

# Vincent and Louise, a Parallel of Bold and Creative Fidelity

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We who have faith believe that every person who is alive has the objective of giving glory to God and to extend his kingdom among all people. We also say that each one has to achieve this objective in a distinct manner according to one's personality, and the family and social situations that influence one's life. This is called one's vocation. And I think that *fidelity is above all, to remain faithful to one's vocation.*

There is no doubt that choosing a definite way of living one has to take into account the invitation of Jesus to follow him and continue the mission. The invitation is clear, but generic: "He who wants to follow me..." The answer to the divine call cannot be a superficial one; on the contrary each one's answer is conditioned by a series of personal, familial and social circumstances. Hence, it is natural that God manifests his will to each person by means of the nature created by Him so that each one can extend the reign of God, sanctify self and find happiness. However, the divine call is not clearly manifested and one can be left with a doubt as to what is really the will of God. God respects the capacity of rational initiative of the freedom of all and accepts as divine will the answer that each one gives, whether that person is married, priest or religious, if the person responds in good will and according to reason. *Fidelity is to respond according to personal, familial, social situations and in conscience to God who speaks to us through the events of life.*

Speaking more concretely, we know that the salvation of the poor is primarily for the glory of God and the extension of his Kingdom. And speaking in human terms, we say that God needed a priest, and a widow to begin the Charity work, the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity and by means of them, to serve the poor. He set his sights on Vincent de Paul and Louise La Gras whom he would find in Paris.

Consciously or unconsciously, the answer that this priest and this woman gave to the vocational charism, they gave in the context of

the social condition and the customs of the French society of the XVII century. They responded to that which they had committed themselves to and with the decision to be faithful to their obligations. God accepted their good responses.

### **Saint Vincent**

The de Paul family were not poor, but like all country people in times of war or failed harvest, became extremely poor. On his mother's side, the Moras were of the bourgeois class and Lords of Peyroux<sup>1</sup> about 20 km to the south of Dax. Some of his mother's brothers were lawyers and officials. On his father's side, the Paul family were strong country people with land, forest, and cattle in Puy and in other parts near Dax. But like all families, the Paul-Moras family wanted to better their social situation and chose one of their family members to seek to progress through priestly life.

To present a member of the family to be a priest was only possible for the families that could have influence in the collection of clerical benefits that pertained to the Pope, the king, the nobles, the higher class or clerical hierarchy. The Paul-Moras family had the social condition to reach the goal. In that century, the sacred was introduced into all without distinction among the social, political and religious<sup>2</sup> spheres, and the priesthood was considered a mixture of worldly occupation and ecclesial ministry, and to have a vocation or not depended on the family benefice and the needs of the church. St. Thomas and the Council of Trent ask only for a moral life and the knowledge to realize the ministry.<sup>3</sup> Vincent accepted to be a priest for faithfulness to the social category of the family and to himself without breaking the fidelity that he owed to God for his catholic faith.

The Paul-Moras family on the initiative of Mr. Comet, considered Vincent with the sufficient ability to do ecclesiastical studies and to reach a high position in the Church. When he went to study at the age of 15 at the college of the Franciscans in Dax, he passed three courses rapidly and in only two years he was prepared to study theology. This supposes that even though as a child he tended cattle he probably had some special teacher that came through the house of

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<sup>1</sup> CHARLES BLANC, "The Family of Saint Vincent," in *Society of Borda Bulletin*, 1960,

<sup>2</sup> See MARCEL GAUCHET, *The Disenchantment of the World*, Trotta/University of Granada 2005.

<sup>3</sup> *Summa Teologica*, Supl. 31, 1-2 and q. 36; Council of Trent, Session XXIII, Decree on the reform, cp. XIV; c. 12-13 de ref.

his maternal grandparents. It is not odd that the Judge Comet considered him to be a tutor for his children.

And at the same time, they could see his pious qualities. Even though he appeared in the future with a somber, harsh, and quick character, he had an affective and compassionate temperament.<sup>4</sup> He was a good young man who wanted to be faithful to his priestly obligations and also, without a doubt to be faithful to the destiny that he believed was given to him by God through his family and the social circumstances. The fidelity of Vincent de Paul was not the fruit of a sudden conversion, but rather the natural evolution of his personal situation in a peasant family of the southeast of France in the XVII century.<sup>5</sup>

### Fidelity to God

This was Vincent de Paul's primary fidelity: He decided to follow through permanently on his promises according to the project that God was presenting to him through the events of life. His fidelity was a conscious and rational answer to the confidence that God had deposited in him through his family and society. In agreement with Ricoeur, I would say that Saint Vincent changed the gamble of his destiny for fidelity to a continuous choice, and desired to be faithful to God moved by this mentality.

At times, Saint Vincent gave the impression that nature was programmed to find happiness and that fidelity to God was noth-

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<sup>4</sup> Childhood devotion to the Virgin, charity of handfuls of flour or 30 sueldos to the poor, tears when recently ordained priest he went to Rome and saw the tomb of the apostles, cried when he visited his parents and refused to help them economically. Abelly tells us that around 1650 the Lord of Fresno gave him one thousands pounds to help his family taken from the soldiers. When the saint accepted this help he exclaimed "Do you think I do not care about my family? I have all sentiments of love and tenderness that any other can have for his family, and this natural love gives me encouragement to help them, but I must work according to the action of grace and not of nature and think of the most abandoned poor without detaining myself because of my friendships nor relationships" (L. 3, cp. XIX, p. 745-746). Then there is the fact of that priest who having abandoned the Congregation and who saved the life of Saint Vincent; asked various times to be readmitted but in vain. It occurred to him to remind the saint of the service that he had given to him. In the face of that memory the saint was moved and he responded to him: "Come, Father, and we will receive you with open arms" (COLLET, V, 516).

<sup>5</sup> BENITO MARTÍNEZ BETANZOS, C.M., "The Holiness of Saint Vincent de Paul," in *Pastoral Urgency of the Vincentian Family. XXXII Vincentian Studies Week*, CEME, Salamanca 2007, ps. 15-54. ps. 116 ss.

ing more than living according to human nature fulfilling the will of God.<sup>6</sup>

This context can explain why when he went back to his hometown in 1623 he was tormented by having been unfaithful to his family commitments; and for this failing in justice, he supposed that his brothers would cast in his face that they had made financial inversion in his formation even to the point of selling a pair of oxen so that later on he would be able to help them financially. And since this was one of the ways of investing money at that time, still the tenderness that he felt for his family would torment him later on in life. On the other hand, he realized that he should be faithful to his promise made to God; he was a priest, and all he had he owed to God and the poor. And so, in order to calm his conscience he gave back to his brothers all the benefices that he had inherited from his parents, plus 900 pounds.

It is difficult to be faithful to God when in the events of life the will of God is not presented with all clarity and it is the task of human intelligence to discover it and then the freedom of man to fulfill it following Jesus and guided by the Holy Spirit. It is then when one discovers that the universe, which God has created, is ordered in a rational way and the divine will is that man — part of creation — acts and governs himself by reason. All that is rational is the will of God and God cannot contradict himself (SV I, 173; SV IX, 385). We come to the conclusion that *to be faithful to God is to be faithful to personal reason*, up to the point that in the ultimate instance it is the man of good will who discerns, decides, and acts, convinced of doing the will of God, if his conscience is guided by reason and prudence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> SVP.ES IX, 492 s., 693.

<sup>7</sup> Conference of March 7, 1659 on *conformity to the will of God* (SVP.ES XI, 445 ss.). See the pious attitude that the saint tells the young superior Durand: "The superior not only has to pay attention to the spiritual things but also to the material things of the confreres. Since they consist of body and soul, they ought to be concerned for both and this according to the example of God who... besides creating the interior world also created the exterior world, concerned always for the well being of all, producing new grain and new fruit on the trees, etc.... This consideration seems to me to make us understand that we are not dedicated solely to the higher things that are evident in the spiritual life, but also the superior in a certain sense represents the amplitude of the power of God and should attend to the smallest material needs of the confreres without feeling that this attention is unworthy of him. Therefore, the superior should give himself to God to seek out the temporal well being of the house to which he is assigned. The Son of God, when he sent out his apostles in the beginning wanted them to not take money, but later, the number of apostles grew he wanted one to take care of the common goods.

Some biographers,<sup>8</sup> considering the foundation of the Charities, the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the Spiritual exercises to the Ordinands or the Tuesday conferences as the immediate result of an event, conclude that for Vincent, to be faithful to reason is the same as being faithful to the *divine experience that is lived out in every moment of life in order to make the lives of the excluded happy*. Hence, the plan that God has placed in creation is a plan of love always in favor of the poor and this will of God is placed above all others.

Although his family was pretty comfortable, Vincent de Paul had seen the poor in his childhood and in his captivity in Tunisia; he suffered poverty in his own life. He escaped slavery, returned to Paris and through the influence of Berulle, gave himself to prayer. In a mystical experience one night, he discovered that he could not be disinterested in the poor and he had the obligation to help them personally. If up to then, his fidelity consisted in being faithful to himself and to the social category of his family, according to reason, after that mystical experience *his fidelity had reference to his personal obligation to serve the poor*. This will be his new destiny.

## Saint Louise

Something similar happened with the fidelity of Saint Louise. In an epoch of history when people considered the will of God as destiny, Louise, when she was 16 years old, went to the Capuchins and asked them to explain to her why her life had so many sufferings. They told her that the answer lies in the eternal plan of God. But she is not a defeated person; she was free and voluntarily decided to collaborate faithfully so that the divine design, which is called vocation, be fulfilled in her. This was her principal fidelity. In this collaboration she found the solution to the questions that filled her mysterious life: illegitimate daughter of a Marillac who even today we cannot identify, taken as a daughter by the head of the Louis de Marillac family, educated in a good college-convent of Paris,

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That care meant not only feeding the poor, but also taking care of the needs of the companions. He even let some women continue with him for this same end. The gospel commands that no one should be worried about tomorrow, this means that we should not be too worried for the goods of this world, but that we have to be careful not to disassociate ourselves from the means of living and clothing ourselves; on the contrary, it is not necessary to sow” (SVP.ES XI, 241-242).

<sup>8</sup> CHALUMEAU - DUGRIP - MORIN - RENOARD - SYLVESTRE, *Vincent de Paul His Spiritual Experience and Ours* (Document for the General Assembly of the Priests of the Mission, 1980).

and its environs, but excluded from the family by the Marillac and by the civil laws at the death of Louis, even to the point that she confesses that God has given her a cross that will never abandon her from the moment of her very birth (SL 19). Formed in a secular boarding school with the thought of a bourgeois marriage in the future, she wanted to be a capuchin and make her vows to be a religious, but the Marillac family obliged her to marry an official of the middle class, Anthony Le Gras and better the political position of the Marillacs. When she was only 34 years old, she became a widow with a 12 year old son.<sup>9</sup>

Five years before the death of her husband, in a mystical experience at night, the Holy Spirit communicated to her she was needed to be the founder of the Daughters of Charity. She did not understand this at the time. She only felt that she had been unfaithful to God for not entering religious life but getting married. This infidelity tormented her for many years.

In 1642, the floor of the meeting room at the house of the Daughters of Charity fell, but no one died because they had changed the meeting. Three years later, when she heard of the bad life of her son and also heard that the Company came under the authority of the Archbishop of Paris, she thought that that day, the Company had been saved (SL 53). When she was 54 years old, she revealed how God had guided her to meet with Saint Vincent to found the Daughters of Charity though she did not understand the reason for this. Now she realized the usefulness of having been prepared in the humanities at the college-convent of Poissy and in household duties in a boarding school so she can teach the Daughters of Charity. She set out to write a type of spiritual diary and she realized that she had collaborated faithfully with God, before getting to know Vincent de Paul, in an unconscious way because she found Him in the events of life. We understand today how God gave her the charism of founder precisely because she was a widow, and had a life that would lead her to do a good job and to realize that God presented to her the great spiritual director Vincent de Paul.

This is the first fidelity that we discover in Saint Louise: to collaborate with the eternal plan of God for her and to be faithful to that which God speaks to her through the events of life and prayer.

In her personal project, the faithfulness appears that will save her and her son. That fidelity appears in the poor. There was a time in her life when she identified with the poor. It was contagious from

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<sup>9</sup> BENITO MARTÍNEZ BETANZOS, C.M., *Empeñada en un paraíso para los pobres*, CEME, Salamanca 1995 (Life of St. Louise de Marillac).

Saint Vincent. Her fidelity grew more and more creative and aided her commitment to serve the poor in the Company in which she was living. When she was 54 years old she realized the God had taken her from the mystical experience of that night to be faithful in a more creative way to serve the poor even though she did not understand it at the time.

### **Creative and Bold Fidelity**

Certainly, but from different sources, both saints had creative and bold fidelity toward the poor, based on the fidelity to God that spoke to them throughout the events of their lives. Wanting to be faithful to that divine language that Saint Vincent calls Providence, they supported each other in all things. Fidelity supposes a past, present and future. Saint Vincent wanted to be faithful in every moment to the commitment that he assumed in that nightly revelation and wanted to be faithful to it all his life. Also, Saint Louise never wanted to abandon the promise she made to the poor in May 1629 when she offered herself to God to serve the poor. The fidelity to the poor supposes to seek out the most valuable and useful ways to serve them, even though they already existed or had been used. *This is the genius that makes fidelity creative.*

St. Vincent was not an ingenious inventor, he was a genius innovator. Many others had attempted the majority of his works, but to no avail. The archetype of the three great foundations, Charities, Congregation of the Mission, and Daughters of Charity, were ideas that Christianity had been ruminating about for a long time, but was never able to realize them in a stable form.

Saint Vincent possessed something that the earlier ones did not have. This special something was, together with a prudent psychology of a peasant who knew how to wait, a combination of appropriate circumstances and the opportune moment of Providence. Saint Vincent confided in Providence which was evident in all that happened and he wanted to be faithful to that Providence spreading that same fidelity to Saint Louise, a nervous, quick and dynamic woman. They both realized that a creative fidelity needed boldness to be realized, tenacity not to be abandoned, and wisdom so as not to confront the church or civil powers. This we can see in each foundation.

### **The Charities**

The Charities already existed; they were a slow evolution of fraternal charities of the middle ages. They arose to defend the professions against intruders. Later they included in their statutes

help to the widows, the orphans, and the sick and they were converted into confraternities that functioned as societies of mutual help for all the members. This mutual help aided the poor country people to construct barns that were burned down and help save a destroyed crop. Later, they were placed under the tutelage of a holy Patron and extended their services to all the disenfranchised even though they did not belong to the confraternity. They were then called "Charities." The groups were made up of men who at that time were the only ones that were able to be merchants and have property.<sup>10</sup>

In his vision, Vincent de Paul discovered *that the poor touched him personally and that it was his obligation to help them*. When he arrived at Chatillon, he recognized that charity, in order to be efficient, ought to be achieved in *groups* and *organized*. In that city, he established the Charities as it existed in other places. He quotes expressly the Charity of Rome (SVP.ES X, 574). But he makes two modifications and here we find his creative fidelity: First he forms the groups exclusively of women. This was a brave inconceivable act at a time when women were excluded from all aspects of civil society, the work force, and politics. In the same association were included, against all normal ways, nobles and common people. The women "of money" helped support the expenses. This showed that the experience helped them see that it was absolutely necessary that the women did not depend on the men above all for the finances. (SVP.EX I, 141),<sup>11</sup> and the women workers — caregivers of the sick poor — received a salary to care for and clean the sick. The second modification, was to centralize all in such a way that being autonomous in their functions, all pertained to the same confraternity of Charity whose director general is Vincent de Paul and nothing can be founded without his consent (SVP.ES II, 7; SVP.ES X, 605-607).

He wanted to be faithful to his renewed ideas. He believed that the civil or parochial institutions of charity, such as they were working, were lacking many things and were monotonous and absorbing; he had to modernize them with creativity. It was then that he assumed

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<sup>10</sup> See JEAN CHELINI, *Religiosis History of the Middle Ages*, Hachette Pluriel, rééd. 1997.

<sup>11</sup> "The men and women together were not in agreement with matters of administration; the men wanted to be in charge of all and the women would not support that. The Charities of Joigny and Montmirail were governed at the beginning by one or the other sex... but since their was a common fund, it was necessary to remove the men. I am able to give testimony in favor of the women, and there is nothing that I can say against their administration, because they are very careful and faithful" (SVP.ES IV, 71).

the works that did not depend entirely on himself, like the Foundlings and the General Hospital of Paris.<sup>12</sup>

In agreement with this mentality, the Archbishop of Paris, John Francis de Gondi, gave to the priests of the mission the faculty to “erect the confraternity of Charity in all places that they deem convenient” and Pope Urban VIII in the Bull of erection of the Congregation of the Mission indicates that the missionaries “will procure and establish the so-called confraternities of Charity” (SVP.ES X, 262, 309). Saint Vincent himself considered these new charities as unique to him and his congregation and he felt obliged to visit them, animate them, direct them or correct them.<sup>13</sup> Such was one of the first missions that was entrusted to Louise de Marillac, to visit the charities of the towns as their representative and liaison.<sup>14</sup>

Here, the organizational genius of Saint Louise begins to appear, or if you wish her fidelity to Saint Vincent, but with the delicate and astute personality of a woman. She sends Saint Vincent information about her visits and redacts faithfully in an objective and clear manner, putting a verb, an adjective, a conjunction, or an adverb, indicating what has to be changed or completed: but... it is necessary... there is only one... for this reason the others... too soon... the others are complaining... the town is murmuring.... She took on the concrete problems and the practical situations of the poor of each Charity in each place and each day (c. 5).

Having given the same organization to all the charities by means of the same rules and objectives, and to live out the same Vincentian spirit, one can consider the principal reason why the Charities have lasted with vitality throughout the years and in so many nations, despite the diversity of cultures, even up to forming a world-wide federation in 1971: The International Association of Charities (AIC).

There was a certain model of unity, when the Charity of the Hotel Dieu de Paris (Municipal Hospital) (SVP.ES I, 275) was founded, its center was not a parish, rather the Hospital and its director was not the pastor but Vincent de Paul himself or a Vincentian missionary who was his delegate. Any woman, no matter where she lived, was able to be part of this Charity. Women of high category, of the aristocracy or wealthy women strengthened the charity with

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<sup>12</sup> ANDRÉ DODIN, C.M., *Saint Vincent Recorded By His Secretary* [Robineau], O.E.I.L., Paris 1991, n° 278-280; ANNALES, 114-115 (1949-1950), 238 ss. See BENITO MARTÍNEZ BETANZOS, C.M., “The Excluded in the Time of Saint Vincent de Paul,” in *The Social Exclusion. XXIX Vincentian Studies Week*, CEME, Salamanca 2004, pp. 27-31.

<sup>13</sup> SVP.ES I, 155, 159-160, 352-353.

<sup>14</sup> SVP.ES I, 133-134; SL.E, 16, 17, 25, 26.

millionaire funds, being able to help in great catastrophes and embrace companies that needed millions. It came to be a multinational network of charity: poor, abandoned, galley slaves, immigrants, hospitals to which only the poor would go.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Daughters of Charity**

Eleven years after founding the first Charity in Chatillon, Vincent de Paul heard of a young farm girl, Margarite Naseau. He thought it would be better to substitute the salaried workers with girls who did the work for love and vocation and she offered to begin the work. Her fidelity entered into conflict: on one side, he wanted to be faithful to the rule of the first charity, but on the other side he wanted to be faithful to God who spoke through that young girl.<sup>16</sup> The innovative faithfulness was reborn.

It is now when a tremendous doubt arises in both saints between the fidelity to the traditional divine message in favor of the poor and the bold creativity to accommodate the Charities to the new situation which has been presented. Saint Vincent knew that many marvelous projects were abandoned for not knowing how to join together faithfulness and creative boldness. Saint Louise knew it, but seven years after the death of her husband, and tormented by the infidelity of not having become a religious, she unconsciously put being faithful to herself before being faithful to the poor. And this infidelity put her on the brink of throwing away the fidelity to her vocation. Louise right from the start was thinking about forming a new religious congregation with the young women that had united themselves to Margarite Naseau and to be faithful to the vow she had made as a young woman. Vincent vehemently opposed this because it would enclose them in a convent (SVP.ES I, 141, 175).

They dialogued, prayed and reached the conclusion that fidelity to God and to the poor would lead them in a new direction: faithfulness to a distinct association, the Company, gathering together the young women from the town in a Charity exclusively for them. Louise sought to assume this new charity without the least doubt: though nervous, she insisted on realizing it very soon and stubborn as she was, she would not give way to the pressures come wind or high water. Saint Vincent tried to hold her back (SVP.ES I, 251) but he was convinced that God had something exceptional planned for

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<sup>15</sup> BENITO MARTÍNEZ BETANZOS, C.M., *Building a Paradise for the Poor*, CEME, Salamanca 1995, p. 73 ss.

<sup>16</sup> SVP.ES IX, 20, 90, 203, 233-234, 416, 542.

Louise (SVP.ES I, 266) and he authorized her to begin the experience on the weekends (SVP.ES I, 266). Finally, in November of 1633 they decided to begin the New Charity with Marie Joly and another two or three companions (SVP.ES I, 227, 261; GOBILLON, p. 51). Margarite Naseau had died nine months before (SVP.ES I, 238-240). Their faithfulness was so strong that the Procurator General was afraid to give them authority seeing that young women without noble titles would direct public establishments (SL., c. 320).

The Charity of the young women was the Charity of Saint Vincent and he named himself director and named Louise the Sister Servant. The immediate government and direction as well as the administration depended on the superioress. Vincent knew very well the gifts and talents of Louise de Marillac, and even more, entrusting her with the Company, he put it in her hands. The first rule and order of day was redacted by Louise. Vincent made some few annotations and proposed that she explain the rules to the women and only due to the great reverence that Louise had for Vincent did he explain them himself in the month of July 1634.

Vincent, without paying attention to the social rules of the time that the woman is subordinate to the man, destined Louise from being a simple collaborator to taking a role equal to his and gave her as much responsibility as he had.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Louise never wanted to put herself at the same level as her director. Her faithfulness was that of a helper. He knew that and was aware also that Louise never took on anything independently from him without his knowledge.

I think that the parallelism of creative and bold faithfulness is so evident that judging in a natural and human way; I would dare to affirm that if one were not present the actual Company of the Daughters of Charity would not have been realized. Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac are equal founders of the Company of the Daughters of Charity: the Vincentian charism is also the charism of the Daughters of Charity.

### **Conflict of Fidelities**

Saint Vincent as well as Saint Louise wanted to be faithful to God who spoke to them through the events of life and reason with regard to the well being of the poor. However, their formation, their personalities and their families were different. This affected the way that they conceived of their approach to God and the poor. Also entering here are the structures of the Company especially in

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<sup>17</sup> SVP.ES I, 281, 308, 325, 326, 336.

reference to the Superior General of the Company: The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission or the bishops of the Dioceses?

The disagreement between the two saints had a basis: Vincent de Paul, wanting to be faithful to the poor, saw that it was difficult for the Archbishop to approve the Company if it depended on a priest, even if it were Saint Vincent himself; but depending on the archbishop he thought it easier to obtain approbation. The dependence on the Archbishop favored the nature of the confraternity as opposed to a religious institution. Besides, Vincent de Paul felt the opposition within his very own congregation to which he had to maintain fidelity to assume the direction of the female company. For all these reasons, he desired that the Company depend completely upon the archbishop of Paris.

Louise vehemently opposed this but with her gentleness and delicate female manner (SL, c. 181, 228, 374). Louise wanted to be faithful to her vocation as Daughter of Charity to the Company and to the poor and the motives were not important. Always the realist and very attentive, Louise knew all the daughters in their psychology and ways and she knew that those simple women needed some well prepared priests to assist them; besides the Daughters of Charity were rejected in other dioceses if they were under the authority of the Archbishop of Paris and if they depended on the Bishops, each one would direct them in his own way.

The faithfulness of Saint Louise was bolder than that of Saint Vincent in the manner of conceiving the structure of the Company. More than bold, it was a daring fidelity. While Vincent de Paul, titled in law, was involved with the Council of Trent and the Constitution *Quaecumque* of Clement VIII (1604) he needed to look at the juridical nature of the Daughters of Charity. Louise was thinking in a practical mentality: she dreamed that there would be only one institution or congregation made up of Vincentian missionaries and the Daughters. It was a dream and only a dream, it never came to be realized while she was alive nor after her death. It seems that none accepted their wishes for being too daring or perhaps prophetically too premature.

Her vision could have become historical, but it was enough to have been able to impose her vision concerning the Superior General. Four times she wrote concerning the natural union between the Company and the Congregation and four times seems to want a curious union that would perhaps have changed our history.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> SL.E, 33, 53, c. 228, 374.

Vincent de Paul assumed this daring vision and even considered that he had to be faithful to it. He reacted in the beginning; however at the end of his life, he assumed the position of Louise. The arguments that he proposed to the confreres to convince them of the congruence between the spiritual help to the Daughters of Charity and the ends and nature of the Mission (December, 1658) were very well known. He gave the sense that he did not dare to present in public to the missionaries a suspected argument for them, but he proposed it to P. de la Fosse in February 1660.

“The Daughters of Charity entered in the order of Providence as a way that God gave us to do with their hands that which we could not do with ours... these Daughters dedicate themselves like us to the salvation and care of the neighbor; and if we would say they work *with us*, they would say nothing contrary to the gospels” (SVP.ES VIII, p. 227).

Some days before, he had written to P. Dehorgny that it is the obligation of P. Cuissot, “as superior of the missionaries to take the same care of the Sisters that he takes of the seminarians and that he should instruct them, confess them and direct them; he should do it according to his counsels and not independently of them” (SVP.ES VIII, p. 220).

If the actual society and life demands and needs equality in the rights and functions between men and women, would it not have been the time to realize this vision of Louise de Marillac concerning one institution with two bodies?

### **The congregation of the Mission**

Vincent de Paul, at the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, was faithful to the environment that filled the clergy of his time.

Since the beginning of the XVI century, European society had suffered great social transformations. Urbanization had demanded new forms of religious life. If the monks with their monasteries responded to the needs of the country society, then there was a need for mendicant preachers to evangelize the cities, some teaching theology in the Universities. With the spread of Protestantism, there was a need for clerics to catechize the towns and educate the children in the schools, living in small houses, but all centralized in the Superior General. So, a new class of religious was born, the regular clerics, living close to the faithful, with a style of common life that was easier and more mobile. Like the secular clerics, they did not wear habits to

help them realize the apostolate. They were not oriented toward a rigorous penitential practice, but rather toward apostolic activity: Jesuits (1540), Camilos (1582), Escolapios (1597). Of all of these, the Jesuits had a special importance, so much so that Vincent had them present in various aspects of the organization of the Congregation.<sup>19</sup>

In the presence of a decadent secular clergy, there had to be created a new structure of priestly associations, the secular congregations: Oratorians of Saint Philip Neri (1575), Oblates (1578) Oratorians of Berulle (1613) Congregation of the Mission (1632), all without public vows, some with private vows and others with no vows.

Saint Vincent did nothing more than present himself in the current that was advancing. The Congregation of the Mission is the least creative and bold of all the institutions that the saint founded, but always encompassed his special fidelity to his country background and the poor. Because fidelity to the poor supposes permanency, he presented the private vows with the speciality of the vow of poverty concerning the use of material goods and not the possession of personal goods.

With regards to the vows, yes it was very daring. Since Luther published (1521) his *Judgement of the Vows* (Monastic Vows),<sup>20</sup> convents of middle Europe emptied out, the religious state was depreciated, and the value of the vows deteriorated. In the time of St. Vincent, the *mission counted more than the vows*. It is not strange that there was so much opposition in the missionaries that they found it a threat to be considered religious, Saint Vincent himself confessed that the religious state was badly seen by society and even the Roman Curia and the Pope.<sup>21</sup> But Saint Vincent thought that the vows of fidelity and *stability* were to better remain faithful to the poor.<sup>22</sup>

*Faithfulness to the written word: Once the grand foundations were established, the formation of the members continued. It is then that a new fidelity appears in the two founders: Fidelity to the Word through Sacred Scriptures.*

Translation: ARTHUR J. KOLINSKY, C.M.

<sup>19</sup> SVP.ES III, 224-225; SVP.ES V, 298-299, 301.

<sup>20</sup> See a synthesis and critique in RICARDO GARCÍA VILLOSLADA, S.J., *Martín Lutero*, vol. II, BAC, Madrid 1973, pp. 45-55.

<sup>21</sup> SVP.ES III, 348; SVP.ES IV, 541.

<sup>22</sup> SVP.ES II, 396; SVP.ES III, 223-225, 348, 350; SVP.ES IV, 329, 541; SVP.ES V, 295-301.