

Electronic Sources for Vincentian Studies

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The great advantage of modern technology for Vincentian Studies has been the development by the Congregation of various electronic sources. This has brought to researchers anywhere with access to the Internet a wealth of texts that previously could have been found only in specialized libraries. In providing this material, the Congregation has only been doing what many others are also doing. While there are many documents and encyclopedias accessible on the Internet that have some relationship to Vincentian life, there are thousands of documents still to be made available. This survey presents only a selection of the most valuable ones currently available or projected for the future. This area of research is developing rapidly.

Sources pertaining to Saint Vincent de Paul

The most important of these sources is the fourteen volumes of the writings of Saint Vincent edited by Pierre Coste. It is thanks to the initiative of Claude Lautissier in Paris, helped by a group of dedicated persons, Daughters of Charity, Vincentians, and laity (including his sister), that we have these texts. They are available in French. In addition, the so-called Volume 15, published by André Dodin as part of his series in *Mission et Charité*, has also been digitized, thereby completing what was known to be available some thirty years ago. A preliminary appendix, Volume 16, is in the stages of preparation by Georges Baldacchino in Paris. It contains new materials that have come to light since Dodin's publication in 1970.

The Spanish translation of Coste's *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents* has also been prepared in digital format. So far, it has not been made available on the Internet, but it likely will be in the coming months.

The English translation of the same work will also be made available to researchers through a new website sponsored by DePaul University in Chicago. Its web address is: <<http://via.library.depaul.edu>>.

The Province of Turin, the repository of a large collection of the original correspondence of Saint Vincent, has prepared an elegant CD with photographs of the original texts, along with the printed versions in French and Italian. The CD can be obtained by contacting the provincial secretary. It may be hoped that the other major collections can do something similar, thereby allowing researchers access to the original texts through the miracles of electronic means.

The first biography of Vincent de Paul, by Louis Abelly, has been available for many years in a facsimile edition, prepared in Piacenza. Printed and bound copies are easily attainable from the General Curia or from the Paris province. In addition, it is now available in digital format, thanks again to Claude Lautissier's team. It will appear on the DePaul University site. The English translation of Abelly's work is likewise available in digital format and will be on the same website. The Spanish version of the same biography has also been digitized.

The first edition of Abelly was published in 1664, but many found it too long and difficult to read. As a result, the author published a second edition in 1667. He eliminated about one third of the material while reworking nearly every page in some way. This important second edition is also available in digital format, and it will be placed on the DePaul University site. It has not been translated from the original French.

Coste's *Monsieur Vincent. Le grand saint du grand siècle*, has been digitized and will be put up on the DePaul University website, both in French and English.

Other biographies are available as well. De Broglie's *Saint Vincent de Paul*, Paris, 1900, is already available on-line in Google Books. Arthur Loth's *Saint Vincent De Paul et sa Mission Sociale* (Paris, 1880) is now completed, minus its lavish illustrations, and will be on the DePaul website. As for so many others, we owe our thanks to Pierre Willemet of the motherhouse in Paris for its preparation. The Spanish original and the French translation of José María Román's biography of Saint Vincent are also available in digital format.

There are a vast number of studies, several hundred, on Saint Vincent already digitized, far too many to list here. Nevertheless, a sample will illustrate what is available. From the pen of André Dodin we have some forty texts on all aspects of the founder's life and spirituality. The same is true with studies by Pierre Debognie and Pierre Coste, about ten different works. Alphonse Feillet's *La Misère au temps de Saint Vincent* (Paris, 1868) has been partially digitized to present the most important chapters dealing directly with Saint

Vincent. Many others, such as Claude Lautissier, Robert Maloney, Luigi Mezzadri, Joseph Parrang, Miguel Pérez Flores, and Jean-Pierre Renouard, have enriched our library of sources and their materials will gradually be made available on the DePaul University website. In the meantime, they are also available through direct contact with Claude Lautissier.

Sources pertaining to the Congregation of the Mission

The most important of all these sources concerning the life and history of the Congregation, including many studies about the Daughters of Charity, is the *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*. DePaul University has digitized this amazing collection, in 127 volumes, and it will be available on the University's website. It is also searchable, in that any word or phrase can be searched in the texts. The valuable volumes of indices form part of this series, as well as the typed index to the volumes published in the twentieth century. The *Annales* were also translated into various languages, Spanish, Italian, Polish, English, German, but these are not yet available. The English series will be digitized in the near future. These editions are not entirely a translation from the French original, since gradually original material was included that normally pertained to the ministries and the history of the provinces.

A second major source, already digitized, is the *Catalogue du Personnel*, dating from 1853. The first hundred years will soon be available on the DePaul website. The importance of this source for Vincentian history cannot be minimized, even though the data found there are not always correct nor complete.

Claude Lautissier and his team have also given us the three volumes of the circular letters of the superiors general, from Saint Vincent through Eugène Boré, 1878. John Rybolt has completed what was only a selection of the more important circulars, and this enlarged version will take its place beside other major historical sources.

Pierre Coste was the author of the major catalogue of the members of the Congregation from the time of Saint Vincent until 1800. This catalogue has been prepared in digital fashion, and its many defects have been corrected, thanks to the patient researches of many other confreres. An important series prepared in Poland has been compared with this catalogue, and the revised catalogue, *Catalogue du Personnel de la Congrégation de la Mission (Lazaristes) depuis l'origine (1625) jusqu'à la fin du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1911) will also be made available to researchers on the DePaul website.

Many other important sources, such as the *Acta Apostolica, Bullæ, Brevia et Rescripta in Gratiam Congregationis Missionis* (Paris, 1876), the *Répertoire Historique* (Paris, 1900), and the *Actes du Gouvernement Français concernant la Congrégation de la Mission* (3rd ed., Paris, 1902) are also available. These documents, along with many others, will help to open to researchers from the entire world the richness of Vincentian materials.

A major work of research into the legislation of the Congregation, the “Corpus Constitutionum Congregationis Mission,” prepared by the author of this report, contains the most complete series of legal texts governing the Congregation. These are principally the Common Rules, in various forms and languages, along with the Constitutions from all periods. Like the other texts, the DePaul website will post these texts.

A text prepared from a typescript of the minutes of the General Assemblies from 1661 through 1931 offers an excellent source for researchers. The text, almost exclusively in Latin, will appear on the DePaul site.

Sources pertaining to the History of the Congregation of the Mission

Besides the general sources listed above, there are also many other sources concerning the history of the Congregation. In particular, these sources deal with the history of individual countries or provinces. There is a vast amount of material now available concerning China. Gradually, as they become available, other valuable texts on individual provinces will be posted. It is foreseen that the major history of the Congregation now being prepared will also have a website attached, where further important documentation, maps and illustrations will also be found.

Other publications in series

Besides the *Annales* mentioned above, other publications are, or soon will, become available to researchers. *Vincentiana* is being posted on the Internet in the three official languages of the Congregation, French, Spanish and English. They are found on <<http://www.famvin.org/>>. This is a current and ongoing project. *Vincentian Heritage*, the publication of the Vincentian Studies Institute of the United States, has been digitized and is available on the DePaul University site. *Colloque*, a publication of the Irish province, has likewise been prepared digitally and will be made available to readers.

Images

A very large selection of images of Saint Vincent de Paul can be found at <http://stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu/>. The site arranges more than 10,000 images of Saint Vincent according to media (engravings, portraits, paintings, statues and sculpture, windows) and under these categories generally by the countries in which the originals of the images are to be found. It is planned for the future that further categories will appear, such as Vincentian sites, Vincentian persons (saints, blessed, members of the Congregation, superiors general), and materials pertaining to Saint Louise de Marillac. The site welcomes submissions of photographs for inclusion and attribution.

Conclusion

With the ease of digitizing materials, it can be hoped that other provinces or groups of provinces will make their materials accessible in digital format, both for their own members and for their confreres and others. The Congregation's desire to be of service to the poor can also be understood as being of service to poor confreres or provinces with only minimal access to the important sources of Vincentian life. As the introduction to the Constitutions states concerning its own reflections and studies:

The Congregation considers it necessary to go back to its roots, and to St. Vincent's lifelong conversion and original vision, so that it may continue to witness to its role within the Church. This is how it seeks to affirm more forcefully, and loyally maintain, its original identity and the spirit of its Holy Founder, and to draw greater inspiration from these sources. In this way, attentive to the will of God, it seeks to respond to its calling which is manifested in a special way, today as in St. Vincent's time, in the needs of the poor.