has pleased the Divine Goodness to take to Himself good Monsieur de la Salle. He died of purpura on the feast of Saint Denis, between three and four o'clock in the morning on the fourteenth day of his illness. His death corresponded to his life. His acceptance of the good pleasure of God was constant from the beginning of his illness right to the end, without any contrary thought at all. He had always feared death, but, as he saw from the start that he was contemplating it with delight, he told me that he was going to die with pleasure because, he said, he had heard me say that at the end God takes away the fear of death from those who have feared it during this life and who practiced charity towards the poor. I cannot tell you the devout sentiments he has left in the Company*¹⁷.

Naturally, Saint Vincent informed Louise because the deceased had collaborated with her on many occasions: *I shall say just a word to you about the loss we have experienced in the late M. de la Salle and the one we are in danger of suffering. By the grace of God, my heart is at peace about it, seeing that is it God's good pleasure*¹⁸.

Father Jean de la Salle was one of the first three companions who joined Saint Vincent to initiate the development of the Company. He was simple, humble and an effective worker in all his ministries. The biographers of Saint Vincent say that he cried when Jean died; but then that would be natural because he had lost a beloved son. Jean was a missionary for only thirteen years, from 1626-1639, but the ardor of his zeal compensated for the short span of his existence.

¹⁷ CCD, I: 586-587.

¹⁸ CCD, I: 580.

Vincent de Paul and the Holy See

Adelino Ornelas, C.M.

The child who was born in Landes, in the south-western part of France during the sixteenth century did not appear to be destined to confront the leader of Christianity. But yes, during his lifetime Vincent de Paul did in fact establish relationships with several of the Popes. When he was studying in Dax and Toulouse he had listened to others speak about the Popes who were involved in various political dealings at that time and also concerned about the religious wars that assaulted France and reached Italy. Perhaps Vincent had formed some image of the Renaissance Popes, worldly individuals who were involved in the politics of Italy. Most probably all of this appeared to be a reality that was quite removed from him and therefore nothing to be concerned about. Yet as events unfolded Vincent would become deeply involved with the Holy See.

It should be remembered that during the eighty years of Vincent's life there were eleven Popes: Gregory XIII (1572-1585); Sixtus V (1585-1590); Urban VII (1590); Gregory XIV (1590-1591); Clement VIII (1592-1605); Leo XI (1605); Paul V (1605-1621); Gregory XV (1621-1623); Urban VIII (1623-1644); Innocent X (1644-1655); Alexander VII (1655-1667).

Vincent's first contact with the Holy See occurred in 1601 when he had been appointed pastor of Tilh. His appointment was disputed and he decided to abandon his claim to this position. He did however have his sights set on higher positions *which he dared not speak about* and which seem to indicate the possibility of being named a bishop. Even though Vincent was unable to achieve his objective, nonetheless, his first visit to Rome enabled him to visit the different Christian monuments in the city. When M. Du Coudray was in Rome in 1631, Vincent wrote to him and stated: *So you have finally arrived in Rome, there where the visible head of the Church militant resides, where the bodies of Saint Peter and Paul lie, as well as those of so many other martyrs and holy people who, in former times, gave their blood and dedicated their whole life to Jesus Christ. O Monsieur, how fortunate you are to walk on the ground where so many great and holy individuals have trod! This consideration moved me so such an extent when I was in Rome thirty years ago that, although*

*I was burdened with sins, I could not help being moved, even to tears, it seems to me*¹.

In 1601 Clement VIII was Pope and Vincent greatly admired this man whom he considered to be a saint, especially when he heard that the Pope wept when he climbed the holy stairs located adjacent to the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. Perhaps Vincent found in this first encounter with holiness a personal call to holiness which at that time remained simply a desire.

Seven years later Vincent traveled to Rome once again. He had lived through his experience of captivity and with the assistance of the Vice-legate, Pietro Montorio, he was able to travel to Rome. The bishop had made promises with regard to a financially profitable appointment and so Vincent lodged with the bishop, taking on the role of a servant and teaching the bishop some of the secrets of alchemy which he learned during his captivity in Algeria. In turn the bishop shared these secrets with some of the cardinals. At the same time Vincent took advantage of this opportunity to engage in some further studies and to become involved in some pastoral experience at the Holy Spirit Hospital. It does not appear that he had any contact with the Pope who at that time was Paul V. It was most probable that it was during this time that he came to some people who led him to advise M. Codoing in 1642: *You see, Monsieur, you and I allow ourselves to be carried away too much by our own opinions. You, however, are in a place where an exceptional reserve and circumspections are necessary. I have always heard that the Italians are the most cautious people in the world and the most distrustful of individuals who act too quickly. Caution, patience, and gentleness resolve everything with them, in time. Because they know that we French act too quickly, they leave us out in the cold for a long time without making friends with us*². Disillusioned by the empty promises, Vincent left Rome and returned to Paris.

The years between 1610 and 1625 were years of discouragement and searching. They were also years of discovery and encounter. In 1617 the movement of the Spirit was revealed as Vincent preached in Folleville and as a result the popular missions and the Confraternities of Charity were initiated. From these works there arose a plan to establish a foundation that would come to be known as the Congregation of the Mission.

We can frame Vincent's relationship with the Holy See in three general lines:

¹ CCD I: 111-112; SVP.ES I: 176; SVP I: 115.

² CCD II: 266-267; SVP.ES II: 197; SVP II: 235.

- Vincent and the Congregation of the Mission;
- Vincent and the missions *ad gentes*;
- Vincent and Jansenism.

1. Vincent and the Congregation of the Mission

The year 1622 was most significant for Vincent de Paul. In 1622 he was appointed by Francis de Sales (who died later in that same year) as superior of the Visitation Sisters in Paris, an opportunity to utilize his gift as a spiritual teacher. At the urging of Madame de Gondi, Vincent initiated the ministry of popular missions and was assisted in this work by other priests. There were no guarantees, however, that this ministry could be maintained. Thus the de Gondi family offered Vincent forty-five thousand livres and the College des Bons-Enfants in order to create a stable foundation that would provide continuity to the popular missions. This work had been initiated in 1617 but the contract was not signed until April, 1625. During those eight years Vincent and M. Portail and a few other priests had acquired much experience in preaching these missions. The only thing lacking was a legal foundation for this ministry and in order to obtain said approbation Vincent became involved with the Holy See.

Vincent knew that the approval of the Archbishop of Paris was not enough. He wanted a more stable foundation and for that he needed the approval of Rome. In 1627 Vincent petitioned the Propagation of the Faith for the first time and requested two things: a general blessing and the customary faculties that were granted to other institutes for the missions. After a consultation with the Nuncio this request was put off. Urban VII was the Pope at that time.

The following year Vincent presented another petition but this time his request was broader and included granting him the rights that were normally bestowed on founders of religious groups and exemption from the local Ordinaries except in those areas that pertain to the missions. These two requests received a negative response because his request supposed the creation of a new religious order.

Like a good Gasconian Vincent did not waiver and in 1631 he counseled M. Du Coudray: *You must make it understood that the poor are being damned for want of knowing the things necessary for salvation, and for lack of confession. If His Holiness were aware of this necessity, he would have no rest until he had done all he could to set things right. It is the knowledge we had of this situation that brought about the establishment of the company, so as to remedy it in some way. In order to do this, we must live in a congregation and observe five things as essential for this purpose: 1] leave to the bishops the power of sending*

the Missionaries into the part of the diocese they choose; 2] the above-mentioned priests are to be subject to the pastors where they go to give the mission, for its duration; 3] they are to take nothing from those poor people, but to live at their own expense; 4] they are neither to preach, nor catechize, nor hear confessions in cities where there is an archbishopric, a bishopric, or a presidial court, except in the case of ordinands and those who will make retreats in the house; 5] the Superior in the Company is to have complete control over it; and these five maxims are to be as it were the basic principles of this Congregation.... So, stand firm and make them understand that we have had this in mind for many long years and have had experience with it³.

These matters were of such interest to the general public that King Louis XIII wrote to Pope Urban VIII in almost identical words: *"Most Holy Father, the good results and great edification our subjects in rural areas are receiving from the kind assistance and instruction given them by the Priests of the Mission, founded to go from village to village to preach, exhort, hear confessions, and catechize the poor common people, without accepting any worldly remuneration whatsoever, causes us to desire that this Mission be formed into an Institution that will grow and endure into the future. That is why we write this letter to Your Holiness to implore you with all our devotion that it may be your good pleasure to favor and support by your authority such a holy, praiseworthy, and useful plan, establishing the Mission of these priests as a formal Congregation, in accordance with the requests that will be made in this regard on our behalf by M. de Béthune our Ambassador, whom we have entrusted with them. We ask God, Most Holy Father, to keep you and maintain Your Holiness for years to come in the government and preservation of Holy Mother the Church"*⁴.

After some negative and suspicious, jealous maneuvers of other religious institutes, Vincent had recourse to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and through the mediation of said Congregation obtained the desired approval for his Institute. The joy of Vincent and his companions became a fervent act of thanksgiving.

After some negotiations, Urban VIII approved the new Congregation on January 12, 1633 with the publication of the Bull *Salvatoris Nostri*. In this document the three objectives of the Congregation are recognized:

- a) to assist its members and people living in the country areas attain salvation;

³ CCD I: 112-113; SVP.ES I: 176-177; SVP I: 115-116.

⁴ CCD XIIIa: 243; SVP.ES X: 264-165; SVP XIII: 219.

- b) to honor the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation and cultivate a particular devotion to the Virgin;
- c) to assist ordinands.

Vincent's plan was almost complete; the only things needed were approval of the vows and the Statute on Poverty. These would be the icing on the cake but the new Pope, Innocent X, refused these requests. In fact, the relationship with the Vatican became more difficult during this period. This Pope was famous for being opposed to religious communities and during his pontificate he favored the suppression of small convents and abbeys where the observance of the Rule was no longer possible and where the ministry of evangelization was no longer being carried out. This, however, was not Vincent's situation and it was within this context that the following words were attributed to Vincent: *We can expect nothing from this Pope and will have to await another.* These words present an apt description of Roman diplomacy.

In 1655 Alexander VII was elected Pope. He was very aware of the activities of the Congregation within the Church and he was favorably disposed toward the Missionaries. Soon after his election, on September 22, 1655 he published the brief *Ex commissa nobis*, which approved vows for the Congregation. Then on August 12, 1659 the brief *Alias nos* was published and with this the Statute on the vow of poverty was ratified. In 1659 the Pope ordered the ordinands in Rome to make their ordination retreat in the house of the Congregation located in Montecitorio (a building which still exists and is currently the seat of the Italian Chamber of Deputies).

We can understand Vincent's joy when this Pope was elected, one from whom much good was expected: *O wretch that I am, pouncing on my food, devouring it like those just mentioned, what reason I have to humble myself.... It has pleased Our Lord to give us a Pope. I received this news when I was on my way to the meeting. Cardinal Mazarin's sister sent it to the Visitation Nuns in the faubourg Saint-Jacques, and they had someone inform me. He's a good Pope, very knowledgeable about contemporary affairs, and has held the opposite opinion to the ones that have been condemned. The Priests of the Mission will please offer a Holy Mass of thanksgiving, etc. tomorrow, and our Brothers will assist at it and receive Holy Communion next Sunday for the same intention. The Ladies of Charity are to receive Holy Communion tomorrow for that intention*⁵.

It is easy to see how this Pope became part of Vincent's conference (December 19, 1659) on obedience: *But to whom do we owe obedience?*

⁵ CCD XI: 171; SVP.ES XI: 103; SVP XI: 179.

The Rule begins with Our Holy Father, the Pope; he is the common father of all Christians, the visible head of the Church, the vicar of Jesus Christ, the successor of Saint Peter; we owe him obedience, we who are in the world to instruct the people in the obedience they, as well as we, should have for this universal shepherd of our souls. It is up to us to show them the example of this. Therefore, let us give ourselves to God to obey him faithfully, and receive gladly what will come from Him. It is to him, in the person of the saint to whom Our Lord said, "Peter, feed my lambs, feed my sheep," that this same Savior has given the keys of His Church. He is, as it were, another species of man, so far is he above others. Consequently, we must consider him in Our Lord and Our Lord in him⁶.

This same thought was communicated to the Daughters when during September 1655 Vincent explained to them the Common Rule: *People who speak of doing God's will understand by this will his commandments and those of his Church, which oblige us to obey the Pope, bishops, and others who have received authority from them⁷.*

2. Vincent and the mission *ad gentes*

In matters that concerned the Congregation of the Mission it was Vincent who had recourse to Rome as he attempted to convince the Vatican of the worthiness of his cause. In matters, however, that concerned the missions *ad gentes* negotiations moved in the opposite direction.

In 1622 Rome created the Propagation of Faith to promote the Church's concern with regard to the missions *ad gentes*. Rome wanted to break the Spanish and Portuguese hold on these missions and to do this it needed personnel who were not citizens of those countries.

The Roman Pontiff ratified the missionary character of the Congregation, a mission that was based on the mission of Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor and that involved the Missionaries in the preaching of missions to the people and in other ministries proper to the Institute. Missions *ad gentes* were mentioned in the Papal Bull but no specific commitment was assumed in this area. Even so, certain phrases in the Bull opened the path for other works that *are in conformity with the Rule*, recognizing of course that *the Superior General will have complete superiority and authority over all the houses of the Congregation of the Mission, wherever they have been established*

⁶ CCD XII: 350; SVP.ES XI: 692; SVP XI: 179.

⁷ CCD X: 86; SVP.ES IX: 734; SVP X: 107.

and that *the Superior General has the power to send or recall the missionaries to any place.*

The Propagation of Faith requested the Congregation to assume responsibility for certain territories where the Church had not yet been established and the Missionaries responded enthusiastically to these requests. Vincent himself imagined a world that extended beyond the borders of France.

Through the Missionaries who were living in Rome, Bishop Ignoli, the secretary of the Propagation, proposed certain missions that Vincent referred to in a letter that he wrote to M. Lebreton: *I admire the Congregation's care for the missions and I pray the sovereign shepherd and Master of the missions to draw glory from it*⁸.

In the meantime requests had been received to send Missionaries to Istanbul (1634); Brazil (1640); Persia (1640); the Far East (1644); North Africa: Tunis (1645), Algeria (1646); Ireland (1646); Arabia (1647); Madagascar (1648); Canada (1650); Poland (at the request of Queen Louise-Marie de Gonzague, 1651); Switzerland (1654); Lebanon (1656). Even though Vincent would have liked to have been able to send Missionaries to each of these places only a few of these requests received a favorable response: North Africa, Ireland, Madagascar and Poland.

In 1640 Vincent wrote to M. Louis Lebreton: *What shall I say about Bishop Ingoli's suggestion? Nothing certainly, Monsieur, but that I accept it, with all the reverence and humility in my power.... I have been to celebrate Holy Mass. This is the thought that came to me: because the power to send persons ad gentes resides, on earth, in the person of His Holiness alone... all priests have the obligation to obey him in that regard. According to that maxim, which seems reasonable to me, I offered this Little Company to God, to His Divine Majesty, to go wherever His Holiness commands*⁹.

Two years later he wrote: *This Little Company is established in this disposition that, when His Holiness chooses to send it a capite ad calcem to those countries, it will drop everything and go most willingly*¹⁰.

In 1646 Vincent rejoiced as he witnessed the expansion of the Church and the universal vocation of the Company. But he could not hide his concern for the de-Christianization of the Old World: *I must admit that I am, I think, extremely attached to and zealous for the propagation of the Church in infidel lands, for fear that God might gradually do*

⁸ CCD I: 538; SVP.ES I: 539; SVP I: 548.

⁹ CCD II: 64-65; SVP.ES II: 214; SVP II: 256.

¹⁰ CCD II: 288; SVP.ES II: 214; SVP II: 256.

*away with it here*¹¹. A short time later Vincent admitted to the same missionary: *Who will assure us that God is not calling us right now to Persia? This must not be conjectured from the fact that our houses are not full, for the ones that have more men do not produce the most fruit.... You know, Monsieur, how long the Sacred Congregation has had its eyes on us, how often it has approached us, and how slowly we have moved so as not to involve anything human in the decision on this holy endeavor. However, since we are being pressured once again both by letter and by the Nuncio, I no longer have any doubt that this must be done*¹².

Vincent was enthusiastic about the missions and in 1648 he decided to accept the mission in Madagascar. As a result of Vincent's commentaries and the reading of the chronicles of the missionaries in the refectory, many confreres also became enthused about the missions. In 1657 Vincent became very emotional when he said in his conference: *We should be ready and willing to come and go wherever God pleases, whether to the Indies or elsewhere; lastly, to devote ourselves willingly to the service of our neighbor and to extend the empire of Jesus Christ in souls; and I myself, old and infirm as I am, must, nonetheless, have this disposition, even to go to the Indies to win souls to God there, although I were to die on the way or on board ship*¹³.

Vincent's zeal reached mystical heights when during the repetition of prayer he spoke to a priest who had been sent to Madagascar as though he were present there in front of him and when in reality this confrere had died.

He spoke to the Daughters of Charity: *I know that people more than six hundred leagues away are asking for you, Sisters; I have had letters from them; yes, people more than six hundred leagues away are thinking of you; and if Queens are requesting you there, I know other persons who are also asking for you overseas*¹⁴. Vincent was referring to the requests he had received from the Queen of Poland and M. Nacquart who asked Vincent to send Daughters to Madagascar.

All of this shows that Vincent and the Holy See frequently discussed the matter of missions *ad gentes*. At times these requests were made directly to Vincent, at other times these requests were communicated to Vincent by the Missionaries living in Rome and then there were other times when these requests were communicated by the Nuncio in Paris.

¹¹ CCD III: 40; SVP.ES III: 37; SVP III: 35.

¹² CCD III:164-165; SVP.ES III: 143; SVP III: 153-154.

¹³ CCD XI: 357; SVP.ES XI: 281; SVP XI: 402.

¹⁴ CCD IX: 409; SVP.ES IX: 472; SVP IX: 564.

3. Vincent and Jansenism

Jansenism was a problem that was specifically French and the Holy See would intervene in this situation that threatened to get out of control. Vincent used his influence and conviction to settle this controversy.

Jansenism arose from the publication of a book written by Cornelius Janssen entitled *Augustinus* which was said to be based on the writings of Saint Augustine. In France, Jansenism came into prominence due to Jean Duvergier, who was known as the Abbot of Saint-Cyran (a title that was given to him by the Bishop of Potiers). Cornelius and Jean became friends while they were studying in Paris. After completing his studies, Cornelius returned to Holland where he was ordained a priest and appointed the bishop of Ypres.

The ideas presented in Janssen's book were very similar to those presented by Calvin or perhaps it is better to say that the abbot of Saint-Cyran said that Calvin was correct in his position. The abbot and Vincent knew one another since they were both members of an elite group of religious and spiritual leaders in Paris and in 1624 they began to collaborate with one another. Vincent valued the abbot's knowledge and graciously accepted his assistance in founding the Congregation of the Mission and in acquiring the property of Saint-Lazare. At some point Vincent began to feel that the abbot's ideas were dangerous and jeopardized the Church's doctrine. Later Vincent would tell M. Dehorny, a Missionary in Rome who found Janssen's ideas attractive, that the abbot did not accept the teaching of the councils.

In 1637 Vincent went to the abbot's house and became engaged in a lengthy and enlightening discussion. This conversation marked the end of their relationship. The abbot wrote a treatise on humility and in this work he attacked Vincent, stating that this missionary was ignorant and incapable of directing priests and seminarians. At the same time Vincent wrote a treatise on grace that was not published but shown to a few of his friends.

Here we will not discuss the doctrinal aspects of Jansenism but rather will focus on Vincent's intervention that was intended to bring calmness and peace to those involved in this controversy. When Vincent intervened he had stated that he was willing to lay down his life for the spouse of Christ. In light of that statement the following words of Vincent are most curious: *On the request as to whether I heard M. de Saint-Cyran say that the Pope and most Bishops, Pastors, etc. do not constitute the true Church, lacking a vocation and the spirit of grace, I reply that I never heard him say what is contained in the said request, except for one time, when he said that many Bishops were children of the*

*Court and had no vocation*¹⁵. This was a statement Vincent made during the trial of the abbot in which Vincent had no desire to be his accuser. During intimate conversations with his confreres, however, he stated: *All my life I have been afraid of finding myself at the start of some heresy. I saw the great havoc wrought by that of Luther and Calvin and how many persons of all kinds and conditions had sucked in its pernicious venom by wanting to taste the false sweetness of their so-called Reformation. I have always been afraid of finding myself enveloped in the errors of some new doctrine before realizing it. Yes, I have feared that all my life*¹⁶.

When this new doctrine began to spread, Vincent felt he had to act. He gathered together at Saint-Lazare a group of important individuals who redacted a document in which they put forth five propositions that they considered to be the basis of the Jansenist doctrine and that were contained in Janssen's book (this book, however, was not mentioned by name). The text that was sent to the Holy See was the following:

1. Given their limitations and the fact that they lack the grace necessary to accomplish this, it is impossible for the faithful to keep certain of God's commandments, no matter how much they would wish to do so or try to observe them.
2. Given the state of fallen human nature, promptings of divine grace are never resisted.
3. Given man's fallen state, for him to gain or to lose merit it is not necessary for him to have inner freedom; it is enough that he be free from external constraint.
4. The semi-pelagians admitted the need for interior, prevenient grace, for all actions, even for the first stirrings of faith. Their heresy consisted in claiming that the nature of this grace was such that the human will could either cooperate with it or resist it.
5. To say that Jesus Christ died, or shed his blood for all men together, is semi-pelagianism.

Signatures then had to be gathered in support of the petition favoring the condemnation of these propositions. Vincent asked individuals whom he knew to sign the petition and even though Vincent became discouraged at different times during this process he did not give in to these feelings.

The next phase was developed in Rome. We know that Vincent had planned the tactics that should be followed, advised the delegates and

¹⁵ CCD XIIIa: 108; SVP.ES X: 110-111; SVP XIII: 91.

¹⁶ CCD XI: 30-31; SVP.ES XI: 730; SVP XI: 37.

supported them financially. He also assisted them in finding lodging. The delegates, in turn, continued to inform Vincent about the progress of the negotiations and at different times asked for his advice.

Even before the papal Bull was published on June 9, 1633, Vincent had received news about the condemnation of the five propositions. With great joy Vincent communicated this news to his community and his friends.

But the problem continued since the Jansenists said that the propositions were certainly able to be condemned but these propositions did not represent Jansenism nor were they part of Augustinian thinking.

On April 2, 1657 Vincent wrote to Jean Des Lions, the dean of Senlis and a fervent Jansenist *Enclosed also is the Bull of our Holy Father the Pope, confirming those of Innocent X and the other Popes who have condemned the opinions of the time. I think you find, Monsieur, that it leaves you no room for doubt, after the acceptance and publication made by our Prelates, who have met so often on this subject, and recently, by the Assembly of the Clergy, who had a report printed – which I would have sent you, except that I think you have already seen it – and, finally, after the censure by the Sorbonne and the letter written to you as ordered by our Holy Father. In line with that, Monsieur, I hope that this time you will give the glory to God and the edification of his Church that everyone expects of you in these circumstances. If you wait any longer, it is to be feared that the evil spirit, who is so adroit in evading the truth, may subtly put you in the situation in which you will no longer have the fortitude to do this because you have availed yourself of grace. This grace has been prompting you for so long a time by such gentle and powerful means that I have never heard that God has used similar means for anyone else with regard to this matter¹⁷.*

To those who felt that this situation could only be resolved by an Ecumenical Council, Vincent wrote: *You say that the zeal of each of the two parties in maintaining its own opinion leaves little hope for perfect union between them. Yet, this goal must be pursued, which obliges me to point out to you that no union can be attained when there is a diversity and opposition of opinions in matters of faith and religion, unless a third party is consulted. When there are no Councils, this can only be the Pope. Anyone who is unwilling to bring about union in this manner is incapable of union and, apart from that, the latter is not even to be desired. Laws must never be made compatible with crimes, no more than, lying should be in harmony with the truth.... As for referring the matter to an Ecumenical Council, how can one be convoked during these*

¹⁷ CCD VI: 290-291; SVP.ES VI: 264; SVP VI: 266-267.

*wars?... do not fear that the Pope will not be obeyed, as he should be, when he has made a pronouncement*¹⁸.

Despite Vincent's efforts the controversy was not resolved. New actors appeared: Pascal with his famous *Pensees*, A. Arnaut and his book on frequent communion and Pashasius Quesnel. Clement XI resolved the question with the publication of the Bull *Unigenitus*. Jansenism, however, influenced some members of the Congregation and also influenced popular piety until the end of the nineteenth century.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

¹⁸ CCD IV: 210, 214; SVP.ES IV: 200-204; SVP IV: 204-210.

The Charitable Missionary in Action: M. Étienne Blatiron (1614-1657)¹

Erminio Antonello, C.M.



M. Étienne Blatiron

From an individual's writings we are able to discover something about who they are as a person. From the letters of Monsieur Étienne Blatiron we are able to see that he had a strong personality and was

¹ Étienne Blatiron, a priest of the Mission, was born in Saint-Julien-Chapteuil (Haute-Loire) on January 6, 1614 and was received into the Congregation of the Mission on January 6, 1638. He was ordained a priest in 1639 and ministered in Alet (1639, 1641), Saintes (1641), in Richelieu, Rome (1644-1645) and in Genoa (1645-1647). At the request of Cardinal Durazzo the missionaries began to minister in that city. There, as superior of the new house, he was responsible for organizing everything. Vincent considered him one of the most competent of his Missionaries and a *great servant of God* (LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul*, New City Press, New Rochelle NY 1993, Volume III, p. 54). Étienne Blatiron died in Genoa, July 24, 1657, a victim of his dedication to the plague-stricken. His biography was published in Volume II of *Notices sur les prêtres, clercs et frères défunts de la Congrégation de la Mission*, pp. 151-203.

enflamed with an apostolic zeal. During the final years of his seminary formation he was profoundly impressed by the missionary spirit of Vincent de Paul... that spirit which, in a conference to the Missionaries, he affirmed as the most perfect way of extending the kingdom of the God among people and thus making people aware of God's offer of salvation, all of which implies a zeal that is the flame of God's love². In the letters that Vincent wrote to Monsieur Blatiron we have a confirmation of the fact that this desire to build up the kingdom of God and this passion for the salvation of people were very much a part of Étienne's personality.

In one of the first letters that Vincent wrote to Monsieur Blatiron, he warned him, in a friendly manner, to *always remember that in the spiritual life little account is taken of the beginnings. People attach importance to the progress and the end*³ and the following year he wrote to him about moderating his zeal. At that time Monsieur Blatiron was twenty-seven years old, had been ordained about a year and was preaching a mission in Alet:

*In the name of God, Monsieur, take care of your poor life. Be content with consuming it little by little for Divine Love. It is not your own; it belongs to the Author of life, for love of whom you must preserve it until He asks it of you, unless an opportunity arises to offer it*⁴.

These exhortations to moderation appear as a constant theme in Vincent's letters. On another occasion he wrote:

*I do not know if it is necessary for me to urge you to take a rest, since you know that the greatest satisfaction you could wish for me in this world is your good health. So, take care of it for the love of Our Lord, and, while others are pushing you to do too much, allow me to invite you not to work so hard. Speak up courageously in my name and, without complaining, say that it is too much*⁵.

With those words Vincent highlighted the active character of Monsieur Blatiron as well as his availability for any mission despite his weak and fragile health⁶. In reality his whole life was a continual

² Zeal to spread the kingdom of God and zeal to procure the salvation of our neighbor. Is there anything in the world more perfect? If love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is unconditional in the love of God [CCD XII, 250; SVP.ES XI, 590; SVP XII, 307-308].

³ CCD II, 146; SVP.ES II, 107; SVP II, 129.

⁴ CCD II, 211; SVP.ES II, 157; SVP II, 185.

⁵ CCD III, 198; SVP.ES III, 175; SVP III, 195.

⁶ CCD III, 257-258; SVP.ES III, 234; SVP III, 256.

offering of himself for the building up of the kingdom of God and this offering reached its culmination when he served his sisters and brothers in 1657 during the time when the plague had afflicted the population of Genoa.

The establishment of the house in Genoa

While preaching popular missions in Alet (1644), Monsieur Blatiron was appointed by Vincent as a consultor to the superior in Rome, Monsieur Dehorgny. Soon after that, in 1645 at the request of Cardinal Durazzo⁷ he was named the first superior of the new House in Genoa. The Cardinal had been impressed by the zeal of Monsieur Codoing whom he met in 1645. At that time Monsieur Codoing was traveling from Rome to Paris and had stopped in Genoa where he offered to preach Missions in the Diocese. This created in the cardinal a desire to have the members of this new Congregation present in his city⁸. He petitioned Vincent who took advantage of this offer and sent four priests and one brother to Genoa. This group of Missionaries was

⁷ Cardinal Étienne Durazzo was a member of one of the new noble families of Genoa: the family of Marquis Durazzo who gave Genoa nine dukes (supreme magistrates). He was the son of the Duke of the Republic of Genoa, Pietro Durazzo (1560-1631) and the brother of Duke Cesare Durazzo (1593-1680). He was created a cardinal in 1633 and ministered as the Archbishop of Genoa from 1635-1644. He governed the diocese with much energy and on two occasions opposed the civil authorities. The first of these occasions occurred when the Duke wanted to affirm that his power came from God and therefore he had power over the Church. The conflict became more intense when the Duke wanted to control the hospitals and the confraternities which represented a very powerful network of associations and which had considerable economic and social influence. These confraternities felt as though they depended solely on the civil authorities and rejected the interventions (which were attempts at new reforms) of the archbishop. The second situation arose when the civil authorities wanted to control the seminary. The archbishop would not cede his authority and in fact the reform of the clergy was the primary objective of his episcopacy. In the Synod of 1643, his decisions were criticized by those members of the clergy who were opposed to any reform. In 1648, the Senate of the Republic pressured the Archbishop even more when they appealed to Rome and requested his removal. During the time of the plague the Archbishop labored heroically and he was referred to as the *Borromeo of Genoa*. After 1656 he lived in Rome (1659-1661). When he returned to Genoa the situation was still critical. Then as a result of serious illness he resigned as archbishop and retired in Rome. He helped the religious in Rome and was also kind and devoted to Vincent de Paul and his Missionaries. He died in Rome on July 22, 1667.

⁸ CCD II, 595; SVP.ES II, 463-464; SVP II, 544.

headed by Monsieur Blatiron. Thus the new establishment was begun. In March of the following year, Monsieur Martin, who had been ministering in Rome, joined this group. This new group of Missionaries immediately began to minister and dedicated themselves to the characteristics works of the Congregation: preaching in the rural areas and retreats for the clergy. The pastoral zeal of the bishop allowed them no rest and this reached a point where Vincent, with great respect toward the cardinal, recommended moderation and rest from their ministry. He wanted to the Missionaries to avoid becoming overly tired and so he wrote the confreres:

I can appreciate the Cardinal Archbishop's reason for not granting you any respite in your work, on the grounds of his zeal or the disposition and present fervor of the people. However, we must look ahead and preserve the workers, so that the work will endure. So please make some effort toward this moderation. If His Eminence insists, at least be careful to go easier in the pulpit and in the services. Speak to the people more familiarly and in a softer tone, making them come closer to you, for, in the final analysis, virtue is not found in extremes, but in prudence, which I recommend as strongly as I can, both to you and to Monsieur Martin⁹.

Thanks to the zeal of Monsieur Blatiron and Monsieur Martin, their missionary activity moved forward. In light of the great masses of people that came forward to receive the sacraments, they put in place some practices that made it easier to satisfy these large numbers of people. Monsieur Blatiron wrote to Vincent in 1646 about one of these missions:

The number of our confessors has gone as high as eighteen. There have been more than three thousand general confessions and a large number of reconciliations of very great importance, putting an end to disputes which have been the cause of twenty-three or twenty-four murders. Most of the persons involved obtained in writing pardon and peace from the offended parties and will be able to obtain forgiveness from the Prince and be restored to their pristine state.... When I wrote you the order followed on our missions, I forgot to tell you what we were doing for the instruction of the people and the relief of the confessors. We have two young clerics who, outside the time for catechism, teach the mysteries to all those who want to go to confession and, when they are sufficiently instructed, they give them a little printed card to that effect. When a penitent comes to make his confession, he presents it to his confessor who is thereby assured that he is

⁹ CCD III, 101-102; SVP.ES III, 89-90; SVP III, 90-91.

*adequately instructed in Christian truths, and he does not have to take the trouble to question him. In this way, the confessors proceed more quickly and do not keep those near the confessionals waiting*¹⁰.

Following the tradition of the Congregation, the missionaries established the Confraternity of the Charities in the areas that were evangelized. Monsieur Blatiron was concerned about organizing these in the best possible manner and therefore provided them with a Rule and offered them the possibility of coming together in a new way, namely, gathering men and women together in the same Confraternity. Vincent wrote to the Missionaries about his negative experience in this matter but left the final decision to Monsieur Blatiron who was ultimately the one who had to establish these Associations in the manner that he saw most favorable:

*I still have not had time to examine your regulations for the Charity. As for protectors and counselors, however, I can tell you that this custom may be good for Italy, but experience has shown us that it is harmful in France. Men and women working together do not agree on administrative matters. The men want to assume entire responsibility for them and the women cannot tolerate this. In the beginning, the Charities of Joigny and Montmirail were governed by persons of both sexes. The men were responsible for the care of the poor who were in good health, and the women for those who were ill, but because the funds were in common, we were obliged to remove the men. And I can give this testimony in favor of women, that there is no fault to be found in their administration because they are so careful and trustworthy. Perhaps in Italy the women are less capable of these things, so I am not giving you as a rule what I have just said*¹¹.

Together with the preaching of missions and the organization of the Confraternities, Monsieur Blatiron, together with his companions, developed activities on behalf of the clergy, a ministry that was begun immediately after their arrival in Genoa. With the support of the Archbishop they invited all the pastors and priests from the different places where missions had been preached¹²... they invited these individuals to participate in a retreat. In a letter that was written to Vincent in 1646 we find an account of this event:

A good number of pastors and priests [have made their retreat]. I cannot express to you the tremendous consolation they received,

¹⁰ CCD II, 664-665; SVP.ES II, 521-522; SVP II, 609-610.

¹¹ CCD IV, 76; SVP.ES IV, 71; SVP IV, 71.

¹² CCD III, 85-86; SVP.ES III, 75-76; SVP III, 74.

the abundant graces Our Lord bestowed on them, the great modesty and exact silence they observed, their humility and sincerity in giving an account of their prayer, and the admirable and almost miraculous conversions that have taken place there.

Among others there was a pastor who told me, almost in public, that he had come so that the Cardinal would have his income increased. He came with the intention of ridiculing things and more out of hypocrisy than devotion. He said also that the Mission had no greater enemy than he, and that he had said all the evil that could be imagined about it and even about His Eminence. He was a man strongly addicted to vice; he had obtained a benefice by simony, was ordained without any title except this benefice, carried out the functions of a priest, administered the sacraments and performed every parochial duty. He remained in this state for several years, a man given to scheming and enterprising, etc. However, God finally touched him, and touched him in a most efficacious way. He was converted, he wept, he humbled himself, and gave notable proofs of his change. All who saw him during that retreat, or have heard about him, have been extremely edified, and we no less than all the others, who have produced good fruits, each according to his needs¹³.

As a result of the preaching of missions and the retreats for priests Monsieur Blatiron began a vocational recruitment ministry and Monsieur Martin took responsibility for some candidates who requested to enter the Congregation of the Mission. In 1647 Vincent sent to the Missionaries in Genoa a copy of the Rule that was used at the seminary Bons-Enfants¹⁴. In this regard Monsieur Blatiron helped Vincent change his attitude because for a rather long period of time he did not dare to ask God to send new vocations to the Congregation but trusted in Divine Providence. Monsieur Blatiron on the other hand had joined this ministry of vocational recruitment to his devotion to Saint Joseph and Vincent agreed with this approach. We read in his letter of November 12, 1655:

I thank God for the special devotions you are planning in order to ask God, through the intercession of blessed Saint Joseph, for the spread of the Company. I ask His Divine Goodness to accept them. For more than twenty years I have not dared to ask this of God, thinking that, since the Congregation is His work, its preservation and growth should be left to His Providence alone. Reflecting, however, on the recommendations given us in the Gospel to ask Him to send

¹³ CCD III, 85-86; SVP.ES III, 75-76; SVP III, 74.

¹⁴ CCD III, 154; SVP.ES III, 134; SVP III, 144.

*laborers into His harvest, I have become convinced of the importance and usefulness of this devotion*¹⁵.

Vincent became aware of the unity among the missionaries in Genoa: their unity in living out their community life as well as their unity in carrying out their different apostolic endeavors and as a result offered one of the most beautiful prayers that he ever uttered:

*O Divine Goodness, unite in this way all hearts in this Little Company of the Mission, then order whatever You please. Labor will be sweet to them and every task easy; the strong person will relieve the weak one, and the weak will cherish the strong and obtain increased strength for him from God. And so, Lord, Your work will be done as You would like, for the building up of Your Church and Your workers will multiply, attracted by the perfume of such charity*¹⁶.

The zeal of the missionaries did not free them from conflict among themselves. There were evident differences in their approach to evangelization as well as differences in dealing with the clergy. They also found that their zeal was being diminished as they attempted to follow the reforming impetus of the archbishop who seemed to provide no opportunity for rest. And then there was the new house, a house which the cardinal offered to them and which was ready in 1647 but another two years would pass before they could occupy it because they had to wait for the Senate to approve this donation.

The mission in Corsica

The Senate became aware of the impact of the preached missions on the people and in 1652 asked the Missionaries to consider preaching a very difficult mission to the people on the island of Corsica which, at that time, was part of the Republic of Genoa and yet was in continual conflict with the central government. The Missionaries, led by Monsieur Blatiron, left for Corsica. The area that was entrusted to their work belonged to the Diocese of Aleria which at that time had no bishop. The diocese was governed by two vicars, one appointed by the Holy See and the other by the cathedral chapter. These two priests disagreed with one another and this caused great confusion among the clergy and the faithful. The missionary team was composed of seven priests who were members of the Congregation and they were assisted by four ecclesiastics and four religious who had been chosen by Cardinal

¹⁵ CCD V, 468-469; SVP.ES V, 439; SVP V, 462.

¹⁶ CCD III, 258; SVP.ES III, 234; SVP III, 257.

Durazzo. They established their headquarters in Nicolo which was in the center of a long, narrow valley. The missionaries found that they would have to confront multiple spiritual and social problems: family divisions, hatred and resentment among family members, on-going quarrels between different clans which resulted in the injury and death of many individuals. There was such a strong sense of honor and reputation that it was felt these had to be defended at any cost, including recourse to violence. The state of the family was very sad: hatred was instilled in children at a very early age and this resulted in endless hostilities. In addition there were numerous homicides and other crimes of passion and women were not exempt from any of these crimes. All of this together with their resentment toward the central government led to a continued increase in the activity of bandits throughout this area. Efforts to curb this activity seemed to have no effect and the land seemed to favor the bandits since rough mountains and dense forests provided a natural hiding place for these individuals. The mission was most difficult. It seemed impossible to make any impression on these people that would help them change their ways, especially the men who came to the mission, but came armed. Monsieur Blatiron wrote about this mission to Vincent:

All those people were so filled with hatred and a desire for vengeance that, no matter what we said to cure them of this strange passion, it made no impression on them. When we spoke about forgiveness of enemies, several of them even left the sermon. This left all of us very worried; myself more than anyone else, because handling these reconciliations was my special task.

Finally, on the eve of the general Communion, as I was coming to the close of the sermon, after exhorting the people once again to forgiveness, God inspired me to take in hand the crucifix I was wearing and say to them that anyone who was willing to forgive should come and kiss it. Then I invited them to do so in the name of Our Lord, who was stretching forth His arms to them, saying that those who kissed that crucifix would be giving a sign that they were willing to forgive and were ready to be reconciled with their enemies. At these words, they started to glance at one another but, when I saw that no one was coming forward, I pretended I was going to leave. I put the crucifix away, complaining of their hardness of heart, saying that they deserved neither the grace nor the blessing Our Lord was offering them. At that, a reformed Franciscan got up and began to cry out: "O Niolo, O Niolo, so you want to be cursed by God! You do not want to receive the grace He is sending you by means of these Missionaries, who have come from such a distance for our salvation!". While this good monk was uttering these and similar words, a parish priest, whose nephew had been killed and the murderer was present at the sermon, came to

prostrate himself on the ground and asked to kiss the crucifix. At the same time he said in a loud voice: "Let a certain person (his nephew's murderer) come forward so I can embrace him!". When this was done, another priest did the same with regard to some of his enemies who were present. These two were followed by a throng of others, so much so that, for the space of an hour and a half, we saw nothing but reconciliations and embraces. For greater assurance, the most important matters were put in writing and authenticated by the notary public¹⁷.

This mission seemed to make Monsieur Blatiron's zeal all the more obvious and it was also clear that he was a genius at preaching. These gifts were so prominent that Vincent entrusted him with resolving the delicate problem of taking vows in the Congregation.

Sent to Rome to obtain approval for vows

Since the end of 1638 the matter of the vows was uncertain. It was at that time that Monsieur Lebreton was sent to Rome to obtain approval from Rome. He had been unable to obtain said approval and died unexpectedly in 1641. In 1647 Messieurs Portail, Dehorgny and Alméras were sent to Rome and they were also unable to obtain their objective. It was at this time that Vincent saw that this matter was not moving forward and so he took advantage of the fact that Cardinal Durazzo held Monsieur Blatiron in high esteem and sent him to Rome to resolve this matter. Vincent had great confidence in Monsieur Blatiron. He entrusted this mission to him even though he knew that in this regard Étienne held a view that was contrary to his own, a view that he tried to change when he wrote him a rather lengthy letter that was dated February 19, 1655¹⁸. Vincent tried to convince him of the need for all the members of the Congregation to profess vows. We do not know Monsieur Blatiron's reaction but we know that he went to Rome and was able to accomplish his mission in a few months. On September 22, 1655 Pope Alexander VII signed the brief *Ex commissa nobis* which approved the vows.

The plague in Genoa and the death of Monsieur Blatiron

In July 1656 the plague afflicted Genoa and during the course of the next year this disease spread like an oil spill. One of the benefactors of the house in Genoa, Rev. Cristóforo Monchia, died. The authorities

¹⁷ CCD IV, 406-407; SVP.ES IV, 389-390; SVP IV, 412ff. Cf., L. Nuovo, *Le missioni in Corsica, Carità e Missione* (2004), 1, pp. 51-56.

¹⁸ CCD V, 314-322; SVP.ES V, 296-302; SVP V, 315 ff.

confiscated the house of the Missionaries and opened it as a hospital¹⁹. The first confrere to place himself at the service of those infected with the plague was Monsieur Lucas Arimondo who was working with the patients in the Consolation House for just a few days when he contracted the illness and died three days later²⁰. After him the whole community there distinguished themselves in the ways that they provided spiritual comfort to those who were ill and administered the sacraments. Vincent encouraged the Missionaries but asked them to be prudent in exposing themselves to infection²¹. No area of the city was able to escape being infected. Each day hundreds of people died²². A miracle would have been necessary to keep the missionaries free from infection. In the repetition of prayer that occurred on July 17, 1657, Vincent exhorted the Missionaries to be willing to become martyrs. Here he was thinking about the confreres in Genoa about whom he had received no news since ordinary mail service had been suspended as a result of the plague:

I recommend to the prayers of the Company our confreres in Genoa. They have a great deal to suffer now because they have had to leave their own house and rent another one in order to give over their home to the plague-stricken. The wear and tear of moving was the greater because they had only one week to do it. Yet, by the grace of God they are enduring this in the right spirit, and happy are they to suffer for the people – for God, in the first place, and then for the people. You see, my dear confreres, we should all be so disposed and have this desire to suffer for God and our neighbor and to wear ourselves out for that purpose. How happy are they to whom God gives such dispositions and desires. Yes, Messieurs, we must be all for God and the service of the people, we have to give ourselves to God for that, wear ourselves out for that, and give our lives for that, strip ourselves naked, so to speak in order to be clothed with Him – at least, we should desire to be so disposed, if we are not already – we should be ready and willing to come and go wherever God pleases, whether to the Indies or elsewhere; lastly, to devote ourselves willingly to the service of our neighbor and to extend the empire of Jesus Christ in souls; and I myself, old and infirm as I am, must, nonetheless, have this disposition, even to go to the Indies to win souls to God there, although I were to die on the way or on board ship; for, what do you think God asks of us?

¹⁹ *Notices...*, cit., Vol. II, p. 193 and CCD XI, 355-356; SVP.ES XI, 279-280; SVP XI, 402.

²⁰ Cf., *La Congregazione della Missione in Italia dal 1640 al 1835*, pp. 30-31.

²¹ CCD VI, 155-156; SVP.ES VI, 132-133; SVP VI, 137-138.

²² CCD VI, 345-346, 468-470; SVP.ES VI, 311-312, 418-419; SVP VI, 323, 450.

*Our body? Oh, not at all! What then? God asks for our good will, a firm, genuine disposition to seize every opportunity of serving Him, even at the risk of our lives, to have and to foster within ourselves this desire for martyrdom, which God sometimes accepts willingly as if we had actually suffered it*²³.

In fact, the community of Genoa was wiped out during the summer of 1657. Vincent received news about this from the community in Rome and on September 23rd, 1657 he spoke to the community that gathered together with him and told them of the death of Monsieur Blatiron, as well as that of Messieurs Duport, Domenico Bocconi, Tratebas, Francesco Vincent, and Ennery. The only survivor was Monsieur Legue²⁴.

Vincent words concerning Monsieur Blatiron remain as a monument to his apostolic charity and reveal the spiritual stature of this missionary who, at the young age of forty-three, gave his life on behalf of his sisters and brothers:

*His Divine Majesty has finally taken from us that great, holy man M. Blatiron, of whom you have so often heard me speak. That apostolic man, by whom God has wrought such great things, is no longer with us. God has taken him from us... M. Blatiron, ah, what a loss! This man, whom we have seen here, was a pillar of the infirmary for the space of three or four years; yet you know what he has done, what and how many conversions God has brought about through him – even bandits! It was unheard of for bandits to be converted; yet there have never been so many conversions since the Priests of the Mission have been in Italy... our good M. Blatiron, he was a man who never stopped working. I am amazed how he was able to keep it up. He was a priest whose very look inspired veneration and respect for him. I assure you, Messieurs, that, when I looked at him, I felt within me a certain respect and reverence for this man of God*²⁵.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

²³ CCD XI, 357; SVP.ES XI, 280-281; SVP XI, 402.

²⁴ LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God: Vincent de Paul*, New City Press, New Rochelle NY 1993, Volume II, pp. 68-69. The Community needed another year to rebuild itself because areas remained infected with the plague. In August, 1658, the Community, under the leadership of Giacomo Pesnelle, slowly renewed their ministry and their life together. The Internal Seminary was reopened and several postulants, who were attracted by the heroic virtues of the missionaries who died while attending those afflicted by the plague, were admitted into the Congregation.

²⁵ CCD XI, 379-380.

Monsieur Jean Martin and Saint Vincent

A Friendship for the Mission as Seen Through their Letters

Erminio Antonello, C.M.

The person of Monsieur Jean Martin¹ 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.

¹ 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 Almérás 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 old².

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 seminary³.

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:

² CCD II, 251.

³ 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 exteriorly⁴.

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!⁵.

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*⁶ 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

⁴ CCD III, 155-156.

⁵ CCD II, 620.

⁶ *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 all⁷.

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

⁷ CCD III, 58.

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

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*⁹.

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 heretics¹⁰. 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

⁸ CCD III, 106.

⁹ CCD V, 611-612.

¹⁰ CCD V, 261-262.

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

*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*¹²....

*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*¹³.

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*¹⁴.

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*¹⁵.

¹¹ CCD V, 477-478

¹² CCD V, 500.

¹³ CCD V, 485.

¹⁴ CCD V, 485-486.

¹⁵ 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 Lord¹⁶.

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 life¹⁷.

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 service¹⁸.

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 well¹⁹.

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 directing²⁰.

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.

¹⁶ CCD VIII, 385.

¹⁷ CCD VIII, 402.

¹⁸ CCD III, 190.

¹⁹ CCD III, 136.

²⁰ 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 Spirit²¹.

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 pleases²².

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 progress²³.* 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 you²⁴.* 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

²¹ CCD III, 136.

²² CCD III, 171.

²³ CCD III, 157.

²⁴ 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 otherwise²⁵.

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 word²⁶.

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 Him²⁷.*

²⁵ CCD V, 544.

²⁶ CCD VII, 271.

²⁷ 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 ourselves²⁸.

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 blind²⁹.*

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 standstill³⁰.

²⁸ CCD III, 207.

²⁹ CCD III, 159.

³⁰ 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*³¹.

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 you³². 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*³³.

*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*³⁴.

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

³¹ CCD III, 159-160.

³² CCD III, 166.

³³ CCD VI, 329.

³⁴ 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 family³⁵.

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

³⁵ 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 you³⁶.

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,

³⁶ CCD VII, 143.

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

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 16th 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*³⁸.

Then on July 7th 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*³⁹.

³⁷ CCD III, 203.

³⁸ CCD IV, 214.

³⁹ 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 this⁴⁰.

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 vice⁴¹.

⁴⁰ CCD V, 598.

⁴¹ 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*⁴².

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 [...]*⁴³.

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

⁴² CCD VII, 290-291.

⁴³ 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.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

The Missionaries in Poland (1651-1697)

Stanisław Rospond, C.M.

In the 17th century, the Polish Republic was at the crossroads of a serious internal and external crisis. The Jagellon Period (1385-1572) had established the Polish-Lithuanian country as a powerful nation. Geographically, it was the third largest in Europe at 900,000 km. In later years, the Polish Republic would struggle to maintain this position because of wars with Sweden, Turkey, and the Cossacks. On the Russian border were the Ottoman and Crimean khanate; at the east were principal waterways for commerce; and at the north, Sweden expanded because of access to the Baltic Sea. The 1648 revolt in the Ukraine also created serious consequences; it became a battle of the entire Ukrainian nation rebelling over Polish domination. In 1654, at the command of Czar Alexis Michailovitch, the Russian army invaded territories in the Polish Republic, killing half the Polish and Lithuanian population of some villages.

Shortly afterward, a new enemy appeared in Swedish King Charles Gustave X, who started a destructive war lasting from 1655-1660. Although this conflict ended with the treaty of Oliwa, there were losses of territory in the north and the east, which resulted in the partition of the Ukraine between the Polish Republic and Russia. Soon after, Poland was forced to make more concessions to Russia. In 1667, a truce was signed at Ardrusssovo, whereby Poland ceded Kiev and the vast territories of the Ukraine to Russia. In addition, the Turkish invasion in 1672 brought more territorial losses from Poland to the Ottoman Empire. It was not until 1699 that Poland was able to re-conquer part of the Ukraine. The 17th Century brought further instability to the Polish Republic which would hasten its eventual collapse late in the 18th Century.

For the Polish Church, this epoch was characterized by the reinforcement of its authority in implementing the reforms of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Established religious orders and new communities helped augment these reforms through pastoral work, missions, retreats, and other creative activities that brought renewal to the Church in Poland. Among religious communities, the Jesuits occupied a prominent place in Poland. In 1564, they ran a dozen

secondary schools; by the mid 17th century, they had founded 28 new schools. In addition, new orders such as the Discalced Carmelites in 1605, the Hospitallers in 1609, the Reformed in 1622, the Piarists in 1642, the Congregation of the Mission in 1651, (who became known in Poland simply as "The Missionaries"), the Theatines in 1664, and the Oratorians in 1668; all these "new communities" helped to strengthen Poland's Catholic heritage. In addition to pastoral and charitable works, a major domain for the renewal of the Church was in the formation of the diocesan clergy which occurred mainly through the establishment of seminaries. Religious communities who undertook this work included the confreres, the Jesuits, and the Bartholomites. Religious communities founded in Poland also appeared, including the Marianists in 1673, the Bartholomites in 1683, and the Trinitarians in 1685. Women's religious orders and congregations were also engaged in many educational and charitable works, most notably the Discalced Carmelites in 1612, the Catherines in 1571, and the Daughters of Charity in 1652.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE MISSIONARIES IN POLAND AND THEIR FIRST APOSTOLATE (1651-1660)

The first Missionaries arrived in Poland in November 1651, thanks to the petition of Queen Marie-Louise de Gonzaga, the wife of King John Casimir. The Queen knew St. Vincent personally and was familiar with the works of the Congregation of the Mission. As in France at this time, it was necessary for Poland to develop works of charity in the face of poverty, famine, epidemics, and wars that were ruining the country. It was also necessary to form the diocesan clergy. In the letter announcing the departure of the first group of confreres, St. Vincent wrote to the Queen: "Finally, here are the missionaries who prostrate themselves at your Majesty's feet to offer you their humble services. They are no more than three or four, even though it was planned to send eight or nine. We think that, for the start, they would suffice. They do not speak the language of the country, but because they know Latin, they could at once occupy themselves with the education of the young seminarians, inculcating on them piety and virtues to practice, all the other usages which they should know and practice" (Letter of September 6, 1651).

Included in the first group were Fr. Lambert aux Couteaux (superior), Fr. Wilhelm Desdames, sub-deacon Nicolas Guillot, the cleric Casimir Zelazowski and Brother Jacob Posny. They lived in a small house offered by Queen Marie-Louise, located in Warsaw (on the lot belonging to the parish of the Holy Cross). St. Vincent wanted them to occupy themselves with seminary formation when they arrived, but his desire

did not come to pass for several years. In 1652, the Queen offered the missionaries the parish of Sokółka near Białystok, and in December 1653, she also succeeded in giving them the parish of the Holy Cross at Warsaw. Fr. Jean Zeydlic, then the parish priest of Holy Cross, gave the parish to the Congregation. Bishop Casimir Florian Czartoryski, Bishop of Posnan, has approved the right to patronage given to the Superior of the Congregation. Queen Marie-Louise financed these works by giving the confreres income from a small plot of land near the Palace of the King, and revenue from their gardens, brewery, and an inn in the village of Skuły.

At first, the confreres sent to Poland did not know Polish (except for cleric Zelazowski) and therefore could not engage in many activities linked to their mission. Thus, they developed a pastoral activity for French nationals who lived in Warsaw. They also assisted the Sisters of Mercy in their first foundations when they came to Poland in 1652. They also assisted the Sisters of Mercy in charitable activities in Cracow during the time of the epidemics. Shortly afterward, the confreres suffered their first losses in January 1653, when their first superior Father Lambert died at Sokółka. He had set an example by his service in aiding the sick and the poor, and in doing so, he became a victim of the epidemic. Despite this major loss, in 1654, the confreres gave their first popular missions at Holy Cross parish at Warsaw and at the parish in Skuły.

In 1654, St. Vincent sent a new group of Missionaries: Fr. Charles Ozenne, Fr. Nicholas Duperroy, Fr. Nicolas Guillot, cleric Rene Simon, cleric Jacob Eveillard and cleric Antoine Durand (the clerics were ordained to priesthood shortly after they arrived in Poland.) However, even with this infusion of new confreres, challenges abounded. Frs. Guillot and Posny left Poland, while Br. Zelazowski left the Congregation. During the Swedish invasion, Frs. Durand, Eveillard, Guillot, and Simon left Poland, while Fr. Ozenne went to Silesia with the Royal Court.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSTITUTIONS IN THE YEARS: 1651-1697

Following the death of St. Vincent, the Congregation expanded its activity in Poland. The Holy Cross parish in Warsaw offered many opportunities to develop pastoral and educational activities. After the erection of the first diocesan seminary in 1677, other seminaries were placed under the direction of the confreres. These included administration of the seminaries in Chełmno in 1677, Chateau in Cracow in 1682, Vilnius in 1685, Przemyśl in 1687, and Łowicz in 1700. In 1676, the confreres also founded their own Internal Seminary to prepare

future generations of Poles to be "The Missionaries." The growth of works of the Congregation in Poland enabled confreres to expand their preaching of popular missions throughout various parts of the country.

After the death of Fr. Lambert aux Couteaux in 1653, St. Vincent designated Fr. Wilhelm Desdames as superior. He served twice in this role, from 1653-1654 and 1658-1668. He was followed by Fr. Francois Dupuich from 1668-1670; Fr. Nicole Duperroy from 1670-1674; and Fr. Jacob Eveilland from 1674-1685. By 1685, twenty-one priests (of whom half had done their formation in the Internal Seminary at Holy Cross) worked in the three houses of Congregation established in Poland. In 1685, at the Fourth General Assembly of the Congregation, Fr. Edmund Jolly, Superior General, erected the Province of Poland and appointed Fr. Michel Bartolommeo Tarlo for the position as first Visitor. He served in this position from 1685-1710.

Holy Cross parish in Warsaw became the Provincial House and office of the Visitor. From 1679 to 1696, the confreres enlarged the building near Holy Cross Church, replacing it with new construction. They also built a school and hospital nearby. In 1675, the confreres were invited by Bishop Stephan Wierzbowski of the Diocese of Poznan to open and run the seminary. The finances for construction of the seminary came from parish benefices in Skuły and Wiskitki, along with revenues from the localities of Zamienie, Podolszynie, and Jeziorki. The Chapter of Warsaw offered funds to maintain the seminary and remunerate the confreres for their services, the Chapter of Warsaw offered assistance.

In 1676, at the invitation of Bishop Jean Małachowski, of the Diocese of Chełmno, the confreres opened a house there, and in 1677 took administration of the Seminary of Chełmno. In 1678, Bishop Małachowski gave the confreres the parish at Chełmno and the Chapel of Mater Dolorosa, whose revenues were able to support the work of the seminary. To this were added revenues from leasing of a plot of land situated in the villages of Działmiany. Revenues were also raised from a parish in Fiszewo, as well as income from tolls on crossing the Vistula River near Chełmno. There were five confreres designated to pastoral work and to preach missions: three priests and two brothers.

In 1681, Bishop Jean Małachowski was nominated bishop of Cracow. The next year, he invited the Congregation of the Mission to the royal city and confided to it the administration of the Seminary of Chateau, founded in 1602. The financial maintenance of the seminary and its twenty students, along with remuneration for the three confreres assigned there was provided by the chapter of Cracow. Their installation at Cracow gave them the opportunity to expand their presence

in Cracow. Soon after, the Congregation erected a new house. In 1686, a small house with surrounding lands in Stradom (near Wawel Castle) which was a gift from Bp. Jean Małachowski enabled the confreres to set down roots in Cracow, which endure to the present day. At first, the "North Wing" of the present building was constructed, consisting of rooms for the confreres who gave popular missions in the Diocese of Cracow. In addition, there were also rooms for retreatants who were candidates for ordination and for other ecclesiastics.

In 1685, the first projects to resume the ecclesiastical Seminary of Vilnius began. Alexandre Kotowicz, the Bishop of Vilnius, invited the confreres to come and confided to them the administration of the seminary. They organized retreats for the candidates for ordination and preached popular missions in the diocese of Vilnius. In the ensuing years from 1695 to 1698, thanks to local benefactor, the confreres constructed a church under the patronage of the Ascension of Christ on the summit of Mount Savior at Vilnius.

In 1687, Jean Zbąski, Bishop of Przemyśl, entrusted to the confreres the administration of the newly constructed Seminary of Przemyśl. To support the seminary, the Bishop directed revenues from properties in Sokółów, Dubiecko, Lubello be used, along with other donations. For the activities of the house and other works, the confreres obtained revenues from a deanship of the chapter at Sambor. Soon after this, the confreres expanded their ministry in this locality.

In 1689, Michael Radziejowski, primate and archbishop of Cracow, asked the confreres to go to Łowicz and entrusted to them the task of giving popular missions in the Archdiocese. He also asked them to organize spiritual retreats for the candidates for ordination and for the priests. In 1700, after the construction and furnishing of a new diocesan seminary, the Archbishop invited the confreres to administer and staff it. The confreres helped finance their work at the seminary from profits of properties in Dmosin, Wola Cyrusowa, Gozdy, and Zurawica. The Archbishop subsidized the running of the seminary from the sum of 80,000 PLN.

THE WORKS OF THE CONGREGATION IN POLAND

Among the most important works undertaken by the confreres in the 17th century were the organization of the popular missions, preparation of the candidates for the priesthood, parish pastoral ministry, retreats for ordinands, and philanthropic works.

The Jesuits, who within the same time period established eighty-one houses in Poland, were famous for their popular missions. To a lesser extent, popular missions in Poland were also undertaken by the Dominicans and other orders. The confreres developed a number

of new foundations, building a network to expand their presence throughout Poland and Lithuania. Priests at Holy Cross at Warsaw and Łowicz preached missions in Mazowie; the confreres also preached in Pomerania and Varmie; houses in Cracow near the Seminary of Chateau and Stradom preached in that area in Silesia: those of the House of Vilnius, in Lithuania. The records preserved at Cracow, Warsaw and Vilnius documented 157 popular missions done through 1697. At the start, a successful mission took 8 days. Later, it was expanded into two to three weeks. The number of faithful who participated varied from 800 in Pniewnik in 1674 to 7,000 at Zbuczyn in 1686. In 1655, the confreres had prepared a translation of a booklet for the popular missions entitled "The Obligations of Christians: what each Christian has to know and how he should act in order to attain the salvation of his soul."

The direction of the diocesan seminaries was the confreres' second important work. As was stated already; foundations in many places in Poland were often linked to the administration of the diocesan seminaries, in seen in Warsaw, Chełmno, Vistule, Cracow, Vilnius, Przemyśl and Łowicz. Otherwise, the missionaries engaged themselves by giving retreats to candidates for the priesthood and ordained priests. The seminaries administered by the confreres were not unlike other seminaries administered by the Jesuits and the Batholomites. However, one particular difference in diocesan seminaries administered by the confreres was that they instituted a program mandated by the Third General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 1673. The "Ratio Studiorum" was characterized by a strong emphasis on pastoral and spiritual preparations for the seminarians. As always, the concerns and needs of local bishops were taken into account. In teaching how to preach a sermon, the confreres used "The Little Method of St. Vincent", their signature style of preaching for popular missions. The seminary course of studies lasted on an average of two years, but it could also be adapted into segments of three to eight months a piece, depending on the needs of the local bishop.

In 1652, the confreres linked their apostolic activities to pastoral activity in parishes. The first parish was opened at Sokółka near Białystok, and the second parish, Holy Cross was opened in Warsaw, near the Royal Palace. This foundation gave the confreres opportunities to preach popular missions, besides administering diocesan seminaries. After these works came several parochial schools, four hospitals, a Pious Bank which gave credits, a pharmacy and a printing press. The confreres served in parishes of Chełmno at Holy Spirit, St. Martin, St. Gregory, and St. Laurent. They exercised pastoral activity in the properties of foundations in Skuły and Wiskitki). The pastoral activity of the confreres was characterized by an elegant and exemplary liturgy,

prayer, processions, and founding of pious and philanthropic parish associations.

The Congregation, faithful to the mission entrusted to it by Holy Founder, gave aid to the poor and the sick. In the mid 17th century, as an epidemic was spreading in Warsaw and Cracow, the confreres dedicated themselves the care of the sick. They helped to create and administer hospitals, including Holy Spirit in Chełmno in 1678, and one in 1682 in Warsaw near Holy Cross parish. They also assisted the Sisters of Mercy in establishing St. Catherine's Hall in Warsaw to care for and educate young orphaned girls in the area.

Like the Congregation of the Mission, the Sisters of Mercy were also invited to Poland by Queen Marie-Louise de Gonzaga. Fr. Lambert Couteaux served as their first director, followed Fr. Wilhelm Desdames. The confreres and Sisters of Mercy engaged in many activities of charity which led to a fruitful cooperation.

The confreres also founded parochial schools in the parish at Warsaw and Chełmno. One of the exceptional works of the confreres was the re-foundation of the Academy of Chełmno which functioned as an Academic Gymnasium. The pastor of the parish of Chełmno gave financial support to the Academy. As a result, the Academy became a distinguished institution with strong academic programs, linked to numerous scientific contacts at the Cracow Academy.

THE DAILY LIFE OF THE MISSIONARIES IN THE 17th CENTURY

It is difficult to find sources that accurately portray the life of the confreres in the early years of the mission in Poland. Community life developed according to the model of life of clergy of that time and according to the traditions of the Congregation implanted in France. The order of the day provided began with rising at 4:00 am, followed by common prayer in chapel at 4:30 am (breviary, meditation, reading of Sacred Scriptures, and Mass). The activities were set by the superior and were carried out in mornings from 7:00 to 11 am and in afternoons from 1:00 to 6:00 pm. Meals were served twice; at 11:00 am and at 6:00 pm, and were preceded by a short prayer. After both meals there was an hour of rest. The day ended at 9:00 pm after an hour of prayer in common. In addition to the order of day, there was spiritual formation through weekly use of the sacrament of penance and a preached spiritual conference. On Friday, chapter was held in which all confessed his failings before the community and the superior imposed a penance. Every year, each confrere was required to make a spiritual retreat of eight days duration; only the Visitor could dispense a confrere from fulfillment of this obligation.

In this group of devoted and eminent confreres who served as missionaries to Poland of the 17th Century belonged the first superior – Father Lambert aux Couteaux, along with confreres Fr. Jean O’Fogerty, Fr. Paul Godquin and Fr. Visitor Michael Bartholome Tarla. Father Lambert distinguished himself by his spirit of sacrifice and his devotion to his work with the sick of Warsaw, which led to his untimely death in 1652. Fr. O’Fogerty showed great fervor in hearing confessions and was known as a protector of the poor and of the sick, replenishing these spiritual forces in the long adorations of the Blessed Sacrament. Father Godquin was remarkable for his work during the missions. He rapidly learned Polish which opened up new avenues for him to serve the Church in Poland, including teaching from 1670-1694, as well as giving a large number of popular missions.

Father Michael Bartolomé Tarło, the first visitor of the Province of Poland was remarkable for his astonishing leadership and courage. His parents were Jean Szczekarzewice Tarło and Princess Anne Czartoryski; he was born on August 24 1656 at Lubowwia in Splsz. During his studies in Rome at the College of Monte Citorio run by the confreres, he decided to enter the Congregation, and was received into the community on August 25, 1677. After his studies, he was ordained a priest in Paris, where he taught Philosophy at the Seminary of St. Lazare. In May 1685, he was nominated as Visitor for the newly created Province of Poland. His initiatives led to the creation and development of the missionary works in the houses of Cracow-Stradom, Łowicz, and Przemyśl. In 1710 he was nominated Bishop of Proznan. He continued to reside in Warsaw, at the house of the Holy Cross, where he lived a modest life of a missionary, he was sensitive to the poor and to their needs, during the years of famine in Poland, and he appealed to take help to the most destitute. He died in Łowicz on September 20, 1715.

For the years 1651 to 1697, sixty-seven priests and fifteen brothers in the Congregation served in Poland. Until Polish confreres were ordained after 1685, 11 French confreres were sent, as were two Italians, and three Poles (who pursued their formation in Paris or Rome). As the community became more established in Poland, eleven native priests entered and finished their studies at the Seminarium Internum at Warsaw. After the exhausting works caused the death of two missionaries (Frs. Lambert and Ozenne) and following the misunderstandings within the Community, three priests left the Congregation. Many French Missionaries left Poland for good. However, the seed sown by the early missionaries to Poland has borne abundant fruit that happily endures to the present day. Due to the vision and perseverance of the first confreres to go on mission to

Poland, "The Missionaries" have made a lasting and significant contribution to the Church in Poland and provide to the present day a lasting legacy of faith, hope, and love.

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STUDY

The Influence of St Vincent Ferrer on St Vincent de Paul

Patrick Collins, C.M.



St Vincent Ferrer

Even before his birth at Valencia in Spain, it seemed that Vincent Ferrer was predestined by God to accomplish great things¹. A Dominican said prophetically to his father, “I congratulate you William. In a few days you will have a son who will become a prodigy of learning and sanctity [...] The world will resound with the fame of his wondrous

¹On his father’s side, his family was originally from Britain. His name was sometimes spelt Ferrer and at others Ferrier.

deeds; he will fill heaven with joy and hell with terror. He will put on the habit which I wear, and will be received in the Church with universal joy as one of its first apostles". Vincent did join the Dominicans at the age of twenty two, became a doctor of theology, and began to teach and preach. During this time he wrote a *Treatise on the Spiritual Life* (hereafter *TOSL*)² which mainly had the members of the Dominican Order in mind. It is a succinct, practical, and demanding summary of how to live a life of Christian perfection. In spite of his obvious holiness of life, Vincent was accused of heresy because he questioned the prevailing view when he taught that Judas may have gone to purgatory rather than hell. The charge was dismissed by his mentor, the antipope Benedict XIII, who burned the Inquisition's dossier and made Vincent his confessor.

Evangelist Extraordinaire

During a time of serious illness in 1399, Vincent had a vision of Christ standing between Sts Dominic and Francis, who told him to go forth and preach repentance and the immanence of the end times. That religious experience kick-started one of the most extraordinary missionary outreaches in the history of the Church. For the next twenty years, Vincent travelled tirelessly the length and breadth of Europe preaching in places such as Marseilles, Geneva, Lausanne, Bologna and Freiburg. Although some books say that he visited Britain and Ireland, there is no documentary evidence that he did so. Popularly known as "The angel of judgement", Vincent was a crisis preacher who urged the people to turn back to the Lord before it was too late. He also preached on the immanent coming of the Antichrist. Nearly 600 years after his death, the Judgment he preached has not come to pass. Perhaps it was averted as a result of his effective evangelisation.

Each day, Vincent celebrated Mass, and preached at length to thousands of people. We know how he spoke because as many as 400 of his sermons are still extant. A selection of them have been published in English³. He was evangelical in style. He knew all the scriptures by heart and often quoted them. He never referred to secular authors. As he explained, nowhere did Jesus say preach Ovid, Virgil or Homer.

²Loreto Publications, Fitzwilliam (NH) 2006. Cf. Ven. Julianne Morrell (1593-1653), a commentary on *A Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, Newman Press, Westminster (MD) 1951.

³*A Christology From the Sermons of St Vincent Ferrer*, Blackfriars, London 1954.

Clearly, Vincent's ministry was blessed by God. Everywhere he went, he was accompanied by up to fifty priests and sometimes thousands of people. Although he had no means of amplification, even those on the edge of vast crowds of 50,000 people or more, said that they could hear him clearly. Finally, not only was he instrumental in the conversion of countless thousands of nominally Christian people, he also won over tens of thousands of Jews and Moslems to the faith. Vincent also got involved in political matters. He had the special gift of reconciling enemies and was often called upon to act as judge and peacemaker. He counselled princes and settled disputes for families and those in high governmental positions.

Vincent had great admiration for his fellow Dominican, St. Thomas Aquinas, and often referred to his writings. Thomas believed that the gifts of the Spirit which are listed in 1 Cor 12:8-10 were given in order to evangelise effectively. There are charisms of revelation, proclamation and demonstration⁴. Vincent Ferrer was an outstanding example of what Thomas had in mind. He seemed to exercise most of the gifts mentioned by Paul. For instance, he regularly received revelation of a prophetic kind. Not only could he read hearts, he often foretold future events. For instance, in 1375, he said to starving crowds in Barcelona, "Have courage, and be glad, for this very night two vessels will arrive in this port laden with wheat". People were sceptical about this prediction because a storm was raging at sea. But everything happened as Vincent had foretold. He proclaimed the Gospel with the aid of supernatural help. In the course of his canonisation process it was reported that although he always spoke in his own native dialect, people of other languages understood every word Vincent spoke without interpretation. As his canonization process also attested, he demonstrated the truth of the merciful love he proclaimed by means of deeds of power. It is estimated that over a period of twenty years he performed more than 50,000 healings, exorcism and miracles, including more than thirty raisings from the dead.

Because St. Vincent's heart was moved to compassion by the economic plight of the people, he built hospitals, asylums, refuges and even bridges. The divisions and heresies in the church caused him great anguish of spirit. He believed that a revival of faith and morals depended upon the restoration of church unity and effective preaching. Although he supported the Avignon Popes, he came to see that his mentor Benedict XIII, was not the true successor of Peter. Eventually his prayers were answered when the Council of Constance (1414-1417)

⁴PATRICK COLLINS, C.M., "St Thomas Aquinas on the Evangelistic Nature of the Gifts of the Spirit", in *The Gifts of the Spirit and the New Evangelisation*, Columba, Dublin 2009, pp. 56-72.

reunited the church under Pope Martin V. Two years afterwards, worn out by his gargantuan efforts, Vincent died, as St. Collette DeBoilet (1381-1447) had foretold, at Vannes in Brittany. As he himself had prophesised more than once during his lifetime, he was canonized by Pope Calixtus III in 1455.

Vincent de Paul influenced by Vincent Ferrer

When I was reading about the life and works of Vincent Ferrer, I was surprised to find that some of his biographers mentioned that he had a significant influence on St. Vincent de Paul. In his book, *St Vincent Ferrer: The Angel of the Judgment*, Andrew Pradel, O.P. claimed that the Spanish saint influenced “blessed Nicholas Factor, a Franciscan and the great St. Vincent de Paul [...] St. Vincent acknowledged St. Vincent Ferrer as his own special patron. He made his life a daily study and had constantly in his hands the *Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, in order that he might conform thereto not only his own heart and actions, but also those of the priests of his institute”⁵. In another book, entitled, *St. Vincent Ferrer, His Life, Spiritual Teaching, and Practical Devotion*, Pradel, reiterated what he has said in his other book and added, “St. Vincent de Paul gloried in St. Vincent Ferrer as his patron; and we can well conceive that the examples of charity in the model would not be without its influence on the holy priest who essayed to walk in his footsteps”⁶. Pradel says that a biographer named Antonio Teoli, O.P., who had a major biography of Vincent Ferrer published in Rome in 1735, had mentioned that the Spanish saint had influenced St. Vincent de Paul.

When I read these claims I wondered if any of the reputable biographies of St. Vincent de Paul endorsed this point of view. Bishop Louis Abelly, who knew the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, says, “He honoured Saint Vincent Ferrer, and it was noticed that on many of his retreats he read from the book written by this saint. He was so strongly influenced by what he had read about this saint’s life and teachings that he often quoted them in the talks he gave to his community. He imitated this saint, particularly in his great zeal for the conversion of sinners and for the salvation of souls”⁷. In the twentieth

⁵Tan, Rockford (IL) 2000, pp. 185-186.

⁶R. Washbourne, London 1875, p. 98.

⁷LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, Vol. 3, New City Press, New York 1993, p. 94. There is an interesting footnote on this page which says that one of the reasons for accepting the date 1580 for the saint’s birth is that his birthday would fall on the feast of Vincent Ferrer.

century, Pierre Coste said of St. Vincent de Paul, "His devotion extended to [...] St. Vincent Ferrer, author of a *Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, which he loved to read"⁸. These quotations raise two questions. Firstly, to what extent was Vincent de Paul influenced by the life and teachings of Vincent Ferrer? Secondly, did Vincent de Paul refer to Vincent Ferrer in his talks and writings?

Both Vincents Lived During Times of Crisis

In a certain sense there were some parallels between the lives of the two men in so far as both of them lived at times when severe problems were evident in secular society and the Church. Vincent Ferrer lived in the late middle ages when the continent of Europe was in deep trouble. Firstly, the black death (1347-1351), had ravaged every country, including Spain, and resulted in the loss of a third of the population. Secondly, the hundred years war (1337-1453) between England and France not only led to the martyrdom of St Joan of Arc (1412-1431), it had a widespread destructive and destabilizing effect. Thirdly, because so many people had died as a result of bubonic plague and violence, the economy declined and poverty increased. Fourthly, the Church was convulsed by the great schism which lasted from 1378 to 1417, and it was undermined by the heresies of people like John Wycliffe (1330-1384) and John Huss (1372-1415). These scandalous situations, compromised ecclesiastical authority, divided the faithful, and weakened spirituality.

Vincent de Paul lived at the beginning of the age of reason, when civil society and the church were once again in trouble. During his youth, France was devastated by the French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) which were fought between Catholic and Huguenot factions. It is estimated that during this period between 2 and 4 million people died as a result of a combination of famine, disease and combat. Sometime later France was convulsed by a civil war known as the Fronde (1648-1653). As we know from the writings of St. Vincent it led to the dislocation of large numbers of people, hardship and famine. From a religious point of view, the Protestant Reformation had divided Christian Europe, including France. Although the Council of Trent had initiated a counter Reformation, by issuing many decrees which advocated reform and renewal, very few of them had been implemented in seventeenth century France. As a result, there were obvious signs of decline in clerical and lay life. There was also the problem of Jansenism,

⁸PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul*, Vol. 3, New City Press, New York 1987, p. 305.

a Catholic version of Calvinist puritanism which stressed predestination. It was considered to be heretical by the church and duly condemned.

So it is not surprising that Vincent de Paul would have seen the response of Vincent Ferrer to the problems of his day, by means of evangelisation and Church renewal, as a template which would have been relevant in the France of his time. Indeed, on one occasion Canon Richard Dognon of Verdun wrote to St. Vincent de Paul and said, "For the good of our century, God has passed on to you by a metempsychosis⁹, which he alone can bring about, the spirit, affections, and design, together with the name of the great Patron of missionaries, Saint Vincent Ferrer. The apostolic missions he instituted in his time are manifestly more necessary than they ever were before"¹⁰.

Vincent de Paul's Interest in Vincent Ferrer

It is probable that Vincent had read one or more biographies of Vincent Ferrer. We know that shortly after Ferrer's death, the bishop of Lucera, Peter Ranzano wrote the first official account of the Dominican's remarkable life (1455). It was followed by other biographies, such as one by Francis Castiglione (1470), and another, written in French, by Dominican Bernard Guyard (1634). It is quite possible that Vincent de Paul read this book. That said, it is unlikely that he had access to any of Vincent Ferrer's sermons¹¹. However, we are sure that he did read and re-read the *TOSL*. While we know that people such as Pierre Berulle, Francis de Sales and Benet of Canfield influenced Vincent's spirituality, the fact that Vincent Ferrer also influenced him is often overlooked.

Vincent de Paul used to refer to his namesake and quote his words, both in his letters and in the talks he gave to the Daughters of Charity and to the members of the Congregation of the Mission. There are no less than nine such quotations referred to in the general index of the French edition of the *Correspondence, Conferences and Documents* (hereafter *CED*), edited by Pierre Coste¹². For example, Vincent de Paul wrote to Bernard Codoing about a business transaction which would require a knowledge of languages. He said, "God will give you the grace,

⁹The passing of the soul at death into another body i.e. to be reincarnated.

¹⁰VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence – Conferences – Documents*, Vol. 1, New City Press, New York 1985, p. 152.

¹¹Some of them are available at <http://www.svfparish.org/svfsermons/index.htm>

¹²Vol. XIV, Lecoffre, Paris 1925, p. 636.

if he wishes, to make yourself understood by foreigners, just as he gave it to Vincent Ferrer”¹³. In a conference Vincent gave to the priests of the Mission in May 1658, he spoke about the importance of deferring or condescending to the opinions of others in all things that are not sinful¹⁴. He then referred to the following words in the *TOSL*, “it is more advantageous to rule oneself by the will of another, provided it be good, although our own judgment may appear better and more perfect”¹⁵. In the course of a talk to his priests about seminaries, St. Vincent said, “St. Vincent Ferrer strove for sanctification so that God would one day raise up good priests and apostolic workers for the reform of the ecclesiastical state and for readying men for working for our perfection to cooperate in such a happy restoration when we see the ecclesiastical state now returning to what it should be”¹⁶. On another occasion Vincent said, “Let us work with a new love in the service of the poor, looking for the most destitute and abandoned among them. Let us recognize that before God they are our lords and masters, and we are unworthy to render them our small services”¹⁷. The striking phrase, “our lords and masters” seemed to have been borrowed from Vincent Ferrer who wrote, “we should have a humble and sincere regard for our brethren, and cheerfully submit to them as our lords and masters”¹⁸. In the light of references like these, it is surprising to find that some recent biographies, such as those of Jose Maria Roman¹⁹ and Bernard Pujo²⁰, seem to make no mention of St. Vincent Ferrer.

The Two Vincents on Preaching

There is no doubt that St. Vincent Ferrer was a remarkably effective evangelical preacher. He described his understanding of this ministry in a chapter entitled, “On Preaching”. In it he advised, “Use simple and familiar words in preaching and exhortation. To explain in detail what you mean; and so far as possible, illustrate what you say with some

¹³VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence – Conferences – Documents*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 232.

¹⁴CED, X, 482.

¹⁵TOSL, cit., p. 3.

¹⁶CED, XI, 7-8, & quoted by ABELLY, Vol. 2, cit., p. 254.

¹⁷CED, XI, 393, & quoted by THOMAS McKENNA, *Praying With Vincent de Paul*, St. Mary's Press, Winona (MIN) 1994, pp. 59-60.

¹⁸TOSL, cit., p. 38.

¹⁹ST VINCENT DE PAUL, *A Biography*, Melisende, London 1999.

²⁰VINCENT DE PAUL, *The Trailblazer*, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame (IN) 2003.

examples, in order that the sinner, finding his conscience guilty of the same sins which you reprehend, may feel as if you were speaking only to him. Do this, however in such a way, that your words, so to speak, may appear to come from the heart, without being mixed with any movement of indignation or pride, and to spring from the bowels of compassion, from the tender love of a father, who is grieved at the faults of his children”²¹. When one reads the sermons of Vincent Ferrer it is clear that he put these principles into practice. Furthermore, a number of points will probably strike anyone who reads the *TOSL*. Firstly, it contains virtually no quotations, either scriptural, patristic or contemporary. Secondly, the style is very simple and clear, and tends to speak briefly about the nature of the topic under discussion, e.g. Christian perfection, while going on to mention motives and means of practicing it²².

Authors such as Abbe Arnaud d’Angel²³, Jacques Delarue²⁴, and Jose Maria Roman²⁵ include interesting sections on Vincent de Paul’s views on preaching. They show how implicit in the various things Vincent de Paul said about preaching over the years, was the “little method”, which he said was the method of Jesus Christ himself. He exclaimed on one occasion, “Hurrah for simplicity, and for the ‘little method’ which is in fact, the most excellent method and one that brings more glory because it moves hearts more than all this speechifying which only irritates the listener”²⁶. The method consists of three interrelated parts which need to be varied depending of the subject under consideration such as a virtue, the life of a saint, a parable etc. Firstly, it deals with the nature of the subject under discussion, e.g. salvation. Secondly, the preacher suggests motives for acting, e.g., why a person should desire to experience salvation, e.g. sorrow for offending the Lord, and fear of losing heaven. Thirdly, the preacher deals with the means of doing something practical and specific, e.g. trusting in the free, unmerited gift of God’s mercy, and making a good general confession.

Anyone who reads Vincent Ferrer’s *TOSL* will notice that the little method comprising of nature, motives, and means, was implicit in the way he wrote. Furthermore, many things Vincent de Paul said about preaching seem to echo points that Vincent Ferrer had already made.

²¹TOSL, cit., p. 24.

²²Cf. TOSL, cit., pp. 30-32; 40-41.

²³SAINT VINCENT, *A Guide for Priests*, Burns Oates, London 1932, pp. 106-133.

²⁴*The Missionary Ideal of the Priest According to Vincent de Paul*, Vincentians, Philadelphia 1993, pp. 121-128.

²⁵ST VINCENT DE PAUL, *A Biography*, cit., pp. 348-351.

²⁶CED, XI, 286.

We can look at a few examples. Firstly, as has already been noted, Vincent Ferrer did not quote secular authors. For his part, Vincent de Paul admonished preachers who tried “to cause wonderment by filling their sermons with a great variety of things such as extracts from philosophy, mathematics, medicine, jurisprudence, quotations from Jewish Rabbis, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, and Chaldaic words [...] in a vain display of knowledge”²⁷. On one occasion, Vincent de Paul said, “Do not use quotations from the profane authors, unless you use them as steppingstones to the Holy Scripture”²⁸. Secondly, Vincent Ferrer warned preachers not to speak in a spirit of pride. Vincent de Paul repeatedly warned against the same danger, “we must remain faithful”, he said, “to the simplicity and humility of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He could have done startling things and spoken momentous words, but he did not do so”²⁹. Thirdly, Vincent Ferrer said that preaching aimed to help sinners to become aware of their sins in a way that would lead to repentance. Vincent de Paul said, “Let us never desire to satisfy ourselves, but to satisfy God, to win souls, and to lead people to repentance, because all else is nothing but vanity and pride”³⁰. Fourthly, Vincent Ferrer stressed the importance of preaching the truth in a spirit of compassion like a loving father or mother. Vincent de Paul quoted his patron when he said, “St. Vincent Ferrer says that there is no means of profiting by preaching if one does not preach from the depths of compassion”³¹. On another occasion he said something similar, “We should use compassionate language to make our neighbours aware that we truly have their interests and sufferings at heart”³². Fifthly, Vincent Ferrer recommended preachers to illustrate what they meant by everyday examples. Vincent de Paul said something similar, “Notice how Jesus spoke in an understandable language, using the simple comparisons of a farmer, a field, a vine, a grain of mustard seed. This is how you must speak if you want to be understood by the people to whom you announce the word of God”³³.

²⁷ Quoted by DELARUE, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁸ CED XI, 50, & quoted in ABELLY, Vol. 2, cit., p. 19.

²⁹ CED, XII, 211-227, & quoted by ABELLY, Vol. 2, cit., p. 86.

³⁰ DELARUE, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

³¹ VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence – Conferences – Documents*, Vol. 1, cit., p. 526.

³² CED, XI, 77, & quoted by ABELLY, Vol. 3, cit., p. 119.

³³ CED, XI, 342-351, & quoted by ABELLY, Vol. 3, cit., p. 320.

Conclusion

While the two Vincents were remarkable evangelists, each in his own distinctive way, there were obvious differences between them. Vincent Ferrer was an eschatological prophet, who focused on the presence of the antichrist and the immanence of the end times and general judgment. Vincent de Paul did not focus on any of these topics. Vincent Ferrer was a remarkable wonder worker, whereas, there is very little evidence that Vincent de Paul healed the sick or delivered them from evil spirits. Indeed there is an interesting discussion of the significance of deeds of power in the lives of saints in Bishop Prospero Lambertini's (1675-1758) four volume, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione, et Beatorum Canonizatione*³⁴. The author, who later became Pope Benedict XIV, mentioned the charismatic activities of Vincent Ferrer, such as the fact that St. Antonius (1389-1459), a Dominican Archbishop of Florence, testified during the canonization process that although Vincent spoke in his Spanish dialect he was understood by everyone³⁵. Lambertini handled the canonization process of Vincent de Paul. Speaking about the latter he said, "Matthaeucci says, that beside heroic virtues, the promoters of the faith are accustomed to require, for the sake of greater precaution, some grace *gratis data*. I confess that when I was promoter of the faith, I did not omit to make that observation. I did so in the cause of St. Vincent de Paul and the prudent postulatores replied, that graces *gratis datae* were not necessary in order to form a safe judgment on his virtues, some however, of them were not wanting in the servant of God. These are their words: 'Although graces *gratis datae* are not necessary to prove heroic virtues, and therefore it is not necessary that St. Vincent de Paul should have been endowed with them in order to perceive that he had attained to heroic virtue; however, we will bring forward many matters of moment, from which it may be inferred that the servant of God was possessed of those gifts which are now the subject of discussion'"³⁶. Unfortunately Lambertini did not offer examples of Vincent's charismatic powers. One could hazard a guess that he thought that Vincent had the gifts of the utterance of wisdom and knowledge, as well as the gifts of the discernment of spirits and seeing visions, as was evidenced by the prophetic image he saw at the time of Jane de Chantal's death³⁷.

³⁴ Prato, Roma 1840.

³⁵ *Heroic Virtue*, Vol. 3, Richardson, London 1851, p. 224.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 97. Cf. PATRICK COLLINS, C.M., "Benedict XIV on the Link Between the Charisms, Holiness and Evangelisation", in *The Gifts of the Spirit and the New Evangelisation*, cit., pp. 73-90.

³⁷ ABELLY, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 283-284.

The findings of this article are intended to be indicative rather than conclusive. The subject of Vincent Ferrer's influence on St. Vincent de Paul's spirituality deserves a more rigorous treatment from a methodological and textual point of view than I have been able to provide. Even so, it is my belief that, taken together, the example of the two Vincents teaches us at least three relevant lessons at this time of crisis in Church and state. Firstly, our multiple problems, which are often the result of sinful forgetfulness of God, are a providential call to seek the Lord while he may still be found (cf. Is 55:6). Secondly, while Christians are right to stress the primacy of the loving mercy of God, they also need to refer, not only to the divine justice which will be exercised on the last day, but also to the possibility of eternal separation from God. Thirdly, when we share the Gospel in different ways, we can expect God to manifest his saving power and presence by means of charitable works, action for justice (e.g. the Vincentian family) and charismatic deeds of power (e.g. Vincent Ferrer). In this way we will help to usher in the new springtime spoken about by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

There is a very moving example of how the new springtime might come about in Abelly's graphic account of a Vincentian mission which was conducted in 1641. It took place as a result of the repeated requests of the duchess of Aiguillon. She appealed to Vincent to evangelise the faubourg Saint Germain des Pres in Paris which was a very deprived, run down, crime ridden area. As a result of their grace filled efforts, Abelly tells us that, "those who worked on this mission were astonished seeing the disproportion between the means used and the result attained. Besides the large crowds at their sermons and catechism instructions which they presented in the simple and familiar style suggested by Monsieur Vincent, they were filled with admiration at their results. They saw inveterate sinners, hardened usurers, fallen women, criminals who had spent their entire lives in crime, in a word, people without faith in God or anyone, throw themselves at their feet, their eyes bathed in tears, their hearts moved with sorrow for sins, begging mercy and forgiveness"³⁸.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 223-224.