

An Event for the Jubilee Year!

A NEW LETTER OF SAINT VINCENT

*The Discovery of an Unpublished Letter of Saint Vincent
has Just Been...*

by Bernard Jean Koch, C.M.

When Father Philippe Lamblin, surfing the Internet, discovered that the Archives of the Company of Jesus in France possessed an autograph letter of Saint Vincent, he contacted the Archivist, Father Bonfils. It was, indeed, a letter of our Founder, dated January 23, 1648, but no mention of the addressee was given, so its existence remained unknown until now. We were planning to go to see this precious document, when Father Bonfils, authorized by his Provincial, offered to make us a gift of the letter. We came into possession of it on Thursday, November 19, in Vanves. Father G. Gregory Gay, who was in Paris at the time, expressed our deepest gratitude to Father Grenet, Provincial of the Jesuits, and to Father Bonfils as well. We add our own gratitude to this.

Father Bernard Jean Koch has done an initial transcription and analysis of the letter.

The text of this letter is given here (in modern spelling);¹ *it is to be placed in Volume III of Coste, p. 267* [English edition, New City Press]:

1009a. – **To?** [*The sheet with the name of the recipient and the address is missing*].²

Sheet 1 front

Paris, January 23, 1648.

The grace of Our Lord be with us forever.

I just received your letter, and have been greatly consoled by it, both for your **?safe?** ~~and~~ [*Crossed out. He had begun to write*

Original autograph letter. Gift of the Archives of the Company of Jesus of Vanves (*originally in the Archives of the former Jesuit Province of Champagne, France*) to the Archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris, received Thursday, November 19, 2009.

¹ In the transcription of the original, the spelling of the period has been respected, particularly in order to facilitate the verification of the readings; a transcription in modern spelling follows. For the sake of clarity, pagination has been added and some paragraph breaks skipped; those of Saint Vincent himself are indicated by a blank line. The disposition of the text on the pages is *in italic bold*. The reconstructed parts of abbreviations are in italics; crossed out words and erasures are also noted; doubtful readings are placed between two question marks and are **in bold**. For some names of confreres, only the initial is given, followed by a period; SV XIV, as indicated in the note above, has allowed them to be identified.

² Everything is made clear in SV III, thanks to the information given by Father Coste, and in SV XIV, as well, regarding the various names, beginning with the letters to Antoine Portail, who, after being in Rome, where he was on October 4, 1647 (p. 246), was in Genoa on December 20, 1647 (p. 258). M. Vincent writes to him there, mentioning, among other things, the need for a Superior in Marseilles, where Jean Chrétien is not doing well. The day after writing this letter, he informs the Duchesse d'Aiguillon of the plan to send Firmin Get there (letter of January 24, 1648, pp. 267-68), while speaking about Lambert and Guillaume Delattre for Marseilles. Then on February 7, 1648, he writes to Antoine Portail (p. 271), who is in Marseilles, announcing the arrival of confreres for Rome and Marseilles, and, on February 14 (p. 273), telling him (that he has chosen) Guillaume Gallais and Firmin Get for Marseilles.

We can conclude, then, that the *addressee is Antoine Portail*, who was passing through Marseilles and whose name is repeated at the bottom of the front of sheet 1.

This letter is an important link in that chain of letters from 1647-1648. It shows us once again that Saint Vincent could be, at the same time, hesitant and prudent, and that he knew how to seek advice and to ask for information before taking a decision. Here, as elsewhere, he shows himself to be a man of discretion.

"landing," thinking Portail had come by sea from Genoa to Marseilles] arrival in Marseilles and for all the things you tell me, for which I thank God.

I ask Him to bring you back here in perfect health, *and* laden with merits [*this word is repeated because the first one was blotted by too much ink on the pen*].

I am hard pressed regarding the choice of a Superior for Marseilles; we need *Monsieur* Lambert here; *Monsieur* Codoing might be among our first thoughts because of the proximity of the Bishops of Agen and Condom, and [?] they will be greatly annoyed if we move *Monsieur* Delattre far away. In addition, he has some traits less in keeping [*two letters hidden under a fold in the paper*] with what is needed. *Monsieur* Gautier, Superior in Richelieu, seems more suitable, (but) there are some problems in taking him from his post.

Monsieur Portail³

[there follows, written along the left margin]

and to find someone who has the necessary qualities to replace him. The thought has occurred to me to send you *Monsieur* Gallais. We brought him here seven or eight months ago; I think he would do a good job and is gracious with outsiders.

Sheet 1 back

and because a Superior is needed right now, from what you tell me, we could send him with someone who is *reg* [*crossed out*] more regular, who can represent him and can see to regularity. *Monsieur* Watebled **?mgr? ?mei? ?verrai?** comes to mind, or *Monsieur* Dufour, but the first is in Saintes, where he is really needed, *and* the second is in Sedan,⁴ from where he could be recalled with less difficulty. He could also be accompanied **?by?** *Monsieur* Jet and another young priest, who has been working in Saintes for a long time. There is also a ~~elierie~~ or [*crossed out*] subdeacon, *Monsieur* Gondrée. The first can teach in the Seminary; you would not believe how learned he is *and* is really good at what he knows. These men will be

³ This name — Portail — written by itself at the beginning of the last line, breaks up the sentence: it could be a reminder to the addressee.

⁴ For Claude Dufour in Saintes, see SV XIV, p. 186; for Watebled, see p. 646. SV XIV, p. 230, indicates that Gallais is no longer in Sedan in 1648, and the other names on p. 560 do not appear in this letter, except for Claude Dufour....

accompanied by seven or eight students or *[crossed out]* most of whom are ready to receive Holy Orders first in Rome. Some of them have finished their Theology, others part of it, and just one who has done

[there follows, written along the left margin]

only his *philosophy*; he is the one who had a post in Rome *and* sold it in favor of the Company. He is someone worthy of consideration.

Sheet 2 front

I think it would be a good idea for you to conclude matters *and* leave as soon as you have finished the ~~Miss~~ *[crossed out]* visitation, unless you see some problem with leaving *Messieurs* C. *[Chrétien]* and S. *[Sicquard]*⁵ together. I hope to have those men leave at the end of the month, in ten days at the latest.

It will be very difficult for *Monsieur* S. to get along with *Monsieur* G. *[Get]*. I think it will be well *[word made illegible by a wavy line]* to have him come back here, or have *Monsieur* C., *and* one or the other go to Anessy *[Annecy]*, where you will find *Monsieur* Guérin, who cannot go on any longer and is crying for help to be relieved; in which case, that would leave four priests in Marseilles, in addition to *Monsieur* Dufour and a clerical student. You are right not to **?arrête?** *[arrêter = define]* the Rules of that house and the hospital now. These **?same?** Rules have to be practiced for a long time before putting them *[definitively]* in writing in **?este? ?ij? ip?**

Two things *[an "s" is obscured by the fold of the paper, as well as the following lines]* will cause us difficulty in the future: the work in the hospital and that *[crossed out]* the role on the Board of Administrators. Our Lord will take care of that, if He pleases. I am sorry *Bishop* L.⁶ is not feeling well,

Sheet 2 back

For the rest, it will be well for you to conclude the matter of that *[crossed out]* the house you mentioned to me. *O Jésus*, *Monsieur*, please do everything you can for that, *and* to satisfy *Bishop* L.

⁵ See SV XIV, p. 378, for the personnel of the Marseilles house.

⁶ Which one? The Bishop of Marseilles was Bishop Gault.

That, Monsieur, is what I can tell you for now, except that I told you **?au?** before that ~~time~~ [*crossed out*] a longer time is prejudicial to the success of visitations, and that I am, with the heart Our Lord knows, your humble servant,

Monsieur,

Vincent Depaul
Unworthy priest of the Mission [*sic*]

May Saint Vincent help those who, like him in 1648, have the responsibility of naming persons for positions of authority and give availability to those who accept them!

Translation: MARIE POOLE, D.C.

et pour ce que est ce qui est presentement en
 requis a un sup^{er} en fait de ce que vous me
 dites, nous pourrions leuoir avec quelques
 qui sont peut plus reguliers qui le representent
 de faire marcher la regularite, nous va-
 rables nous venons en l'esperant de M^r Dufour
 man^{de} preuve que se esoute, ou il se bon
 requis de la seruire a Sedon lequel ton-
 pourrions trop de nous de se esoute
 nous leuoir paiguerons et plus de M^r jet
 et en attendant pour plus qui a travaillé
 a ce point, tout le monde est au monde
 en l'oubli de ce que M^r Goudree par la premiere
 jour faire le plus de son de S^{er}uice
 vous ne sçavez trop combien il se sçavez
 et fait de ce que fait, et nous se sçavez
 nous paiguer de fait en fait de sçavoir
 la plus part en fait de sçavoir de sçavoir
 les se sçavoir a sçavoir, et se en a quelques
 vie qui ont fait leur theologie de sçavoir
 une sçavoir il est a sçavoir sçavoir qui a fait

je pense que vous ferez bien de vous
 excuser de la part de ceux que vous avez
 écrits la lettre rigide, si ce n'est que vous
 vous de l'incriminer à l'usage Mr S.
 et de le faire passer par Mr
 et la fin du mois dans dix jours au
 plus tard.

Il sera fort difficile que Mr S.
 puisse pardonner avec M. G. je pense que l'
 sera bon moyen de le faire revenir

à ou Mr ^{l'un ou} de l'ambassade à Amst^{er} ou vous
 trouverez de l'argent qui sera plus
 qui vous aide pour être déchargé

Il restera en ce cas quatre jours à aller
 aller outre Mr Dundas, & un grand

vous avez raison de ne pas arrêter
 les règles de votre maison de l'hospital
 à présent, il faut les garder long temps au
 présent les mêmes règles, au cas que de
 traduire en esprit

Dans ce cas, nous ferons difficulté à
 l'usage de l'exercice de l'hospital & de la visite
 au cas de l'administration, nous serons y
 pour donner tel conseil que vous en ferez
 de l'usage, on qui parait en Monsieur L,

Je vous prie d'être en ce qui concerne
 la suite de l'acte la Maison, dont vous m'avez
 parlé, et de me faire savoir si vous
 voulez tout ce qui se peut pour la
 faire agréer à Monsieur

L'acte M^r que je vous puis dire
 pour le présent jusqu'à ce que je vous en
 ait dit au contraire que le bon plus long
 temps sans en faire rien de l'acte.
 que je suis de cœur que un seul
 fruit ~~un seul fruit~~
 Monsieur
 Vm centi Des aut
 Indigne p^r la M^r