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## Vincentian Heritage 32, No. 1 [Full Issue]

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# VINCENTIAN HERITAGE

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St. Vincent de Paul  
(1581 - 1660)





# VINCENTIAN HERITAGE

The pulpit of the parish church in Folleville, France

*Image from the collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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# Contributors to this Issue

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# The Heart of Jesus In the Spirituality of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac

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ROBERT P. MALONEY, C.M.

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There was something in the air in early seventeenth-century France. Decades before the visions of Margaret Mary Alacoque, which began on 27 December 1673, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac were already focusing on the heart of Jesus. It became a powerful force in their spirituality, moving them on related, but different, roads toward “mission” and “charity.” The names of the congregations they founded reflect these two thrusts: the Congregation of the *Mission* and the Daughters of *Charity*.<sup>1</sup>

At a gathering of the members of the Congregation of the Mission on 22 August 1655, Vincent de Paul cried out, “[let’s] ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord... He sent the Apostles to do that; he sends us, like them, to bring fire everywhere. *Ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur; to bring this divine fire, this fire of love and of fear of God everywhere...*”<sup>2</sup>

Vincent spoke eloquently of the fire that he hoped would burn in the heart of missionaries, like those who went to Madagascar. He envisioned it as a flame, an all-consuming zeal that would drive the members of his Congregation toward those in need. His dream was that this flame would energize not just those engaged in foreign missions, but also those preaching missions at home or laboring in works among the abandoned anywhere in the world.

Louise referred to the heart of Jesus even more. Not only do we read of it in her writings, we see it in the paintings which, she told the sisters, were her devotion and amusement.<sup>3</sup> She painted both small and large images of Jesus’ heart, and her letters inform us that she sent the “Lord of Charity” to houses of the Daughters of Charity. A large painting depicting the “Lord of Charity” hangs above a landing on a staircase near the Superior General’s room at the Motherhouse of the Daughters in Paris. The heart of Jesus is exposed as he looks out at the viewer.

For Vincent, the heart of Jesus was the source of missionary zeal. For Louise, it was the font of a burning charity that was both affective and effective. Hence, “Mission et Charité” have had a central role in the lives of their followers, with different accents, in the Congregation of the *Mission* and the Daughters of *Charity*.

## I. Early traces of devotion to the heart of Jesus

Explicit devotion to the heart of Jesus developed slowly in the Church. In some ways

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<sup>1</sup> Bibliography about Vincent’s and Louise’s focus on the heart of Jesus is not abundant. See E. Didron, “Louise de Marillac et le Sacré-Cœur,” *Petits Annales de Saint Vincent de Paul* 1:4 (15 Avril 1900), 97-102; F. Portal, “Louise de Marillac et le Sacré-Cœur,” *Ibid.* 1:6 (15 Juin 1900), 161-174.

<sup>2</sup> Conference 135, “Repetition of Prayer,” 22 August 1655, in Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. by Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., Ann Mary Dougherty, D.C., et al., 1-13a & 13b (New York: New City Press, 1985-2010), 11:264. Hereinafter cited as CCD.

<sup>3</sup> She speaks of “the little occasions for amusement that I find in holy cards and other devotions,” in Louise Sullivan, D.C., trans. and ed., Document A.11, “Notes on a Retreat,” in *The Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac: Correspondence and Thoughts* (New York: New City Press, 1991), 783, online at <http://via.library.depaul.edu/ldm/11> (accessed 18 July 2013). Hereinafter cited as SW.



this is surprising, since love is so central in the New Testament and since the heart is a universal symbol of love. The New Testament tells the Good News of God's love for us as revealed in Jesus. This is especially evident in John's gospel and letters. John sums it up in statements that are familiar to all readers: "God so loved the world that he gave us his only-begotten Son"<sup>4</sup>; "God is love"<sup>5</sup>; "In this is love: that he laid down his life for us."<sup>6</sup> Paul makes similar forceful assertions.<sup>7</sup>

But neither John nor Paul speaks of the heart of Jesus. One Johannine text has had a significant influence on devotion to Jesus' heart, but while it is often cited as referring to his heart, it actually speaks of his *side*: "...one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out."<sup>8</sup> From early times, Christians meditated on Christ's open side and the mystery of blood and water that flowed from it. Some saw these as symbols of baptism and the Eucharist. Others saw the Church issuing from the side of Jesus, as Eve came forth from the side of Adam. But it is only by extension that John's reference to Jesus' side came to be understood as alluding to his heart.

One New Testament text, however, does speak explicitly of Jesus' heart. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus himself tells his followers (it was a text that Vincent and Louise loved to quote), "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart."<sup>9</sup> This text has had an enormous influence on Christian spirituality. It appears in the rules of numerous religious communities. Jesus' gentleness of heart has stood as a challenge for all Christians: they were to be in control of their anger, peace-makers, warm, receptive, aware of their limitations, grateful for God's gifts. As will be recounted later in this article, Vincent and Louise placed strong emphasis on gentleness as well as humility.

Yet, as is evident, the New Testament and early Christian texts are not speaking of devotion to the Sacred Heart. In fact, there is nothing to indicate that, during the first ten centuries, any explicit devotion focused on the wounded heart of Jesus. It is only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that we find the first clear indications of devotion to the heart of Jesus. The wound in Jesus' side began to be seen as symbolizing a wound of love in his heart. In Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries, and through the writings of Anselm and Bernard, the devotion gradually grew. Among the early devotees were Saint Mechtilde (d. 1298) and Saint Gertrude (d. 1302). On the feast of Saint John the Evangelist, Saint Gertrude had a vision that plays an important role in the history of the devotion. Resting her head near the wound in Christ's side, she heard the beating of his heart and questioned the apostle John: "If, on the night of the Last Supper, you too felt Jesus' heartbeat, why did you never mention it?" John replied that this revelation was reserved for subsequent ages

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<sup>4</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 4:16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:16.

<sup>7</sup> See Romans 8:31-35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Ephesians 3:14-19, etc.

<sup>8</sup> John 19:34.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 11:29.

when the world, having grown cold, would need to rekindle its love.<sup>10</sup>

The *Vitis mystica*, ascribed to Saint Bonaventure (d. 1274),<sup>11</sup> contains a beautiful passage about the relationship of Jesus' heart to the sacraments. It was later used by the Church for one of the lessons for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart:

It was a divine decree that permitted one of the soldiers to open his sacred side with a lance. This was done so that the Church might be formed from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death on the cross, and so that the Scripture might be fulfilled: *They shall look on him whom they pierced*. The blood and water which poured out at that moment were the price of our salvation. Flowing from the secret abyss of our Lord's heart as from a fountain, this stream gave the sacraments of the Church the power to confer the life of grace, while for those already living in Christ it became a spring of living water welling up to life everlasting.

From the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, the devotion spread slowly, particularly among members of religious congregations, especially Franciscans, Dominicans, and Carthusians. Still, it remained an individualized devotion, often of a mystical nature. No widespread movement gained momentum, other than devotion to the Five Wounds of Jesus, in which the wound in his side figured prominently.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, devotion to the heart of Jesus took a leap forward and entered into the domain of popular piety. By the end of the seventeenth century, it had become a widespread devotion called "Devotion to the Sacred Heart," with clearly formulated prayers and special exercises whose practice was recommended.<sup>12</sup>

### *Francis de Sales*

In this context, from the perspective of the Vincentian Family, the writings of Francis de Sales in the early seventeenth century are most significant. His *Treatise on the Love of God* speaks often of the heart of Jesus. This work, along with his *Introduction to a Devout Life*, had an enormous influence on Catholic spirituality. Both Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac read it and referred to it frequently, as did Jane Frances de Chantal, an intimate friend of Francis de Sales and, with him, the co-founder of the Order of the Visitation. At his death in 1622, Francis entrusted the direction of the Visitation nuns to Vincent de Paul. Margaret Mary Alacoque, whose visions sparked what came to be called "Devotion to the Sacred Heart," with its particular prayers and practices, was a member of that congregation.

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<sup>10</sup> *Legatus divinae pietatis*, IV, 305; *Revelationes Gertrudianae*, ed. Poitiers and Paris, 1877. See <http://www.thesacredheart.com/shdhis.htm> (accessed 29 July 2013).

<sup>11</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Opusculum 3, Lignum vitae*, 29-30.47, *Opera Omnia* 8:79, at [http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library\\_author/50/pics/library\\_article.136.doc/Saint\\_Bonaventure.pdf](http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_author/50/pics/library_article.136.doc/Saint_Bonaventure.pdf) (accessed 22 July 2013).

<sup>12</sup> For example, communion on the first Friday of the month, assisting at Mass on nine first Fridays, the observance of the Holy Hour, the saying of certain prayers, etc. See <http://sacredheartdevotion.com/> (accessed 15 July 2013).



At the very start of his *Treatise on the Love of God*, in the Dedicatory Prayer, Francis addresses himself to Mary and Joseph, praying, “I conjure you by the heart of your sweet Jesus, King of hearts... animate my heart and all hearts that shall read this writing, by your all-powerful favour with the Holy Ghost.”<sup>13</sup> And Francis returns to the subject of Jesus’ heart in a variety of ways. Of someone impervious to the divine touch: “We call that a heart of iron, or wood, or stone.... On the contrary, a gentle, pliable and tractable heart is termed a melting and liquefied heart. *My heart*, said David, speaking in the person of our Saviour upon the cross, *is become like wax melting in the midst of my bowels!*” (Ps. 21:15).<sup>14</sup> Speaking of the union of the soul with God, he writes, “O sweet Jesus! ...draw me still more deeply into thy heart, that thy love may devour me, and that I may be swallowed up in its sweetness.”<sup>15</sup>

Francis uses the image of the heart in many different contexts. He speaks of the heart of God, the heart of Christ, and the heart of the individual person, and he describes a dynamic movement of love between the three. To Francis, the heart of Christ is what makes our ascent to the heart of the Father possible. On earth, a ladder is planted in the pierced side of Jesus, in his Sacred Heart. His wounded heart is where we start climbing.

Francis writes, “[He] beholds by the cleft of his pierced side all the hearts of the sons of men: for this Heart being the King of hearts keeps his eyes ever fixed upon hearts. But as those that look through a lattice see others clearly, and are but half-seen themselves, so the divine love of this Heart, or rather this Heart of divine love, continually sees out hearts clearly and regards them with the eyes of his love...”<sup>16</sup>

### *John Eudes*

For most of the seventeenth century, devotion to Jesus’ heart remained private. It was ultimately John Eudes (1602-1680) who made it public and succeeded in having a feast established for it. Eudes, whom Vincent knew, was an apostle of the heart of Mary especially; but his devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary overlapped with devotion to the heart of Jesus. Gradually, he saw devotion to the Sacred Heart as separate, and, through his efforts, on 31 August 1670, the first feast of the Sacred Heart was celebrated with great solemnity at the major seminary in Rennes. The feast soon spread to other dioceses and was adopted in various religious communities. Two centuries later, Leo XIII pronounced Eudes as “the author of the liturgical devotion of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.”<sup>17</sup>

### *Margaret Mary*

In 1673, Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), a Visitation sister living in Paray-le-Monial, began to have visions of the Sacred Heart. From there, the devotion took off.

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<sup>13</sup> St. Francis de Sales, “Dedicatory Prayer,” in *Treatise on the Love of God*, Henry Benedict Mackey, O.S.B., trans. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books & Publishers, 1997), 58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 6, chapter 12, 240.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 7, chapter 1, 252.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 5, chapter 11, p. 214.

<sup>17</sup> See *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis de Montfort* (Litchfield, CT: Montfort Publications, 1994), III, 2b, at: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/Montfort/Handbook/sheart.htm> (accessed 18 July 2013).

There is no indication that Margaret Mary had known the devotion prior to the apparitions. Her visions were many. In them, Jesus permitted her, as he had formerly allowed Saint Gertrude, to rest her head upon his heart and revealed to her the wonders of his love, telling her that he desired to make the treasures of his heart known throughout the world. He told her that he had chosen her for this work. He wanted to be honored under the figure of his heart of flesh and asked for a devotion of expiatory love — frequent Communion, Communion on the First Friday of the month, and the observance of a Holy Hour. In what came to be called the “great apparition,” which took place during the octave of Corpus Christi in 1675, he said, “Behold the Heart that has so loved men... instead of gratitude I receive from the greater part [of men and women] only ingratitude...”, and asked her for a feast on the Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi, telling her to consult Father Claude de la Colombière, then superior of the small Jesuit house at Paray-le-Monial. A few days after the “great apparition,” Margaret Mary made everything known to Father de la Colombière. He promptly consecrated himself to the Sacred Heart and directed Margaret Mary to write an account of the apparition, which was soon circulating through France and England. The Jesuits played an enormous role in spreading the devotion.<sup>18</sup>

In 1765 Clement XIII approved the Office and Mass of the Sacred Heart for use in Poland, and the nuns of the Visitation were allowed to celebrate the feast throughout their Order. In 1856 Pius IX made the feast obligatory throughout the Church. In 1899 Leo XIII consecrated the human race to the Sacred Heart.

## II. The heart of Jesus in the spirituality of Vincent de Paul<sup>19</sup>

Vincent uses the word *heart* often. In his conferences and letters, one finds numerous common uses of the word, such as “take to heart,” “learn by heart,” “heart to heart,” and “with all my heart.” He also speaks of his own heart and that of Saint Louise. Frequently, he urges Louise to keep her “heart at peace.”<sup>20</sup> He felt that she was too serious, and was also concerned about her health (as she was about his), so he encouraged her to honor the

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<sup>18</sup> An extended treatment of this topic might address at length the Jesuit contribution to devotion to the Sacred Heart. It might also include a treatment of the writings of Louis de Montfort, in which devotion to the heart of Jesus, like that of John Eudes, is united with devotion to the heart of Mary. For a discussion of the role of Jesuits and others in fostering individual devotion and communal practice of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, see “Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07163a.htm> (accessed 18 July 2013). See also, Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Hereinafter cited as Jonas, *Cult*.

<sup>19</sup> As the reader has probably already noted, in order to avoid confusion I am using the word “focus” rather than “devotion” when I speak of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise and the heart of Jesus. Clearly, they were “devoted” to the heart of Jesus, but the phrase “Devotion to the Sacred Heart” has a technical meaning, involving concrete practices. This meaning flowed from the visions of Saint Margaret Mary, which began thirteen years after the deaths of Vincent and Louise.

<sup>20</sup> See Letter 309, “To Saint Louise,” [1638, around February], *CCD*, 1:446.



joy of Jesus' heart: "I shall say nothing to you about the rest [of the things you asked me about]. Our Lord will advise you as to what you must do. Please take care of your health and honor Our Lord's cheerfulness of heart."<sup>21</sup>

At times his language of the heart is quite affectionate. He writes to Louise, "Rest assured, Mademoiselle, of the heart of one who is, in the heart of Our Lord and in His love, your most humble servant.... Courage! May Our Lord be in our hearts and our hearts in His, so that they may be three in one and one in three and that we may wish only what He wills."<sup>22</sup> On another occasion, he tells her, "Offer this action to God, I beg of you, as with all my affection, I ask God to be the heart of your heart. I am, in His love, your servant."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps most affectionate of all are his greetings on New Year's Day in 1638: "I wish you a young heart and a love in its first bloom for Him Who loves us unceasingly and as tenderly as if He were just beginning to love us. For all God's pleasures are ever new and full of variety, although He never changes. I am, in His love, with an affection such as His Goodness desires and which I owe Him out of love for Him, Mademoiselle, your most humble servant."<sup>24</sup>

He uses similarly affectionate language when writing to Jeanne Frances de Chantal<sup>25</sup> and Madame Goussault. To the latter he says, "God knows to what extent He has filled my heart with this fondness for you and how much I feel it now as I speak to you, I who am, in the love of Our Lord, Madame, your most humble servant."<sup>26</sup>

He sometimes describes the fire of love that he feels in his own heart. During a conference to the priests and brothers of the Congregation of the Mission he prays aloud:

O God of my heart, Your infinite goodness doesn't allow me to share my affections or to give them to anyone else if that's prejudicial to You! Take possession, for yourself alone, of my heart and my liberty! And how could I wish for anything good from anyone else but you! Would it be, perhaps, from myself? Alas! You love me infinitely more than I love myself; You are infinitely more desirous of my welfare and have the power to see to it better than I myself, who have nothing and hope for nothing except from you. O my only Good! O Infinite Good! Would that I had as much love for you than all the Seraphim put together! Alas! It's too late to be able to imitate them! *O antiqua bonitas, sero te amavi!* [O goodness so

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<sup>21</sup> Letter 109, "To Saint Louise," [June 1632], *Ibid.*, 1:162.

<sup>22</sup> Letter 148, "To Saint Louise," [n.d.], *Ibid.*, 1:212-213.

<sup>23</sup> Letter 216, "To Saint Louise," [1636], *Ibid.*, 1:310.

<sup>24</sup> Letter 288, "To Saint Louise," New Year's Day [1638], *Ibid.*, 1:408.

<sup>25</sup> See Letters 383, 446, 465, 474, "To Saint Jane Frances," dated 14 July 1639, 14 May 1640, 30 July 1640, and 26 August 1640, respectively, *Ibid.*, 1:556; 2:57; 2:101; 2:116-117.

<sup>26</sup> Letter 362, "To Madame Goussault," [November 1638], *Ibid.*, 1:512.

ancient, late have I loved you!<sup>27</sup>] But, at least I offer you, with all the extent of my affections, the love of the Most Holy Queen of Angels and of all the blessed in general. O my God, before heaven and earth I give You my heart, such as it is. I adore, for love of you, the decrees of Your paternal Providence regarding Your poor servant; in the presence of the whole heavenly court, I despise anything that could separate me from You. O Sovereign Goodness, You who want to be loved by sinners, give me love for You, and then command what You will: *da quod jubes et jube quod vis* [Give what you command, and command what you will].<sup>28</sup>

He tells his confreres that what God wants is the heart, “God asks primarily for our heart — our heart — and that’s what counts. How is it that a man who has no wealth will have greater merit than someone who has great possessions that he gives up? Because the one who has nothing does it with greater love; and that’s what God especially wants...”<sup>29</sup>

Vincent often expresses his admiration for martyrs and for the love that burned in their hearts. Speaking to the Daughters of Charity, he cites the Cantic of Canticles 4:9:

Dying like that seems the most beautiful way to go; it’s to die of love, to be a martyr — a martyr of love. It seems that those blessed souls can apply to themselves the words of the Spouse and say with her: *Vulnerasti cor meum* [you have wounded my heart]; it’s You, my loving God, who have wounded me; You’re the one who has broken and pierced my heart with Your burning arrows; You’re the one who put this sacred fire in my inmost being, causing me to die of love. Oh, may You be forever blessed! O Savior, *vulnerasti cor meum!*<sup>30</sup>

For Vincent, fire in the heart expresses itself as missionary zeal. There are few occasions when he was so clearly moved as when he spoke with the members of the Congregation of the Mission on 22 August 1655. He urges them to pray: “Let’s ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord... He sends us, like them... to bring this divine fire... everywhere, throughout the world.”<sup>31</sup> He asks them to be willing to go anywhere in the world as missionaries and to be willing to die there, citing the famous saying of Tertullian, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.”

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, bk. 10, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Conference 102, “Exhortation to a Dying Brother,” [1645], *CCD*, 11:130-131.

<sup>29</sup> Conference 132, “Poverty,” 13 August 1655, *Ibid.*, 11:228.

<sup>30</sup> Conference 129, “Repetition of Prayer,” 4 August 1655, *Ibid.*, 11:205. The contemporary translation of the Cantic of Canticles 4:9 utilized in *CCD* interprets “vulnerasti” as “ravished.” However, Vincent was using the Vulgate and I feel “wounded” better reflects his reading at the time.

<sup>31</sup> Conference 135, “Repetition of Prayer,” 22 August 1655, *Ibid.*, 11:264.

Vincent mentions various things that presumably delighted Jesus' heart: the practice of poverty,<sup>32</sup> doing the Father's will,<sup>33</sup> humility,<sup>34</sup> and love of the neighbor.<sup>35</sup> Vincent also focuses on Jesus' heart in another context, one which has played a very important role in the spirituality of his Family. He uses the words of Jesus himself about his heart, and cites them frequently, "Learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart."<sup>36</sup> He returns to those words again and again in his talks to the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Perhaps the clearest, most succinct expression of his thought in this regard appears in the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, published in 1658:

We should make a great effort to learn the following lesson, also taught by Christ: *Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart.* We should remember that he himself said that by gentleness we inherit the earth. If we act on this we will win people over so that they will turn to the Lord. That will not happen if we treat people harshly or sharply. And we should also remember that humility is the route to heaven. A loving acceptance of it when we are humiliated usually raises us up, guiding us, as it were, step by step from one virtue to the next until we reach heaven.<sup>37</sup>

Speaking to the Congregation of the Mission, Vincent states that gentleness and humility are like "two sisters"<sup>38</sup> who are inseparable. They are missionary virtues<sup>39</sup> which are indispensable for winning the hearts of poor country people. He describes them as two of the five smooth stones<sup>40</sup> with which a missionary can slay any enemy, as David slew

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<sup>32</sup> Conference 130, "Poverty," 6 August 1655, *Ibid.*, 11:212. See also, Conference 132, "Poverty," 13 August 1655, *Ibid.*, 11:226. The text of which reads: "we'd be immediately delighted with the charms of that virtue [referring to poverty] which delighted the heart and affections of the Son of God!"

<sup>33</sup> Conference 104, "Repetition of Prayer," [n.d.], *Ibid.*, 11:135; Conference 198, "Seeking the Kingdom of God (Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 2)," 21 February 1659, *Ibid.*, 12:113; and Conference 199, "Conformity to the Will of God (Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 3)," 7 March 1659, *Ibid.*, 12:137.

<sup>34</sup> Conference 203, "Humility (Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 7)," 18 April 1659, *Ibid.*, 12:165.

<sup>35</sup> Conference 207, "Charity (Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 12)," 30 May 1659, *Ibid.*, 12:216, 221.

<sup>36</sup> See Conference 27, "The Practice of Mutual Respect and Gentleness," 19 August 1646, *Ibid.*, 9:207, 211; Conference 85, "Service of the Sick and Care of One's Own Health (Common Rules, Arts. 12-16)," 11 November 1657, *Ibid.*, 10:270; Conference 40b, "Humility," [n.d.], *Ibid.*, 11:50; Conference 202, "Gentleness (Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 6)," 28 March 1659, *Ibid.*, 12:153; Conference 203, "Humility (Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 7)," 18 April 1659, *Ibid.*, 12:161, 164, 169. See also, SW, pages 118 and 701, online at <http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=ldm> (accessed 15 July 2013).

<sup>37</sup> *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission* (Rome: 1984; English translation, Philadelphia: 1989), 110. Hereinafter referred to as *Constitutions and Statutes*.

<sup>38</sup> Conference 202, "Gentleness," 28 March 1659, *CCD*, 12:152.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 12:156-157.

<sup>40</sup> *Constitutions and Statutes*, 159.



Goliath. Speaking to the Daughters of Charity, he tells them that humility “is the origin of all the good that we do.”<sup>41</sup> He equates gentleness with charity, “For what is charity if not love and gentleness?”<sup>42</sup>

When he mentions the heart of Jesus to the Daughters, the context is usually their prayer or their service. What a blessing it will be, he tells them, if a sister “does her utmost to put her heart in the state of being united with the heart of Our Lord.”<sup>43</sup> He encourages them to speak with the Lord “heart to heart.”<sup>44</sup> He says that ejaculatory prayers are “like darts that are shot and [that] wound the heart of Our Lord.”<sup>45</sup> In their service of the poor, he urges them to “find in the heart of Our Lord a word of consolation for the sick poor person.”<sup>46</sup>

### III. The heart of Jesus in the spirituality of Louise de Marillac

#### *Her writings*

Louise uses *heart* with great frequency. She urges the Company to be of “one heart”<sup>47</sup> and one mind or will, and encourages sisters to have “a loving heart for works of charity.”<sup>48</sup> She is aware of her own “hardness of heart”<sup>49</sup>; she desires things “with all my heart”<sup>50</sup>; and advises that “God wants only our hearts.”<sup>51</sup> She frequently ends letters “in the love of the heart of Jesus Crucified.”<sup>52</sup> Her language too, like Vincent’s, is often quite affectionate.<sup>53</sup>

As early as 1622, when writing about her desire to give herself to God, she focuses explicitly on the heart of Jesus:

As I meditated on the Gospel of the Sower, I realized that there was no good soil in me. Therefore I desired to sow, in the heart of Jesus, all the actions of my heart

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<sup>41</sup> Conference 58, “Secret Pride,” 15 March 1654, *CCD*, 9:530.

<sup>42</sup> Conference 27, “The Practice of Mutual Respect and Gentleness,” 19 August 1646, *Ibid.*, 9:211.

<sup>43</sup> Conference 89, “Mortification, Correspondence, Meals, and Journeys (Common Rules, Arts. 24-27),” 9 December 1657, *Ibid.*, 10:327.

<sup>44</sup> Conference 21, “Observance of the Rule,” Continuation of Conference 22 January 1645, *Ibid.*, 9:176.

<sup>45</sup> Conference 85, “Service of the Sick and Care of One’s Own Health,” 11 November 1657, *Ibid.*, 10:268.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:269-270.

<sup>47</sup> See L.130c, “To Sister Jeanne-Christine,” [c. 1650], *SW*, 328, online at <http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=ldm> (accessed 16 July 2013).

<sup>48</sup> L.121, “To My Very Dear Sister Madeleine,” 27 June 1645, *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>49</sup> L.418, “To Monsieur Vincent,” [Monday, November 1564], *Ibid.*, 456; and L.456, “To Monsieur Vincent,” Eve of the Feast of Saint Denis [October 1655], *Ibid.*, 487.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, L.11, “To Sisters Barbe Angiboust and Lousie Ganset,” 26 October 1639, *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> See L.40, “To Madame...,” [undated], *Ibid.*, 679.

<sup>52</sup> This was the practice of Louise de Marillac as evidenced by letters written between the Years 1639 and 1660. See *Ibid.*, 151-231, in which there appear 25 instances of such a closing statement.

<sup>53</sup> See L.58B, “To Sister Élisabeth Martin,” 7 August [1641], *Ibid.*, 56-57.

and soul in order that they may grow by sharing in His merits. Henceforth, I shall exist only through Him and in Him since He has willed to lower Himself to assume human nature.<sup>54</sup>

Louise had frequent contact with the Capuchin religious, a community she tried to join but to which she was refused entrance for reasons of health. They had a strong devotion to the Five Wounds of Our Lord. At that stage in her life, she may well have also come in contact with the works of contemporary writers like Père Joseph, the original *Éminence grise*, the counselor of Richelieu, who in 1623 urged devout people to find in the Open Heart of Jesus, “the living fountain of pure love and the center of all their works.” In 1636, he introduced religious in Paris to the “Exercise of the Devotion to the Five Wounds of Our Lord.”<sup>55</sup>

However, her contact with the writings of Francis de Sales and with the Visitation nuns would surely have influenced her most strongly. She was a friend of Jane Frances de Chantal, to whom Francis had written on 10 June 1611, “I thought we ought to take as our arms a heart pierced by two arrows, enclosed in a crown of thorns, this heart serving as a setting to a cross which will rise from there, and will be inscribed with the Sacred names of Jesus and Mary... Truly our little Congregation is a work of the hearts of Jesus and Mary. The dying Savior gave birth to us through the wound of His Sacred Heart.”<sup>56</sup>

In speaking to the sisters about the heart of Jesus, Louise’s emphasis, like Vincent’s, is on the affective and effective love they are to bring to the poor: “During this time of recreation, reflect on the eternal joy that you will have in heaven if, on earth, you love God and your neighbor as He has commanded you. To help you practice the love you owe your neighbor, remember when you are together that the bond of union among you is the Blood shed by the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ.”<sup>57</sup>

### *Her paintings*

It is surprising that so little has been written about Louise as a painter, surely a very interesting facet of her personality. Vincent refers to her paintings as early as 1630.<sup>58</sup> We still have a number of them and know that there were many more. Louise called them, “the little occasions for amusement that I find in holy cards and other devotions.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> A.15B, “On the Desire to Give Oneself to God,” [c. 1622], *Ibid.*, 693.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. l’Abbé Dedouvres, *Le Père Joseph et le Sacré-Cœur* (Angers: Germain & G. Grassin, 1899), *passim*, “Exhortation sur les cinq plaies – Exhortation pour la retraite des dix jours.”

<sup>56</sup> *Oeuvres Complètes de Saint François de Sales*, V, 360. See <http://visitationspirit.org/2011/09/visitandine-mystics-the-sacred-heart/> (accessed 29 July 2013).

<sup>57</sup> M.69, “On Recreation,” *SW*, 804.

<sup>58</sup> Letter 50, “To Saint Louise,” [Around 1630], *CCD*, 1:81.

<sup>59</sup> A.11, “Notes during a Retreat,” *SW*, 783.



The miniature painted by Louise de Marillac depicting the Good Shepherd surrounded by his sheep. Original is housed at the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, Paris.

*Courtesy of the author*



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Here I will comment briefly only about those paintings which are related to her devotion to the heart of Jesus.

### *1. The Good Shepherd*

We possess three miniature watercolors painted by Saint Louise. One of these, shown above, depicts the Good Shepherd surrounded by his sheep. In the background, which is quite detailed, Louise has placed towers, a home, a fence, a river, a wall, trees, birds, and plants. In the foreground, she portrays Jesus seated, four sheep with him. One has climbed onto Jesus' lap and is quenching his thirst at the wound in Jesus' side. Two others appear to be doing the same at Jesus' feet. A fourth seems about to kiss Jesus. One can see the wound on Jesus' left hand.

Here, then, we see the influence of devotion to the five wounds of Jesus, popular at that time. Devotion to the wound in Jesus' side, as discussed previously, developed into devotion to his heart.

### *2. A medallion of Christ*

A small medallion, painted by Louise, is in the archives of the Daughters of Charity at rue du Bac, and was formerly in the apartment of the Mother General.

Close photographic analysis of the painting reveals a heart which the naked eye can barely see, and was unnoticed for years. On the right-hand banner, near the head of Christ, are the words, "Learn from me that I am gentle...", and on the left-hand banner, "Come, blessed of my Father..." This is the Lord of Charity, and it was images like this that Saint Louise referred to when she wrote, "I am enclosing pictures for you. One is a Lord of Charity to put in the room where you receive the poor. The other is for your room."<sup>60</sup>

As can be seen below, an attestation on the reverse side of the medallion states: "*Cet image a été peinte de la propre main de la vénérable Louise de Marillac, veuve de M. le Gras, secrétaire de la reine Marie de Medicis, et 1<sup>ere</sup> Supérieure de la Compagnie. Morte le 15 mars 1660*"

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<sup>60</sup> L.3, "To a Sister," [Between 1640 and 1646], *Ibid.*, 335.





The front and back sides of the small medallion painted by Louise de Marillac.

Courtesy of the author



[This image was painted by the very hand of the venerable Louise de Marillac, widow of Monsieur le Gras, secretary of the queen Marie de Medicis and first Superioress of the Company. Died, 15 March 1660].”

### 3. A large “Lord of Charity”

Over the years, Vincent sent Louise various images of the Lord of Charity, painted by unknown artists. Louise passed a number of them on to houses of the Daughters, and painted some herself. Around 1637, she sent two to Barbe Angiboust, one for the room where the sisters received the poor, and one for her own room.<sup>61</sup> In 1647, Louise asked Vincent for more images of the Lord of Charity.<sup>62</sup> Vincent must have liked these images; in 1656, he told Jean Martin in Turin that he would send him several copies of the Lord of Charity.<sup>63</sup>

The large painting below is currently housed on the staircase near the office of the Superior General in the Maison-Mère of the Daughters of Charity, rue du Bac. At the bottom of the painting someone has written in capital letters: “*Ce tableau a été peint par Mlle. Le Gras notre mère et institutrice* [This tableau was done by Mademoiselle Le Gras, our mother and founder].”

In 1891 this painting was noticed in a chapel annexed to the cathedral of Cahors, where a house of the Daughters of Charity had been established in the time of Vincent and Louise. It is likely that this house, like many others, received a “Lord of Charity” from Louise. Such paintings were probably also placed in the room or chapel where the Confraternities of the Ladies of Charity met, so that the members might have an image of

<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note that in the French edition of *Écrits Spirituels* the letter listed as L.3 appears twice. The first time, as cited in the footnote immediately above; the second time as L.3, “à Sœur Barbe Angiboust,” [vers 1637], *ES*, 680. In the English translation, however, the second appearance of L.3 is eliminated. The Translator’s Note to the English translation states: “Entries which could not be verified have been eliminated.” See *SW*, xxxv.

<sup>62</sup> L.190, “To Monsieur Vincent,” [August 1647], *SW*, 224; This same letter appears with a different date ascribed; see Letter 999, “Saint Louise to Saint Vincent,” October 1647, *CCD*, 3:255.

<sup>63</sup> Letter 2150, “To Jean Martin, Superior, in Turin,” [29 September 1656], *CCD*, 6:111.



The "Lord of Charity" painted by Louise de Marillac; discovered in Cahors, France, in 1891.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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the Lord, their patron.<sup>64</sup> It appears that, for some reason, the sisters in Cahors had a local artist add 25 centimeters of canvas around the painting, harmonizing the new canvas with the original painting and adding the inscription. The painting was probably sent to the chapel during the French Revolution, when the sisters were expelled from the orphanage they ran in Cahors. In 1891, a member of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul drew it to the attention of a confrere, M. Méout, who was the superior of the major seminary there. The bishop of Cahors gave it to the Daughters at the Maison-Mère.

The work pictures Jesus, almost life-size, with open arms, his head inclined and his eyes lowered as if he were speaking to someone who is imploring him. He is standing on a globe to signify that he is both its creator and its savior. His feet and hands reveal his wounds. His heart radiates light.

It is a remarkable image, particularly if one considers that it was created decades before Saint Margaret Mary's visions of the Sacred Heart. The heart painted by Louise is simpler than the one that Margaret Mary later popularized, without a flame, and with no crown of thorns. It is one of the first such representations of the heart of Jesus that we know of. Some feel the figure of Christ was painted by someone else (since the paintings of Louise that we possess are so small), and that Louise added the heart.

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<sup>64</sup> This is another related topic which cannot be treated here, but merits further research. In setting up the Confraternity of Charity at Châtillon-les-Dombes in November 1617, Vincent gave them the Lord of Charity as their patron: "Since, in all confraternities, the holy custom of the Church is to propose a patron, and since the works gain their value and dignity from the purpose for which they are performed, the Servants of the Poor will take for patron Our Lord Jesus and for its aim the accomplishment of His very ardent desire that Christians should practice among themselves the works of charity and mercy. This desire He makes clear to us in His own words: 'Be merciful as my Father is merciful,' and in these words: 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat... I was sick and you visited me... for what you have done to the least of those, you did to me.'" See Document 126, "Charity of Women (Châtillon-les-Dombes)," November-December 1617, *Ibid.*, 13b:9.



The “modern” emblem of the Congregation of the Mission.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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Similar images of the “Lord of Charity” can still be found today in Boulages,<sup>65</sup> Chavagnes, Paris, l’Huitre, St. Ouen, St. Germain en Laye, Toulouse and, most likely, in other places. All are similar to the medallion above and to the painting of the Lord of Charity on the staircase at the Motherhouse of the Daughters, except that a heart is not visible in the other images.<sup>66</sup>

#### **IV. The emblems<sup>67</sup> of the two Companies**

The emblems of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity both appear to derive from the Lord of Charity. Did Louise influence Vincent in the choice of this emblem for the Congregation?

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<sup>65</sup> The image in Boulages is interesting. Fernand Portal, in an article that appeared in *Petites Annales de St. Vincent de Paul*, 1ère Année (Juin 1900), N°6, pp. 173-174, describes it as follows: “Tableau conservé à l’église de Boulages, diocèse de Troyes. Notre-Seigneur porte sur la poitrine un cœur couronné d’épines et surmonté d’un jet de flammes. En haut, des anges déploient des banderoles sur lesquelles on lit, à droite: ‘Venez, les bien aimés de mon Père, posséder le royaume qui vous a été préparé dès le commencement du monde’; à gauche: ‘Pour ce que j’ay eu faim vous m’avez donné à manger, j’ay eu soif et vous m’avez donné à boire, j’ay été malade et vous m’avez visité.’ Au bas, à droite, un prêtre donne la communion à un mourant et plusieurs personnes sont à genoux auprès du lit; à gauche, deux groupes de Dames de la Charité servent des malades. Tout à fait au bas, bien en évidence: ‘La Charité de Jésus-Christ nous presse,’ et au-dessous: ‘Dieu est charité et qui demeure en charité demeure en Dieu et Dieu en lui.’ Ce tableau, peint par Duviert, est de 1666.” But contemporary photos of the image show no heart. Historian John E. Rybolt, C.M., who saw the image and photographed it, attests that no heart of Jesus was visible.

<sup>66</sup> Actually, Vincent and Louise, over the course of the years, gave many different types of images to the Daughters so that they might distribute them to the poor. They regarded this as an effective way of catechizing.

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed treatment of this topic, see John E. Rybolt, C.M., “The Emblem and Motto of the Congregation of the Mission,” *Vincentian Heritage* 22:2 (2001), 123-52. See <http://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol22/iss2>.





The emblem of the Daughters of Charity.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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While the Congregation had no official emblem in Vincent's time, various emblems appeared, many featuring the Lord of Charity. The words on those emblems varied. Today, the image of the Lord of Charity on the Congregation's emblem is surrounded by, "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me." The first known instance of an emblem in which the Lord of Charity and the now universal motto are combined dates from 1655, when Firmin Get, superior in Marseilles, wrote to Saint Vincent asking his approval for its use.<sup>68</sup> But Get's emblem was notably different from the modern version. He placed "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me" on a ribbon below the Lord of Charity. In any event, there was not much follow-up to Get's lead. The modern version of the emblem, in which the motto surrounds the image, dates from the nineteenth century.

In the Daughters' emblem, seen above, a burning heart is surmounted by the crucified Lord, and surrounded by "Charitas christi urget nos." It is clear that this emblem aims to signify that the heart of the crucified Lord is the font of the Company's works of love.

Below, the reader can see an emblem of the Congregation of the Mission, in color, based on the Lord of Charity,<sup>69</sup> and the emblem of the Daughters of Charity with the heart of Jesus Crucified.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See Letter 1872, "To Firmin Get, Superior, In Marseilles," 14 May 1655, CCD, 5:380n3.

<sup>69</sup> There are many other interesting topics that one might write about in relationship to the heart of Jesus and the Vincentian tradition; e.g., the image on the reverse side of the Miraculous Medal, images of Saint Vincent with a burning heart, etc. In order to keep this article within reasonable length, however, I must leave those to another day (and perhaps another author!).

<sup>70</sup> Much more could be said about Louise's devotion to the Crucified Lord, which, as is evident on the emblem, is related to her devotion to his heart. I have touched on this topic briefly in "The Cross in Vincentian Spirituality," which appears in my work *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (New York: New City Press, 1995) 30-51, available also at [http://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian\\_ebooks/2/#](http://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/2/#). In her will, Louise asked that a cross be placed at her burial place and that it would bear the inscription "Spes Unica," an allusion to a line from a famous sixth-century hymn, "Vexilla Regis Prodeunt" (*The Banners of the King Unfurl*), whose ninth stanza begins: "O Crux ave, spes unica" (*Hail, O Cross, our only hope*). See <http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Hymni/Vexilla.html> (accessed 29 July 2013).



Further examples of the emblems for both the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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## V. Vincent's and Louise's focus on the heart of Jesus — some implications for the spirituality of the Vincentian Family today

### 1. Focus on the heart of Jesus heightens our awareness of the limitless love of God

Some words are more than words. They are universal symbols that evoke feelings and transmit levels of meaning that go far beyond any definition found in a dictionary. German philosophers and theologians sometimes refer to them as *Urworte*.<sup>71</sup> Life, light, spirit, and a number of other words have a significance that runs much deeper than their literal sense; they come inextricably bundled together with a series of emotions.

*Heart* is one of these symbolic words. It means more than a muscle which pumps blood and which doctors can now transplant. We use *heart* in all sorts of ways: "He's all heart"; "Have a heart"; "The heart of the matter." But in its deepest sense, heart signifies the core of the human person. It refers to the inner wellspring of love. When we speak of the heart of Jesus, we are referring to the center of his person, where God himself is revealed as boundless love. In the heart of Jesus we experience the height and depth, the length and breadth of God. In the pierced heart of Jesus, from which, on the cross, blood and water flow out, we experience death and life, sorrow and joy, weeping and laughing, darkness and light.

Even here, our words fail. When I refer to "God's limitless love," it is not just that God *has* a love that knows no bounds. Rather, God *is* limitless love. The experience of that love

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<sup>71</sup> See Goethe's poem "Urworte. Orphisch," which lists five such words: Demon, Chance, Love, Necessity, and Hope. Karl Rahner, the great twentieth-century theologian, speaks of *Urworte* as "creative words," "living words in which the soft music of infinity plays," "primordial words in which a door is mysteriously opened to us into the unfathomable depths of true reality." *Paroles maternelles or paroles-de-l'origine (urworte)* is an essential term used by Rahner in "Prêtre et poète" ("Priest and Poet") in his, *Éléments de théologie spirituelle* (Paris: Desclee De Brouwer, 1964).

is central to all Christian spirituality.<sup>72</sup> In the New Testament, love is everything. Saint John puts it quite simply, “God is love.”<sup>73</sup>

The response which the God of love calls for is simple too. When asked what the greatest command is, Jesus responds without hesitation, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength; and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>74</sup> The Johannine tradition states, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>75</sup> In a summary statement, Paul says, “Owe no one anything except to love one another.”<sup>76</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., expressed the matter succinctly: “Christianity affirms that at the heart of reality is a Heart.”<sup>77</sup>

Devotion to the heart of Jesus helps us to plumb the mystery of God’s love for us. “The marvelous thing is not so much that we love God, but that God first loved us.”<sup>78</sup> God’s love saves us from our sin. It is liberating. It makes us whole. It drives us out to spread the same love with joy. This love has characteristics that the scriptures emphasize again and again. It is:

- freely bestowed; that is, it is pure gift, grace,
- suffering,<sup>79</sup>
- forgiving, and
- constant.

## 2. *Focus on the heart of Jesus summons us to learn to be gentle and humble*<sup>80</sup>

Jesus’ statement in Matthew 11:29 is clear and direct: “Learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart.” In our wounded human condition, being gentle and humble does not come easily. It is a learning process.

Vincent himself tells us that, when he was young, he was strong-willed and easily moved to anger. He also had a tendency to be moody for long, dark periods which, he admits, caused Madame de Gondi some pain at times. But, recognizing these traits

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<sup>72</sup> Theologian Karl Rahner addresses this theme frequently, and explicitly, within the context of devotion to the Sacred Heart. See “Behold this Heart,” *Theological Investigations* III, 321-330; “Some Theses for a Theology of Devotion of the Sacred Heart,” *Ibid.*, 331-352; “A Theology of Symbol,” *Theological Investigations* IV, 221-252; “Ignatian Spirituality and Devotion to the Heart of Jesus,” *Mission and Grace*, Cecily Hastings, trans., 3 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 3:176-210.

<sup>73</sup> 1 John 4:16.

<sup>74</sup> Luke 10:27.

<sup>75</sup> John 13:35.

<sup>76</sup> Romans 13:8.

<sup>77</sup> Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love* (1963; repr. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 97.

<sup>78</sup> John 13:35.

<sup>79</sup> Classical theology has consistently found it difficult to reconcile the revelation of God in Jesus as “suffering love” with its conviction that God, being perfect, cannot suffer.

<sup>80</sup> Elsewhere, I have written at length on gentleness and humility in the Vincentian tradition. See Robert P. Maloney, C.M., *The Way of St. Vincent de Paul* (New York: New City Press, 1992), 37-69; also, “A Further Look at Gentleness” in *Seasons in Spirituality: Reflections on Vincentian Spirituality in Today’s World* (New York: New City Press, 1998), 81-100.



within himself, “I addressed myself to God... to beg him earnestly to change this curt and forbidding disposition of mine for a meek and benign one. By the grace of Our Lord and with some effort on my part to repress the outbursts of passion, I was able to get rid of my black disposition.”<sup>81</sup> Saint Vincent speaks with considerable modesty here.

Abelly, his first biographer, attests that Vincent had an enormous admiration for Francis de Sales, whom he considered the gentlest person he had ever known; and that Vincent profited so well from the example of the Bishop of Geneva that he acquired a remarkable gentleness and affability, and had a wonderful way of speaking and relating with all different kinds of persons.<sup>82</sup> In fact, he learned the lesson of gentleness so well that he was often compared with Saint Francis de Sales. Collet observes that his gentleness and affability became proverbial, and that people said the same things about him that he himself said about Francis.<sup>83</sup>

Humility stands near the top, and sometimes at the very top, of the list of virtues Vincent recommends to his followers. It is “...the basis of all holiness in the Gospels,” he wrote, “and a bond of the entire spiritual life. If a person has this humility everything good will come along with it. If he does not have it, he will lose any good he may have and will always be anxious and worried.”<sup>84</sup>

Few New Testament imperatives are as clear as Jesus’ call to, “Learn from me that I am gentle and humble of heart.” Vincent saw gentleness and humility as indispensable missionary virtues, as inseparable as twin sisters.<sup>85</sup>

### *3. Focus on the heart of Jesus draws us to be vulnerable*

The Latin word *vulnus* means *wound*. The humble know their woundedness. In fact, it is precisely the vulnerable who are capable of letting God’s saving love, and the love of others, enter in. Consciousness of our own sinfulness and limitations, a fundamental aspect of humility, is basic to salvation. It is only when we recognize our woundedness, and humbly come to the Lord, that we can be healed. In “The Ballad of Reading Gaol,” Oscar Wilde, the Irish playwright and poet writes:

How else but through a broken heart  
May Lord Christ enter in?<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul: Founder and First Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission*, 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1993), 3:163. Hereinafter cited as *Abelly*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:165.

<sup>83</sup> See Pierre Collet, *La Vie de St. Vincent de Paul* (Nancy: A. Leseure, 1748), Tome I, book 2, 99, online at [http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=collet\\_mfr](http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=collet_mfr) (accessed 22 July 2013).

<sup>84</sup> *Constitutions and Statutes*, “Common Rules, II, 7,” 111.

<sup>85</sup> Conference 202, “Gentleness (Common Rules, Chap. II, Art. 6),” 28 March 1659, CCD, 12:152.

<sup>86</sup> See, [http://emotionalliteracyeducation.com/classic\\_books\\_online/rgaol10.htm](http://emotionalliteracyeducation.com/classic_books_online/rgaol10.htm) (accessed 25 July 2013).

Wilde, who at this stage in his life was a broken man writing from exile in France, saw that wounded hearts have an opening through which Christ can enter. He perceived, from experience, that a sense of our own weakness opens us to our fellow men and women so that we respond to them with compassion.

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac emphasized throughout their lives how indispensable recognition of our dependence on God, and on others, is for those called to serve the poor. Without a vulnerable heart, we remain untouched by the poor. Our love is neither affective nor effective. In his book *The Wounded Healer*, written more than three decades ago and which remains popular to this day, Henri Nouwen emphasized that it is only when we are vulnerable that we can be effective healers of others. A Daily Meditation offered by the Henri Nouwen Society recounted these words of his:

Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not “How can we hide our wounds?” so we don’t have to be embarrassed, but “How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?” When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.

Jesus is God’s wounded healer: through his wounds we are healed. Jesus’ suffering and death brought joy and life. His humiliation brought glory; his rejection brought a community of love. As followers of Jesus we can also allow our wounds to bring healing to others.<sup>87</sup>

In the end, when we recognize our woundedness and weakness, Vincent urges us to run to the Lord with “exuberant trust.”<sup>88</sup>

#### *4. Focus on the heart of Jesus offers us an often unused road toward wisdom and discernment*

There is a wisdom which goes beyond human knowledge and that flows from the heart. In the Christian tradition, truth and love are inseparable,<sup>89</sup> though philosophers and theologians have continually wrestled with the relationship between the mind and heart. Growing in love involves penetrating to the truth of the beloved. We come to understand those we love, not just on the surface but in their depth. Likewise, growing in truth involves moving toward deeper communion, overcoming differences, “looking for the larger truth that embraces my little truth and that of the other.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “The Wounded Healer,” Daily Meditations series, 8 July 2012, Henri Nouwen Society, available from <http://www.henrinouwen.org>. See also: Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday, 1979); and, *Bread for the Journey* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997).

<sup>88</sup> Letter 1020, “To Charles Nacquart, in Richelieu,” 22 March 1648, CCD, 3:279.

<sup>89</sup> Eph 4:15; cf. Col 3:14, 1 Cor 13:6.

<sup>90</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, *I Call You Friends* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 80.

There is a delicate interplay between mind and heart in the search for truth. For those with a highly intellectual formation, Pascal's corrective can be very helpful: "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things."<sup>91</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry expresses the same conviction: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."<sup>92</sup>

Some, by penetrating to the heart of God, as revealed in Jesus, and by penetrating to the heart of the poor through personal contact, acquire a wisdom that the learned often lack. They do not merely know about God; rather, they know God because, as Vincent and Louise both said, God speaks "heart to heart" with them. They also know the poor, because their love reaches into the heart of the marginalized and abandoned and evokes a resonant response.

In a moving conference, Vincent assures the Daughters of Charity that if they come humbly before the Lord, he will speak with them "heart to heart."<sup>93</sup> He tells them, "Once a person has reached this point, God takes pleasure in that soul, especially since He sees in her the features of His divine perfections, His love, His goodness, and His wisdom, which He has implanted in her by His grace."<sup>94</sup> He assures them, "Here's what will happen, Sisters: all your actions, all your words, and everything else you do will be pleasing in the eyes of God, and people will see the Daughters of Charity growing in virtue from day to day."<sup>95</sup>

We have all known learned people who are not at all wise. From time-to-time we also meet people who have a wisdom that clearly flows from their union with God as revealed in Christ. They have penetrated God's heart, and absorbed "wisdom from above."<sup>96</sup> To use a phrase from the prayer to the Holy Spirit that many in the Vincentian Family say daily, wisdom is *recta sapere*, rendered in English rather aptly as "a sense of the true and a taste for the good."

Thomas Merton sums this up in his brief poem, "Wisdom":

I studied it and it taught me nothing.

I learned it and soon forgot everything else:

Having forgotten, I was burdened with knowledge--

The insupportable knowledge of nothing.

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<sup>91</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, W.F. Trotter, trans. (1670), paragraph 277, online at <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/pascal/pensees-a.html#SECTION%20IV> (accessed 23 July 2013).

<sup>92</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince* (Gaillimard, 1943), chapter 21.

<sup>93</sup> Conference 21, "Observance of the Rule," Continuation of the Conference of 22 January 1645, *CCD*, 9:176.

<sup>94</sup> Conference 99, "Fidelity to the Rules (Common Rules, Art. 43)," 21 July 1658, *Ibid.*, 10:436.

<sup>95</sup> Conference 105, "Order of Day (Arts. 1-7)," 17 November 1658, *Ibid.*, 10:481.

<sup>96</sup> James 3:17; cf. Proverbs 2:10 and 14:33.



How sweet my life would be, if I were wise!  
Wisdom is well known  
When it is no longer seen or thought of.  
Only then is understanding bearable.<sup>97</sup>

5. *Focus on the heart of Jesus moves us to have a love that is expansive (mission) and that is both affective and effective (charité)*

Love is a fire. It is a flame, Saint Vincent said. The expansive love of Jesus' heart, his zeal, mirrored in our hearts, is a love that burns with compassion for those around us and drives us out to serve them. It is warm, but also concrete and effective, as the Vincentian tradition reminds us again and again. When it burns within us, people see in us the reflection of the heart of Jesus.

It is a mistake to think this love is always serene and peaceful. Dorothy Day, quoting Dostoevsky, reminds us: "Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams."<sup>98</sup> It can mean dying in countless everyday ways. It can mean pouring out one's blood, as did the pierced heart of Jesus on the cross. But it is the only thing worthwhile. It lasts, as Paul attests.<sup>99</sup>

Devotion to the heart of Jesus has its historical roots in a profound experience of God's love as revealed in Christ. It is a way in which people have attempted to express God's self-revelation to them. They experience that, in the person of Jesus, they have met God, who is love, and that, in going to the very depths of Jesus' person, to his heart, they have found forgiving, healing, saving love.

What we call "Devotion to the Sacred Heart" is a popular devotion, with its own recommended set of prayers and practices.<sup>100</sup> It began with John Eudes and Margaret Mary Alacoque, and is a specific instance of how focus on Jesus' heart came to be concretized over a long period in history. But a simple focus on the heart of Jesus, like that found in the beliefs of Vincent and Louise, has roots that are basic to Christian spirituality. It draws us to meditate often on God's deep personal love for us. Here, there is no question of a piety that today we call "intimism," a type of spirituality that is overly focused on oneself without any social dimension. Vincent and Louise wanted to avoid that type of piety completely.

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<sup>97</sup> See [http://www.lorenwebster.net/In\\_a\\_Dark\\_Time/2004/04/10/the-selected-poems-of-thomas-merton/](http://www.lorenwebster.net/In_a_Dark_Time/2004/04/10/the-selected-poems-of-thomas-merton/) (accessed 23 July 2013).

<sup>98</sup> Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage – October/November 1976," *The Catholic Worker* (Oct.-Nov. 1976), 1, 4, 7, online at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=574> (accessed 23 July 2013).

<sup>99</sup> 1 Cor. 13:13.

<sup>100</sup> At the time of the French Revolution, particularly in the Vendée, and again in the 1870s, devotion to the Sacred Heart gathered strong political overtones and became an emblem of the counter-revolutionary fervor of some Catholics. It is one of the reasons why the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur in Paris was initially poorly received by a number of Parisians. See Jonas, *Cult*, 122-197. Interestingly, the Basilica has a chapel dedicated to Saint Vincent in which there is a mosaic which highlights Saint Louise's devotion to the heart of Jesus. It depicts the Lord of Charity that now hangs at the Maison-Mère of the Daughters. There are various references in the *Annales* to the devotion that Fr. Étienne, Fr. Fiat, and Fr. Villette had to the Sacred Heart. See, for several examples, *Annales* 81 (1916), 600; *Annales* 98 (1933), 685. See also the text of the "Acte d'amende honorable de la consécration au Sacré-Coeur de Jésus, à réciter, tous les ans, le jour de sa fête, par les membres de la Congrégation de la Mission," in the circular letter of Fr. Fiat on 2 February 1881.

Rather, the accent here is on what is central to the Good News: God, who reveals himself in Jesus, loves us deeply. The Scriptures are filled with images to express this. God holds us in the palm of his hand. He walks with us on the journey. He reveals himself to us face-to-face. He forgives us our sins. He lives with us. He dies for us.

*Mission et Charité* characterize the family to which Vincent and Louise gave birth. The two founders' focus on the heart of Jesus, and the extraordinary impact of Jesus' heart on their own hearts, moved them toward missionary zeal and toward affective and effective charity.





The miniature painted by Louise de Marillac depicting the Good Shepherd surrounded by his sheep. Original is housed at the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, Paris.

*Courtesy of the author*







The front and back sides of the small medallion painted by Louise de Marillac.

*Courtesy of the author*



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The "Lord of Charity" painted by Louise de Marillac; discovered in Cahors, France, in 1891.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*





The "modern" emblem of the Congregation of the Mission.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*







The emblem of the Daughters of Charity.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*







Further examples of the emblems for both the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



# Conversion and Discernment According to Vincent de Paul

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EDWARD R. UDOVIC, C.M., PH.D.

*“Oh Monsieur, what a happiness to will nothing but what God wills, to do nothing but what is in accord with the occasion Providence presents, and to have nothing but what God in His Providence has given us.” \**

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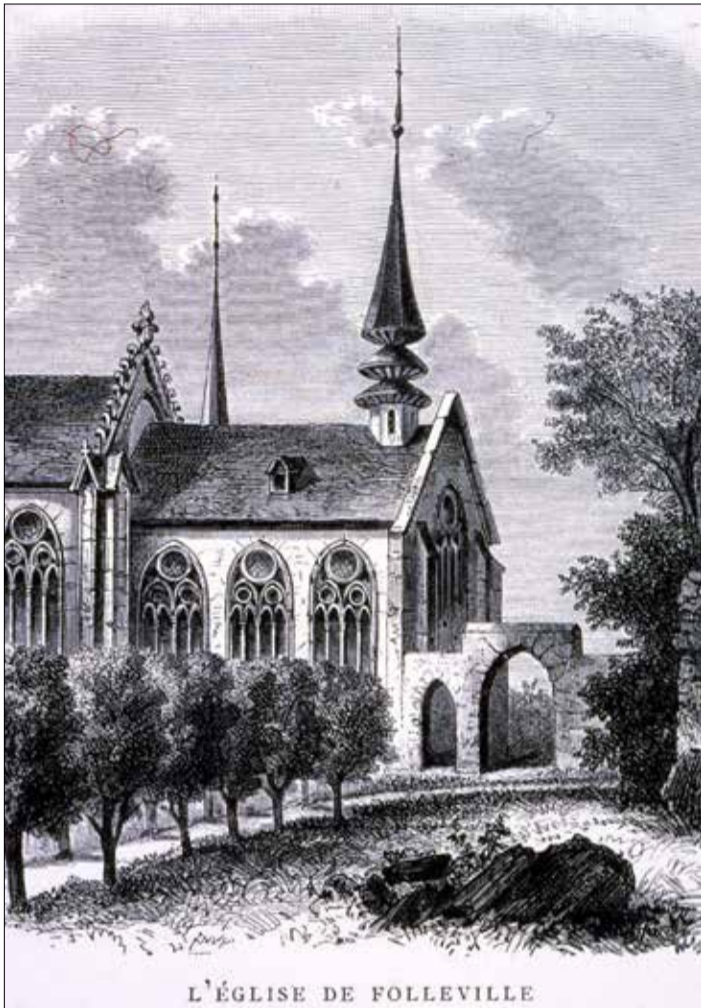
\* *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. by Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., et al, 1-13a & 13b (New York: New City Press, 1985-2010), 3:193. Hereafter cited as CCD.

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The L'Église Saint-Jacques-le-Majeur-et-Saint-Jean-Baptiste, or Church of Folleville.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



## Introduction

**F**or Vincent de Paul the life-long conversion required by a vocation<sup>1</sup> to Christian discipleship begins with the prayerful discernment of God's will in one's day-to-day life, the free decision to accept that will in faith and love and then, to the best of one's ability, living that faith in action and love<sup>2</sup> relying always on God's grace. Thus conversion and discernment are two sides of the one coin of the vocation of discipleship. This article will examine the ways in which Vincent de Paul reflected with, and for, his followers on the spiritual foundations of their vocation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1617, after the completion of the Christmas season, Vincent de Paul traveled with Madame de Gondi and her retinue to visit the family's estates northwest of Paris in the province of Picardy. Their destination was the small village of Folleville where the Gondi chateau, with its adjacent parish church and family funerary chapel were located. Françoise-Marguerite de Silly<sup>4</sup> had brought these ancestral lands to her marriage as part of her dowry when she married Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi in June 1604.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to Vincent: "a vocation is a call from God to do something." *Ibid.*, 9:279.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ibid.*, 9:354.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief review of Vincent de Paul's Christology see, Robert P. Maloney, C.M., *The Way of Vincent de Paul. A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor* (Brooklyn, New City Press, 1992), 19-36. Hereafter cited as *Maloney*.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief biographical sketch of Madame de Gondi, see *CCD*, 1:19.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief biographical sketch of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, see *Ibid.*, 1:18.

Madame de Gondi was a noble woman of intelligence, determination, and piety. She and Vincent de Paul had witnessed the consequences of the spiritual abandonment suffered by the poor people of the countryside.<sup>6</sup> The Gondi estates, after all, were spread across many provinces of the kingdom. Since the spiritual welfare of thousands of peasants was part of her family's responsibility before God, and since they were a leading *dévot* family which took their religious responsibilities seriously,<sup>7</sup> it seems in hindsight to have been inevitable that at some point these experiences and this faith would meet at some providential tipping point.

This tipping point came famously through the incident, sometime that January, of Monsieur Vincent hearing the death-bed confession of an elderly peasant in the town of Gannes near Folleville.<sup>8</sup> This man later told Madame de Gondi of the great peace that had descended upon his soul after having had the opportunity to make a general confession of his life to Monsieur Vincent.

Madame de Gondi also had her own troubling experience of encountering a confessor so ignorant that he did not even know the Latin formula of absolution.<sup>9</sup> She realized that even as a noble woman she could not be guaranteed access to the spiritual and sacramental ministrations of the Church, upon which she believed her salvation depended. So, at this moment of insight she turned to her trusted chaplain and spiritual director and asked what on the surface might have seemed an impulsive and even innocuous question: "What must be done?"<sup>10</sup> This question was far from being impulsive, however, and it certainly was not innocuous. From the perspectives of both Madame de Gondi's and Monsieur Vincent's shared faith, asking this question at that precise moment was providential and was the result of a direct "inspiration" from God.<sup>11</sup> Vincent noted, "It's characteristic of God always to prompt us to do what is good.... All the good we do is done by inspiration.... No one is saved except by inspiration and the good use we make of it."<sup>12</sup>

This question would, as a matter of fact, become *the* question that Vincent would spend the rest of his life striving to answer, beginning with the first sermon (probably given within the context of a parish mission) that he preached at Madame de Gondi's request in the church of Saint Jacques at Folleville on the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul Wednesday, 25 January 1617. It would also, in time, become *the* question for Louise de Marillac.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be remembered that in this era the vast majority of France's population lived in the countryside.

<sup>7</sup> See Louis Abelly, *Life of the Venerable Servant of God: Vincent de Paul*, trans. by William Quinn, F.S.C., and ed. by John E. Rybolt, C.M., 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1987), 1:59. Hereafter, *Abelly*.

<sup>8</sup> *CCD*, 11:2-4. See also *Abelly*, 1:59-62.

<sup>9</sup> *CCD*, 11:162-163.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:3.

<sup>11</sup> According to Vincent angels are the agents of God's inspiration: "The angels take care of us in this latter way; they inspire us gently and almost imperceptibly to do good, and then leave us full liberty to do it or not." *Ibid.*, 7:634.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:8.

“What must be done?” Implicit in this question are the underlying questions asked and answered in the imperative as questions of faith and conscience: “What *must* I do?” “What *must* you do?” “What *must* we do?”

Q: “What must be done?”<sup>13</sup>

A: “God’s will must be done in us, and in all that concern us.”

Vincent de Paul had only one answer to the question of “What must be done?” His “greatest desire”<sup>14</sup> was always that “[God’s] will [must] be done in us and in all that concerns us.”<sup>15</sup> Or, as he also said, “Let us pray that you and I may always have one and the same will and non-will with Him, and in Him.”<sup>16</sup> Or, even further, “I am sure that you wish and do not wish what God wishes and does not wish, and that you are disposed to want and not want only... what God seems to want and not want.”<sup>17</sup> Finally, Vincent imparted, “You have acted according to the good pleasure of God and our own maxim in letting God’s Providence act, without contributing anything to it but your own acquiescence.”<sup>18</sup>

This salvific will<sup>19</sup> was revealed, as God promised, in the person of the Savior; his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Word made flesh. God’s sovereign will must be done in our lives according to the example of how Christ obediently fulfilled that same will in his life “actively and passively by doing and not doing”<sup>20</sup> and through his prayer of “your will be done”<sup>21</sup> finally “becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.”<sup>22</sup>

Vincent reminded his followers, “You are God’s and God is yours.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, “God has great plans for you, directed toward helping you do what Jesus Christ did when He was on earth.”<sup>24</sup> For “the more we are like Our Lord, stripped of everything, the more we will share in His Spirit. The more we seek, like Him, the Kingdom of God His Father and to establish it in ourselves and in others, the more will the necessities of life be given us.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, he said, “Rest assured that the maxims of Jesus Christ and the examples of his

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of *the Vincentian Question* see: Edward R. Udovic, C.M., “Podcast: ‘The Vincentian Question.’” Office of Mission and Values, DePaul University (April 2007). Accessed online at: <http://smedia.depaul.edu/bcicirel/podcasts/vquestion.mp3>.

<sup>14</sup> *CCD*, 1:579.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:297.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:579.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:54.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:12.

<sup>19</sup> Vincent describes God’s salvific will in this way: “The salvation of souls is so dear to Him that He takes all the care needed to put them on the easiest path to arrive on the road to heaven.” *Ibid.*, 9:279.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:506.

<sup>21</sup> Philippians 2:8.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 6:10, 26:42.

<sup>23</sup> *CCD*, 8:163.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:615.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:175.



life (especially his “hidden life”<sup>26</sup>) are not misleading; they produce their fruits in due time. Anything not in conformity with them is vain and everything turns out badly for one who acts according to the contrary maxims. Such is my belief and such is my experience.”<sup>27</sup>

The Christ who captured the heart of Vincent de Paul, who sealed his conversion, and who guided all his discernment and actions was the Christ revealed in Scripture as the Evangelizer of the Poor and the source and model of all Charity.<sup>28</sup> Therefore for Vincent de Paul, God’s will must be done in imitation of how Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor fulfilled it in word and deed: proclaiming the kingdom of God by announcing the good news of salvation to the poor with “the intention of the pure glory of God.”<sup>29</sup>

God continues the unfolding of the “great hidden treasures”<sup>30</sup> of his salvific will in history through the agency of the Holy Spirit, working through the visible Church as the Body of Christ. This revelation takes place through the unfurling of a loving plan<sup>31</sup> that embraces every person, foreseeing their options and choices moment-by-moment, decision-by-decision, for all ages until the end of time. At any given moment, this “adorable”<sup>32</sup> and mysterious plan<sup>33</sup> is revealed through the prophetic “signs of the time,”<sup>34</sup> and unfolds inexorably through the relationships, events, and communities of one’s life and one’s world.

Vincent believed “Grace has its moments,”<sup>35</sup> and “that the things of God come about by themselves and that wisdom consists in following Providence step-by-step.”<sup>36</sup> So he was careful always to point out what Christians so often seem to forget, “God’s works are not governed according to our views and wishes.”<sup>37</sup> However, he also taught that God does offer each human being, and in particular each Christian, the unmerited, unconditional

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:315. See also: 1:54, 7:532.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:316.

<sup>28</sup> Luke 4:18, referencing Isaiah 61:1-2. See also, Luke 7:21-22.

<sup>29</sup> *CCD*, 3:47.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:60.

<sup>31</sup> Vincent notes, “Heaven and earth look with pleasure on the happy lot that has fallen to you of honoring by your duty that incomprehensible charity by which Our Lord came down upon earth to come to aid and assist us in our slavery.” *Ibid.*, 4:361.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:175.

<sup>33</sup> See *Ibid.*, 9:323.

<sup>34</sup> The phrase made popular by Pope John XXIII in his 1961 Apostolic Constitution, *Humanæ salutis*, convoking the Second Vatican Council.

<sup>35</sup> *CCD*, 2:499.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:521.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:531.



An engraved contemporary portrait of Madame de Gondy.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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gift of the “sufficient graces,”<sup>38</sup> “special graces,”<sup>39</sup> and “appropriate graces”<sup>40</sup> that he/she might need at any given moment to discern and follow his providential plan. In the final analysis, “the grace of perseverance is the greatest grace of all; it crowns all others.”<sup>41</sup>

Reflecting on this outpouring of God’s assistance Vincent noted: “Since, then all these graces have been prepared for you, and our good God, who grants them, desires nothing so much as to lavish them on those who truly want to make use of them, what is there to prevent you from being filled with them, destroying by their power all that remains of the old man in you....?”<sup>42</sup>

Vincent’s own answers to this question, and his personal sanctity, emerged gradually through prayerful discernment carried out through the prisms of his faith and his experience. In this case, the answers he discerned were monumental in scale and of lasting importance. For the sake of the evangelization and salvation of the poor it was God’s will that the Church of France must be reformed as envisioned by the Council of Trent: bishop-by-bishop, diocese-by-diocese, parish-by-parish, and priest-by-priest. Further, it was God’s will that our brothers and sisters in Christ who are poor and suffering must everywhere

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13a:167.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:159.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:143.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:292-293.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:462.

and always be recognized as “our lords and masters”<sup>43</sup> — loved, and effectively served with the proverbial “strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.”<sup>44</sup> After all, as Vincent said, in the end, “doing good isn’t everything; it must be done well.”<sup>45</sup>

These answers in turn begged the further question of discernment: “What are the means that God is revealing as those destined to best fulfill and sustain these missions?”<sup>46</sup> Over time, Vincent de Paul’s discernment of God’s answers to these questions led directly to the foundation between 1617 and 1633 of the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, the Ladies of Charity, and the Daughters of Charity. In the case of discernment with respect to the foundation of the Daughters of Charity, Monsieur Vincent’s was a shared one with Louise de Marillac, Mademoiselle Le Gras.

Successively, these answers led to more questions of what I would call foundational discernment: What are the virtues<sup>47</sup> and rules that God is revealing as those best designed to guide the members of these groups to fulfill and sustain their missions over time? This further discernment led Vincent and Louise to a decades-long effort, culminating in the various Rules that are their enduring spiritual legacy to their communities, the Church, and the poor.<sup>48</sup>

Until the end of his life, when questioned about the origins of his great works, Vincent de Paul without fail gave full credit to Madame de Gondi for having first had the faith, inspiration, and courage to ask this question, and the determination to find an answer for it.<sup>49</sup> Almost four centuries later the question “What must be done?” remains *the* inescapable question which these same Vincentian communities, and the wider international Vincentian Family, are still trying to answer with fidelity.

If this question already has its definitive answer in our shared baptismal commitments as Christ’s disciples to follow God’s will “in us and in all that concerns us,” then we are also asked to consider: What must “I,” “You,” and “We” do as members of the Vincentian family to discern God’s will being revealed through his providential plan. How, when, and where are we today called by justice and empowered by charity to serve our brothers and sisters who are poor?<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 10:215.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:32.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:43.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, *Ibid.*, 12:122.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of Vincentian virtues, see *Maloney*, 37-69. See also, Edward R. Udovic, C.M., “Podcast: Vincent’s Values: A spiritual perspective,” Office of Mission and Values, DePaul University (November 2006). Accessed online at: [http://smedia.depaul.edu/bcicirel/podcasts/vincent\\_values.mp3](http://smedia.depaul.edu/bcicirel/podcasts/vincent_values.mp3).

<sup>48</sup> See *CCD*, 13a and 13b for the texts of these rules.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:3, n.2; See also *Ibid.*, 11:110.

<sup>50</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2:68.



*The pre-requisite for discernment achieved through conversion:  
unrestricted readiness: ready for anything in God's plan.*

According to Vincent de Paul, "We mustn't trust ourselves because we're constantly changing; that's why we need to reflect often on ourselves in order to make amends for the failings our corrupt nature causes us to commit. Just as a clock has to be wound every day to rectify any loss of time, we must always start over in practicing mortification of our passions because we always need to be working on ourselves from one minute to the next."<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the pre-requisite to being able to discern God's will at any given moment, in answer to *the* Vincentian question, is the adoption of a state of self-emptying, "holy indifference."<sup>52</sup> "We must give ourselves to God in all respects."<sup>53</sup> The "unreserved gift of yourself"<sup>54</sup> requires that we become "ready for anything and become completely detached from ourselves."<sup>55</sup> It also means, as Vincent noted, praying with "a spirit of resignation"<sup>56</sup> that "God grant that we may receive whatever happens with one and the same heart! I mean accepting the good and the bad indifferently. He will doubtless do so if we reduce our own desires and ways of action to nothing in His presence, allowing ourselves to be governed by His wisdom in the belief that whatever happens is best for us, even though it may be contrary to our feelings."<sup>57</sup> Vincent also observed, "...we have only to commend [our needs] to His Providence, be faithful to our obligations, and be convinced that sooner or later God will provide what He knows we need for His plan for us. What more do we have to do?"<sup>58</sup>

According to Vincent, this "disposition"<sup>59</sup> "is an anticipated Paradise beginning in this life."<sup>60</sup> It can only be achieved with great "perseverance"<sup>61</sup> because it requires that each person have knowledge of "the anatomy of human will,"<sup>62</sup> and in "awe and humility"<sup>63</sup> learn to "mistrust"<sup>64</sup> themselves and thereby abandon human nature's "own ways of acting."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:524.

<sup>52</sup> For example: *Ibid.*, 1:112.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:282.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:348.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:282.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:614.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:292.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:560.

<sup>59</sup> For example, *Ibid.*, 1:36.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:579.

<sup>61</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 2:146.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:55.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:540.

<sup>64</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 1:150.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:515.

Each person must “[be] truly convinced that [we] are capable only of spoiling everything”<sup>66</sup> and must choose to “sacrifice”<sup>67</sup> the “obstacles”<sup>68</sup> of our own cherished opinions, comfort, ideas, desires, preferences, ideologies, assumptions, prejudices, time frames, plans, and “self-will” (according to Vincent “the submission of our senses and our reason.”)<sup>69</sup>

Only a resigned soul “stripped of everything”<sup>70</sup> can “be on guard”<sup>71</sup> against “a thousand outbursts”<sup>72</sup> of self-will, or of “anticipating”<sup>73</sup> providence, and be protected from the “temptations”<sup>74</sup> and “illusions”<sup>75</sup> that our “self-sufficiency”<sup>76</sup> and “rebellious”<sup>77</sup> “pride”<sup>78</sup> inevitably create to try to frustrate the plans of Divine Providence. In Vincent’s words, this would “be a crime for the children of Providence.”<sup>79</sup>

Vincent acknowledged that the “holy resolutions”<sup>80</sup> to be “stripped of everything,”<sup>81</sup> as described above, would always be “repugnant to [human] nature”<sup>82</sup> since they lay out such “a narrow, rough path.”<sup>83</sup> This experience does after all represent the challenge at the heart of religious conversion: “that we carry our cross daily,”<sup>84</sup> and “be happy at the foot of the Cross.”<sup>85</sup> He observed, “We must act against what is painful and either break our heart or soften it to get it ready for anything.”<sup>86</sup> This conversion, “the edifice of our perfection,”<sup>87</sup> is thus in its essence the movement from restricted (conditional) to unrestricted (unconditional) readiness to do God’s will. “Just let Him do His Will in you... and await it in all your exercises. All you need to do is to devote yourself entirely to God.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:389. Vincent went so far as to say, “Alas, if we were truly humble, every one of us would consider ourselves worse than the devil. This is no exaggeration, for we should really do this because, if he weren’t hardened in his sin and were to receive even the least of the graces we have been given, he’d make better use of them than we do.” *Ibid.*, 10:297.

<sup>67</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 4:238.

<sup>68</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 5:84.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:579.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:175.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:278.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:277.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:499.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:615.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:108.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:526.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:473.

<sup>78</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 1:526.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:290.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:615.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:175.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:213.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:181.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:171.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:155.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:579.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:525.

Oh! How little it takes to be very holy: to do the will of God in all things<sup>88</sup> and “to put our feet only in the place It has marked out for us.”<sup>89</sup> Or as Vincent also said, “Indeed, the great secret of the spiritual life is to abandon all that we love to Him by abandoning ourselves to all that He wishes, with perfect confidence that everything will turn out for the best. That is why it has been said that all things will turn to good for those who serve God. Let us serve Him then... but let us serve Him as He wishes, and let us allow Him to act.”<sup>90</sup>

Vincent went on to note, “This mistrust of your own strength must be the basis for the trust you should have in God.”<sup>91</sup> The development of a sense of self-mistrust (the definition of humility) only succeeds “in proportion”<sup>92</sup> to the degree to which a person instead places their “exuberant trust”<sup>93</sup> and “redoubles [their] confidence”<sup>94</sup> in God’s “unrivalled love” for us.<sup>95</sup> After all “we belong to Him,”<sup>96</sup> who “is all good and all wise.”<sup>97</sup>

Vincent’s advice was simple: seek “a total dependence on God”<sup>98</sup> and “place all your trust” in Him.<sup>99</sup> “Entrust yourselves to God, call upon Him, and rest assured that He will be your strength, your consolation, and, one day, the glory of your souls.”<sup>100</sup> “Put your trust in Him, I beg you, and your heart’s desire will be fulfilled.”<sup>101</sup> Vincent also advised, “consider Our Lord close by you and within you, ready to put His hand to the work as soon as you call upon Him for help, and you will see that all will go well.”<sup>102</sup>

In the end, “if you want to have peace of heart and a thousand blessings from God, do not listen any longer either to your own judgment or will. You have already made a sacrifice of them to God; be very careful not to take back the use of them. Allow yourself to be guided, and rest assured that God will be the one who guides you; but where? To the freedom of his children, to a superabundance of consolations, to great progress in virtue, and to your eternal happiness.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:47.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:499.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:298.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:143.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:136.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:279.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:206.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:200.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:509.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:113.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:387.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 13b:326.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:169.

<sup>101</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 1:84.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:143.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:589-590.





St. Jane de Chantal, heart and crucifix in her hands.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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Louise de Marillac described this state of holy indifference when she prayed, “No desires — no resolutions. The grace of my God will accomplish whatever He pleases in me.”<sup>104</sup> Or as Jane Frances de Chantal also once wrote to Vincent de Paul: “It seems to me that I am simply awaiting what God will be pleased to do with me. I have no desires nor plans. Nothing is keeping me from allowing God to act.... I have neither opinion nor feeling with regard to the future, but, at present, I am doing what I think it is necessary to do, without thinking any further.”<sup>105</sup>

For Vincent de Paul the “infallible”<sup>106</sup> signs of readiness for authentic discernment (“this good disposition”)<sup>107</sup> are a sense of abiding cheerfulness,<sup>108</sup> calmness, and “peace of heart”<sup>109</sup> — “So what remains for you except to be at peace?”<sup>110</sup> Vincent advised Louise de Marillac “to try to live content among your reasons for discontent.... That is your center and what He asks of you for the present, and for the future, forever.”<sup>111</sup> To achieve such calmness and harmony was to “honor Our Lord’s peace of soul.”<sup>112</sup> He further remarked,

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<sup>104</sup> *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*, Louise Sullivan, D.C., ed. and trans., from original French edition *Sainte Louise de Marillac: écrits spirituels* (Brooklyn, New York: New City Press, 1991), 717.

<sup>105</sup> *CCD*, 1:32.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:316.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:61.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:145.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:589.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:207.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:54.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:109.

“Is it not enough for God that your heart is honoring the tranquility of Our Lord’s? Then it will be fit and ready to serve Him. The kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit; He will reign in you if your heart is at peace. So, be at peace, Mademoiselle.”<sup>113</sup>

By contrast, Vincent understood the warning signs of an “unsettled state” that indicate one is not ready for, or not engaged in, authentic discernment.<sup>114</sup> These are the very human experiences of “ill-regulated passion.”<sup>115</sup> Feeling hurried, stressed, over-eager, troubled, fearful, bitter, worried, upset, jealous, resentful, or anxious at the opportunities and challenges we face trying to answer the question: “What must be done?” He stated, again to Louise, “Yes, you will tell me, but it is on account of God that I am worried. It is no longer because of God that you are worried if you are troubled because of serving Him.”<sup>116</sup> Or, as he wrote to Brother Pierre Leclerc, “I feel that your desire does not come from God because it is too vehement. Those given by God are gentle and peaceful; they in no way trouble the mind as yours does, causing you anxiety.”<sup>117</sup> From this place of self-forgetful patience, calmness, peace, and quiet only one thing further remains “to seek enlightenment”:<sup>118</sup> “It now remains for you... to raise your heart to God and to listen to what He will say to you on this matter.”<sup>119</sup>

*Why conversion and discernment are so difficult:*

*“the devil butts in, doing his utmost to dissuade us...”<sup>120</sup>*

According to Vincent de Paul’s way of thinking, “rarely is any good done without difficulty.”<sup>121</sup> The inevitable struggles and constant difficulties experienced in reaching and maintaining a state of unrestricted readiness to discern and do God’s will were to be attributed to “the temptations of the world and the flesh.... [and] the devil.”<sup>122</sup> If Monsieur Vincent possessed a keen awareness of the presence and power of God he had an equally keen awareness of the competing presence and power “of the devil, our enemy and the father of discord.”<sup>123</sup>

Vincent told the Daughters of Charity, “Now, a person who loves obedience and who breaks her own will shows that she has the Spirit of Our Lord. If you want to know whether a Sister of Charity has the spirit of the new Adam, see if she’s really obedient, for

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:111.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:434.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:143.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:59.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:143.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:212.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:623.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:524.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:361.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:19.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:100.

that's a sure sign. But if she loves to do her own will in all her actions, that's the sign of the spirit of the old Adam — or rather the sign of the spirit of the devil. All we need is to be really convinced of this truth, and we'll never do anything by this cursed, diabolical spirit, which is nothing other than self-will."<sup>124</sup> He also went so far as to say "there would be no demon, no hell, if there were no self-will."<sup>125</sup>

The devil, "the prince of demons"<sup>126</sup> according to Vincent, "is a roaring lion... (who never sleeps<sup>127</sup>) ...[and is] always prowling around seeking to devour us, he will not fail to attack you and your good resolution to belong entirely to God."<sup>128</sup> Further, the "evil spirit"<sup>129</sup> "is "clever and cunning,"<sup>130</sup> "shrewd"<sup>131</sup> and "subtle."<sup>132</sup> "Seducing us"<sup>133</sup> he uses his "ruses,"<sup>134</sup> "snares,"<sup>135</sup> "schemes,"<sup>136</sup> "wiles,"<sup>137</sup> and "tricks,"<sup>138</sup> at times even to transform himself into "an angel of light"<sup>139</sup> who can "urge us to do good in order to lead us to something evil."<sup>140</sup> In a marvelous turn of phrase, Vincent notes, "that's what the devil does to tempt you. He proposes something as very good and useful; he adds some sauce to make it tasty."<sup>141</sup>

Vincent specifically warned his followers of the dangerous temptation to be "over-zealous"<sup>142</sup> and to "seek [ever] greater perfection." He advised, "be careful not to do too much. It is a ruse of the devil, by which he deceives good people, to induce them to do more than they are able, so that they end up not being able to do anything."<sup>143</sup> Succumbing to this temptation would "thwart God's plans" by drawing one's attention away from

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:66.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:68.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:50.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:492 and 10:553.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:203.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:225; Also, 2:85.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:206.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:12.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:361.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:8.

<sup>134</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 6:146.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:353.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:357.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:435.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:174.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:60.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:14.

<sup>142</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2:85.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:92.



precisely the place that God is calling you to be at that moment.<sup>144</sup> Perfection is not a goal unto itself for a Christian, but through life's journey, "You can be sure that your vocation will bring about your sanctification and, in the end, your glorification."<sup>145</sup>

Vincent prayed for the intercession of the Holy Spirit so that he and his followers would "brace [themselves]"<sup>146</sup> and be "especially... alert to the wiles of the evil one, [and] to resist them."<sup>147</sup> This state of alertness is essential since "the devil won't fail to try to take you by surprise."<sup>148</sup> In order that one not is taken by surprise by the inevitable temptations in one's life, Vincent is quite clear about what these temptations are, what they look like and feel like, and where they originate. He warns, "It's characteristic of the devil, the flesh, and the world to prompt us to what's evil. Temptation, I repeat, is an impulse that prompts us in various ways to what's evil."<sup>149</sup>

If the devil, the flesh, and the world constantly seek to tempt us, God in every instance counters these "wicked phantoms,"<sup>150</sup> inspires us to "to turn a deaf ear,"<sup>151</sup> "to guard against dallying with temptation,"<sup>152</sup> and in the end do what is right and good. According to Vincent, "our reason for fearing and avoiding temptations... is that the devil's plan is to incline us to sin and to ruin us. We have to endure them patiently because the plan of God... is to have us benefit from them."<sup>153</sup>

God "allows"<sup>154</sup> these temptations "in order to make us more virtuous and more exact in the performance of our duties."<sup>155</sup> "If I give in to the temptation, I'm committing a sin; if I make good use of it, I'll gain a great deal of merit."<sup>156</sup> When we make "bad use"<sup>157</sup> of these temptations by sinning "great evils... ensue."<sup>158</sup> By contrast, there is "great good to

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:123.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:174.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:203.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:20.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:250.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:8.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:50.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:69.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:280.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:9.

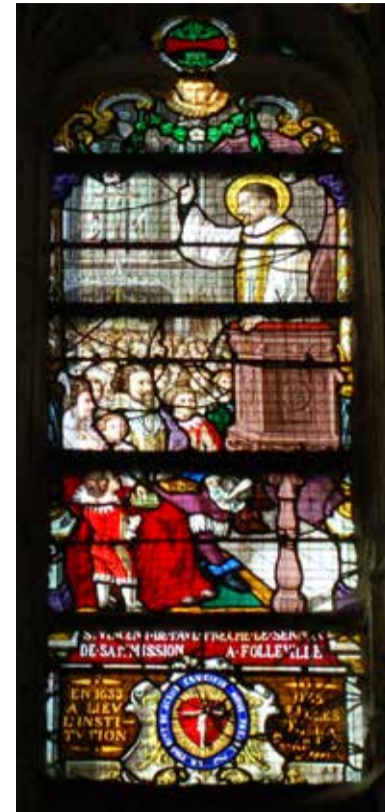
<sup>154</sup> See *Ibid.*, 9:274.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:18.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:8.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:7.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*



Views of the church at Folleville; and a window in the church today that depicts Vincent preaching from the pulpit.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*

be drawn from them when they're used well... handled properly."<sup>159</sup> Consequently, "the very means by which the devil has tried to battle against you will help you to overcome him,"<sup>160</sup> and "draw us closer" to God.<sup>161</sup>

Vincent de Paul cited the example of Saint Paul who "made use of his temptations to humble himself and to give glory to God for all He was doing by His grace."<sup>162</sup> He also reminded his followers that Jesus Christ, "the Saint of Saints was tempted." He remarked, "The Son of God wasn't exempt. How bold of the devil to approach the saint of saints. Is there any surprise then that he tempted human beings, since he attacked Our Lord?"<sup>163</sup> But even in the midst of temptations Christians have reason to rejoice because the "tempter"<sup>164</sup> cannot harm us. "He can tempt us, but he can never force us to do evil.' We have free will to embrace what's good and avoid evil."<sup>165</sup>

In summary, Vincent says: "If we listen to the temptations of the world and the flesh, which always suggest a thousand reasons to gratify ourselves, it's inevitable that we'll have the misfortune to follow our own judgment.... If we mistrust our own strength and fear our three enemies, rejecting instead of listening to them; if, instead of being proud, we humble ourselves; if, instead of growing discouraged, we renew our resolutions and

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:227.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:265.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:11.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:9.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:146.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:11.

deal in the same manner with all other suggestions; then, instead of being the victims of temptation, aided by the grace of God we'll derive great good from them, and in a short time the soul will make great progress in virtue."<sup>166</sup>

"[God's] grace will never fail you; on the contrary, it will abound in your soul in proportion to the adversities you encounter and your determination to overcome them with His same grace. God never allows us to be tempted beyond our strength."<sup>167</sup> According to Vincent, the "great sovereign remedy,"<sup>168</sup> therefore, is for Christians to "train ourselves for combat until we feel we are in command of the situation"<sup>169</sup> and able to "close our hearts and ears to temptation."<sup>170</sup> Under these conditions "the devil will indeed have a hard time carrying out his plans."<sup>171</sup>

In contrast to the language of Vincent de Paul's seventeenth-century theological reflections, contemporary theological reflection would put much less emphasis on attributing the difficulties in achieving Christian and Vincentian conversion/discernment to the influence and activities of the "devil," "demons," or "wicked phantoms." Instead, we typically now use language and images that reflect our spiritual experiences of the challenges posed by the frailties, limitations, and fault lines we find inherent in our human nature. This would include our "inclinations"<sup>172</sup> to find sin (as expressions of self-will, selfishness, and self-centeredness) as an ever-present and powerful temptation in our lives and in our world, with consequences that we all know and can name well. In the end, whatever the theological language and constructs that we use, it is the insight into the difficulties and challenges that we face, and the empowerment of faith and grace, which are at the core of our present discussion about Vincentian conversion and discernment.

*Discernment in action: "consulting Him in your doubts, invoking Him in your needs, following His inspirations, trusting in His Goodness, and having no other intention than His glory and good pleasure."*<sup>173</sup>

According to Vincent de Paul, this life-long spiritual journey of self-emptying ("interior humiliation")<sup>174</sup> to achieve and maintain a state of sufficient unrestricted readiness (or "perfect acquiescence")<sup>175</sup> to discern and do God's will, in "the place and manner in which

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:19.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:203.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:277.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:55.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:277.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 9:291.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:642.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:47.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:109.



He wants you to serve Him,"<sup>176</sup> always requires "our good will and honest efforts."<sup>177</sup> After all, "virtue is virtue only in so far as we make the effort to practice it."<sup>178</sup> Vincent also imparted, however, that "God wills only what is within your power,"<sup>179</sup> and "does not ask anything unreasonable of us." We should therefore "be content to do simply whatever [we] can."<sup>180</sup> As Vincent once told René Alméras, "Do not take on anything beyond your strength, do not be anxious, do not take things too much to heart, go gently, and do not work too long or too hard."<sup>181</sup>

We will inevitably fall short of the full measure of unrestricted readiness because "this cannot be done all at once but only gradually, gently, and patiently... by repeated acts."<sup>182</sup> However, "we will see that this is carried out with the help of God,"<sup>183</sup> who "perfects"<sup>184</sup> and completes all our efforts as needed, bringing them to a providential conclusion "step-by-step... for a long time to come because there is a long way to go."<sup>185</sup> Vincent testified, "That is why God gives me new insights every day on the importance of acting this way, and more devotion to do nothing except in this way."<sup>186</sup>

We learn from our faith and experience that God's plan always unfolds "in the times, places, and manner He pleases."<sup>187</sup> "God's affairs are accomplished gradually and almost imperceptibly,"<sup>188</sup> and with the results which God alone determines. As Vincent advised, "be convinced that God asks of you only that you cast your nets into the sea, and not that you catch the fish, because it is up to Him to make them go into the nets. Have no doubt that He will do so if... you wait patiently for day to come."<sup>189</sup> Or, as he also said, "Let us offer ourselves to Him to do and suffer all things for His glory and the building up of His Church. He wants nothing more. If He desires results, they are His and not ours. Let us open wide our hearts and wills in His presence, not deciding to do this or that until God has spoken."<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:218.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:206.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:203.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:49.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:564.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:146.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:443.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:147.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:297.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:443.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:350.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:348.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:257.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:358.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:531-532.



Image from a German Holy Card, depicting Louise and Vincent offering aid to the sick and poverty-stricken.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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In Vincent de Paul's view, our readiness to enter into authentic discernment will be exactly the same as the measure of our personal and communal conversion at that moment. Of the core virtues, or values, that Vincent identified as being essential for disciples of Jesus, the one that he identified as being the most important was "simplicity."<sup>191</sup> Indeed, he called this virtue "my gospel."<sup>192</sup> For Vincent de Paul the advice "to examine matters in detail"<sup>193</sup> means to examine them as honestly and objectively "as far as is in our power"<sup>194</sup> to determine one's relative state of "restricted" versus "unrestricted" readiness. Vincent proclaimed in this regard, "I have special devotion and consolation in saying things as they are."<sup>195</sup>

Our always imperfect conversion is never to be used as an excuse for putting-off or delaying discernment, since if we wait for perfect unrestricted readiness we will wait without end, and without effect. As Vincent said, "We must go forward without becoming discouraged"<sup>196</sup> "because, on God's road, not to advance is to fall back since man never remains in the same condition."<sup>197</sup> However, this must be done with great prudence. These precautions are aimed at honestly acknowledging and minimizing the influence of our

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<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:476.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:636.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 9:476.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:139.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:146.

self-will and pride with respect to the question at hand. As long as our actions are not sinful, God will accept our efforts and they will in some way contribute to the fulfillment of his plan.

*“What must be done now?”*

As detailed earlier, this Vincentian question “What must be done?” already has its definitive answer in our shared baptismal commitments as Christ’s disciples to follow God’s will “in us and in all that concerns us.” Through Vincent and Louise’s discernment this “fundamental”<sup>198</sup> question received other “firm and unchanging”<sup>199</sup> answers in the distinctive Christology, missiology, ecclesiology, soteriology, spirituality, virtues, and rules of the various “Vincentian” organizations and the “Vincentian” tradition itself. The results of these core discernments do not need to be repeated, and serve as “givens” in our subsequent discernments as described below.

It follows then that the question remaining to be answered through our ongoing conversion and discernment is immediate and of the “moment:” What must “I,” “You,” and “We” do as members of the Vincentian family to discern God’s will as revealed through his providential plan? How, when, and where are we today called by justice, and empowered by charity, to serve our brothers and sisters who are poor, and advocate for the systemic and sustainable changes which will address the root causes of their poverties?

As part of the discernment to answer this final question, there is a preparatory question that first needs to be asked and answered: Out of ALL the options (as influenced by political, economic, social, cultural, religious, scientific, and geographical factors) detailing what *could* be done in the present circumstances, which are the ones that Providence seems to be revealing “in a way that cannot be mistaken,”<sup>200</sup> and answers the “how,” “when,” and “where” posed by the Vincentian question of this moment in our lives?

There is always some real urgency to answering this question of the moment correctly, since the stakes are constantly high for the poor who are to be served. However, Vincent noted that Providence “requires time for generating its works.”<sup>201</sup> Therefore, we should not be “restless”<sup>202</sup> and “not be in too great a hurry” in answering.<sup>203</sup> Rather, we should take “all the time [we] need.”<sup>204</sup> Vincent reminded his followers often, “Let us not rush into things,”<sup>205</sup> and “you have no need of hurrying.”<sup>206</sup> “What does not get done at one

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:368.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:332.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:54.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:514.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:531.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:502.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:631.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:657.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:631.



time gets done at another.”<sup>207</sup> Vincent frequently quoted the proverb, “Let us make haste. Slowly.”<sup>208</sup> He further added, “God’s affairs do not usually deteriorate because we take more time to consider them and recommend them to Him; on the contrary, everything [only goes better].”<sup>209</sup> This purposeful slowdown of the discernment process is essential since it allows us to “proceed calmly.”<sup>210</sup> While time spent in conversion and discernment is time well-spent in Vincent’s view, if these opportunities are wasted “or put off too long... [this] lost time can never be recovered.”<sup>211</sup>

A central “maxim” guiding Vincentian discernment is “the less we are involved in it, the better the Will of God will be made known to us.”<sup>212</sup> This revelation is something we “await rather than anticipate.”<sup>213</sup> We are “never to act except in a passive way,”<sup>214</sup> and we are to do nothing except attentively listen for God to reveal his will. Since God speaks to us through the prisms of faith and experience these should be the foci of our calm, prayerful, detached attention. This means that we should never presume to “take too much initiative,”<sup>215</sup> or make “the first move... either directly or indirectly,”<sup>216</sup> to seek out or suggest answers to the questions for discernment. Further, “we must be on our guard against pushing our own way”<sup>217</sup> into pre-determined or stock answers based merely on “our views and way of thinking.”<sup>218</sup>

Vincent once wrote to a confrere: “I fear you are in too great a hurry about everything.... Now, this happens because you are incessantly occupied with ideas and ways of making progress, and you rush to carry them out. And when you undertake something that does not succeed according to your liking, you talk of changing it at the first difficulties that present themselves. In the name of God, Monsieur, reflect on this and on what I had told you about it at other times, and do not let yourself get carried away by the impetuosity of your impulsive ideas. What usually deceives us is the appearance of good according to human reason, which never or rarely attains the divine. I have told you on previous occasions... that the things of God come about by themselves, and that wisdom consists in following Providence step by step. And you can be sure of the truth of a maxim which seems paradoxical, namely, that he who is hasty falls back in the interests of God.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:459.

<sup>208</sup> See for example *Ibid.*, 2:310; Also, 5:400.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:249-250.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:514.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:358.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:229.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:346.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:12.

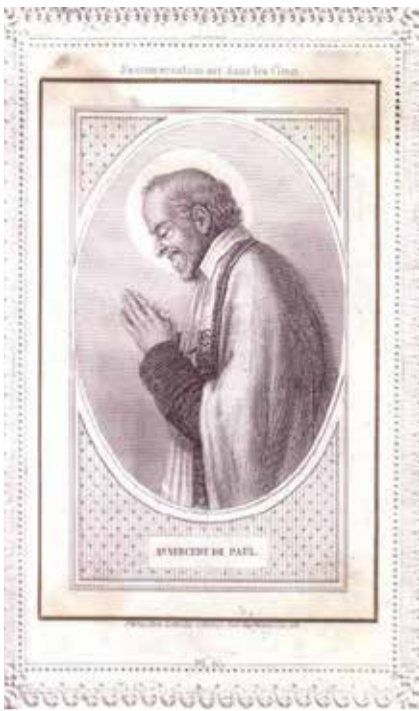
<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:491.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:559.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:326.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:160.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:520-521.



Vincent at prayer; and an engraving of Vincent's statue in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



This required passivity should not be confused with inactivity or entrapment in the seeming safety of the status quo.<sup>220</sup> Rather, it is based on our “steadfast”<sup>221</sup> desire and free choice to move forward for the sake of fulfilling our vocations by finding the times, places, and circumstances where we will “correspond” with God’s plans as they are revealed.<sup>222</sup> Vincent said, “So then, let us be steadfast, and always walk in the ways of God without coming to a standstill.”<sup>223</sup> As he pointed out, this “indifference” gives “us the leisure to learn from experience” and “acknowledge the disposition from on high.”<sup>224</sup> “We should receive with respect all that God offers us, and then examine matters in detail in order to do what is most expedient.”<sup>225</sup>

This discernment, then, is a question of judging both the precise moment (after “mature deliberation”<sup>226</sup> and “serious consultation”<sup>227</sup>) when the opportunity seems ripe and the means are judged “feasible,”<sup>228</sup> “reasonable and suitable.”<sup>229</sup> As we have seen, this requires that we take the time to “examine matters thoroughly,” “being attentive... down to the last details,”<sup>230</sup> “with respect to the essentials, but also as regards the circumstances.”<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> The status quo is not an option in a vocation. As a Daughter of Charity once observed in a conference given by Vincent: “It’s impossible for us to remain always in the same state. If, therefore, we don’t advance in the love of our vocation, we grow cold and fall back.” *Ibid.*, 9:354.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:157.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:412.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:157.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:164.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:636.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:236.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:262.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:66.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:479.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:318.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:249.

We do this by objectively considering the full range of “pros” and “cons”<sup>232</sup> of “all licit and possible means”<sup>233</sup> which suggest themselves in answer to the question “What *could* be done?” What helps keep this process authentic is our willingness to take “the necessary precautions”<sup>234</sup> by always consulting with “wise [and] competent persons,”<sup>235</sup> who are also “persons of outstanding piety,”<sup>236</sup> about the question and options for action at-hand. And then we should only move “after much prayer and by common consent,”<sup>237</sup> “having weighed and considered all things.”<sup>238</sup> Vincent points out, “God blesses resolutions taken this way through consultation.”<sup>239</sup>

Vincent’s reasons for relying on “much prayer and consultation”<sup>240</sup> in the process of discernment revealed his sense of personal honesty: “That is how I act, and rarely do I do anything out of my own poor head.... I have within myself that unfortunate quality of judging everything and everyone according to my own poor wits, but experience has made me see the happiness of acting otherwise and how God blesses this manner of acting.”<sup>241</sup>

Interestingly, Vincent de Paul was not particularly troubled by mistakes or failures in discernment (as long as they did not result from sin). In an instance when this happened he remarked, “I admit once again that we moved too quickly.... Oh well! There is no use talking about it any longer; the mistake has been made. It will teach us another time to look more closely and to take more time with what we have to do. God, who knows how to draw good from evil, will see that all turns to His glory. One mistake should not be corrected by another.... So you should continue.... If the work that has begun does not succeed, it should not, however, depend on us but on God to bring it to completion, since it is His Providence that has committed us to it.”<sup>242</sup>

While Vincent admits the possibility of discernment reaching a point of absolute clarity, in truth what he trained his disciples to do was to come to reasonable clarity (achieved “in the presence of God, after many prayers and the seeking of advice”<sup>243</sup>), and then to act boldly, without hesitation and without looking back — “All that remains now is for you to make a firm resolution and put your hand seriously to the work”<sup>244</sup> “as rough

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<sup>232</sup> See *Ibid.*, 2:236. See also, *Ibid.*, 2:458, 3:403.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:362.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:40.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:566.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:396.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:368.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:262.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:77.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:316.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:637-638.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:631.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:256.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:462.



tools in the hands of a good workman.”<sup>245</sup> “I also hope that you will take the resolution to correspond henceforth to God’s plans for you and put them into effect without delay, always and everywhere.”<sup>246</sup>

## Conclusion

In light of the stark challenges to charity and justice, systemic change, and sustainability that have characterized and will continue to characterize our twenty-first century, and in light of how these challenges are impacting poor people throughout the world, there is a new urgency for asking and answering the Vincentian question of “What must be done?” As we have seen, the efficacy of the Vincentian tradition’s answer to this question today, as in the past, is deeply rooted in conversion and discernment as understood in the Catholic and Christian tradition. One of the present challenges for the members of the Vincentian tradition is to find ways for our tradition to serve as a highest common denominator for all people of good will and all faiths to ask and answer this question together.

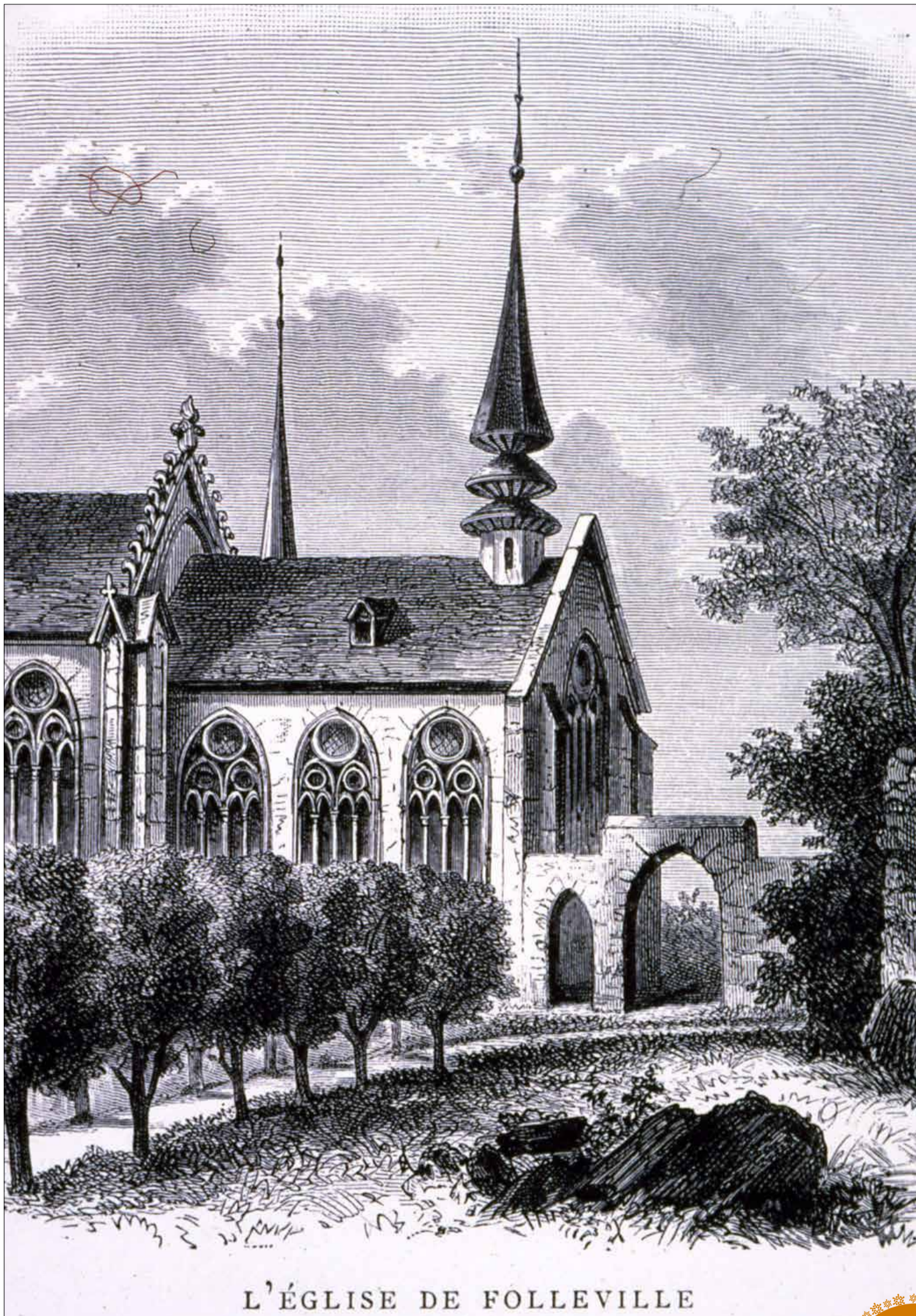


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<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:286.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:358.





The L'Église Saint-Jacques-le-Majeur-et-Saint-Jean-Baptiste, or Church of Folleville.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*







An engraved contemporary portrait of Madame de Gondy.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*





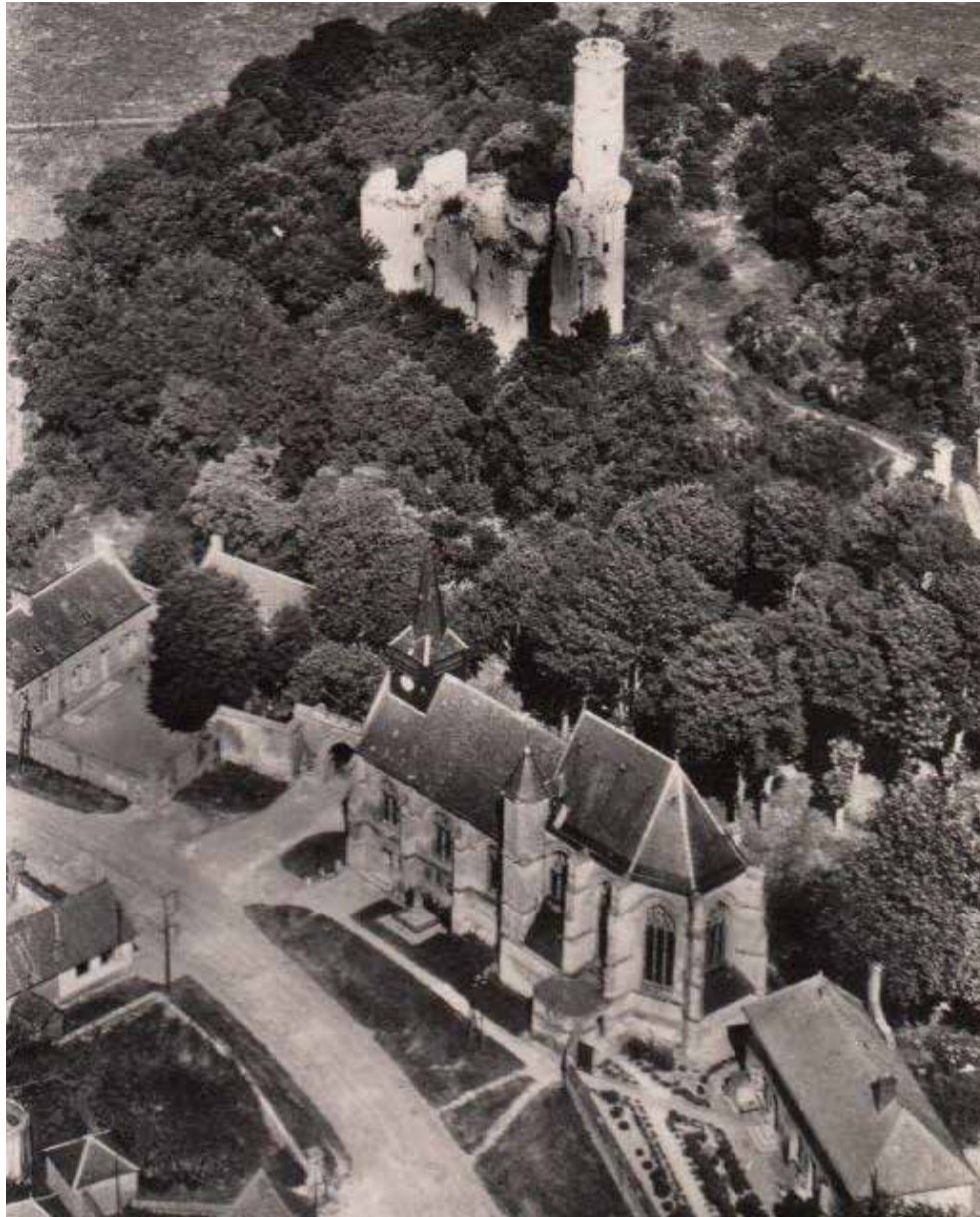


St. Jane de Chantal, heart and crucifix in her hands.

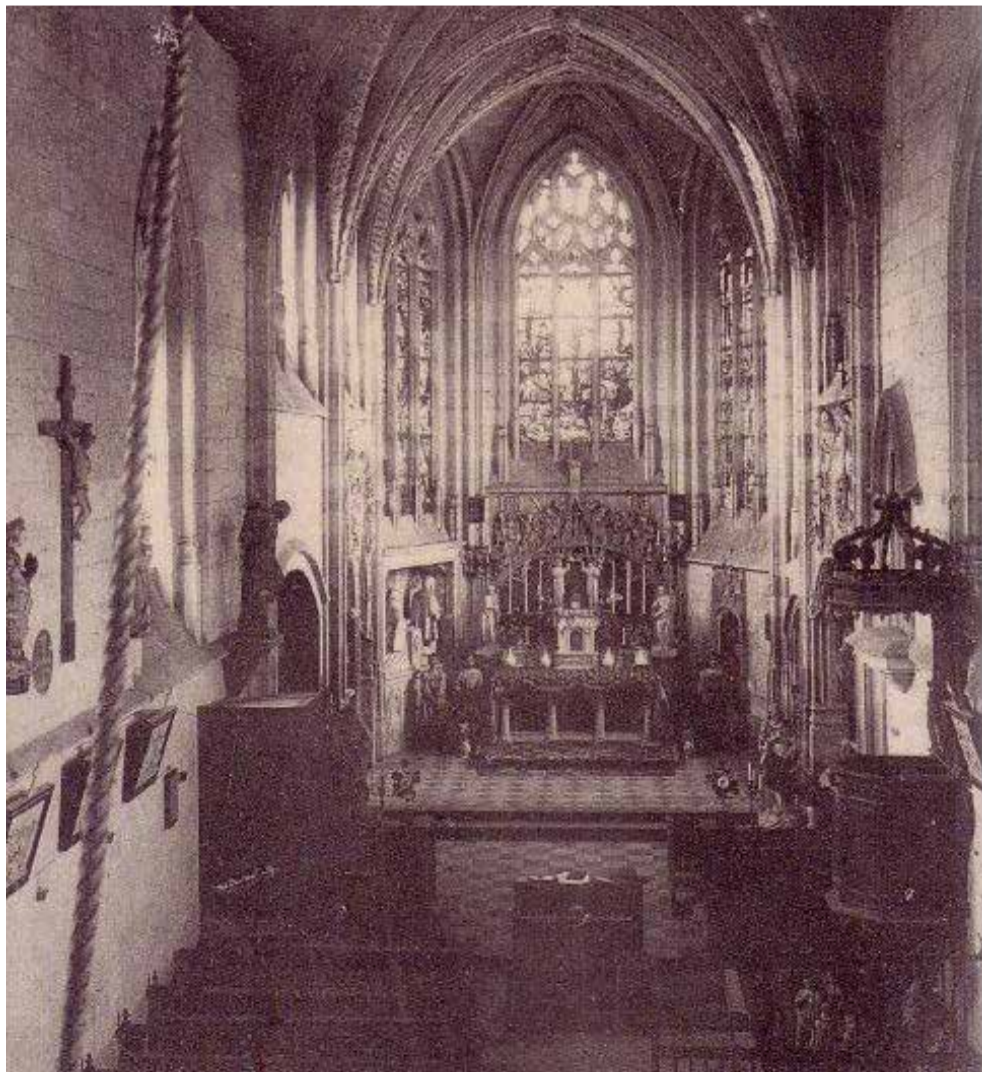
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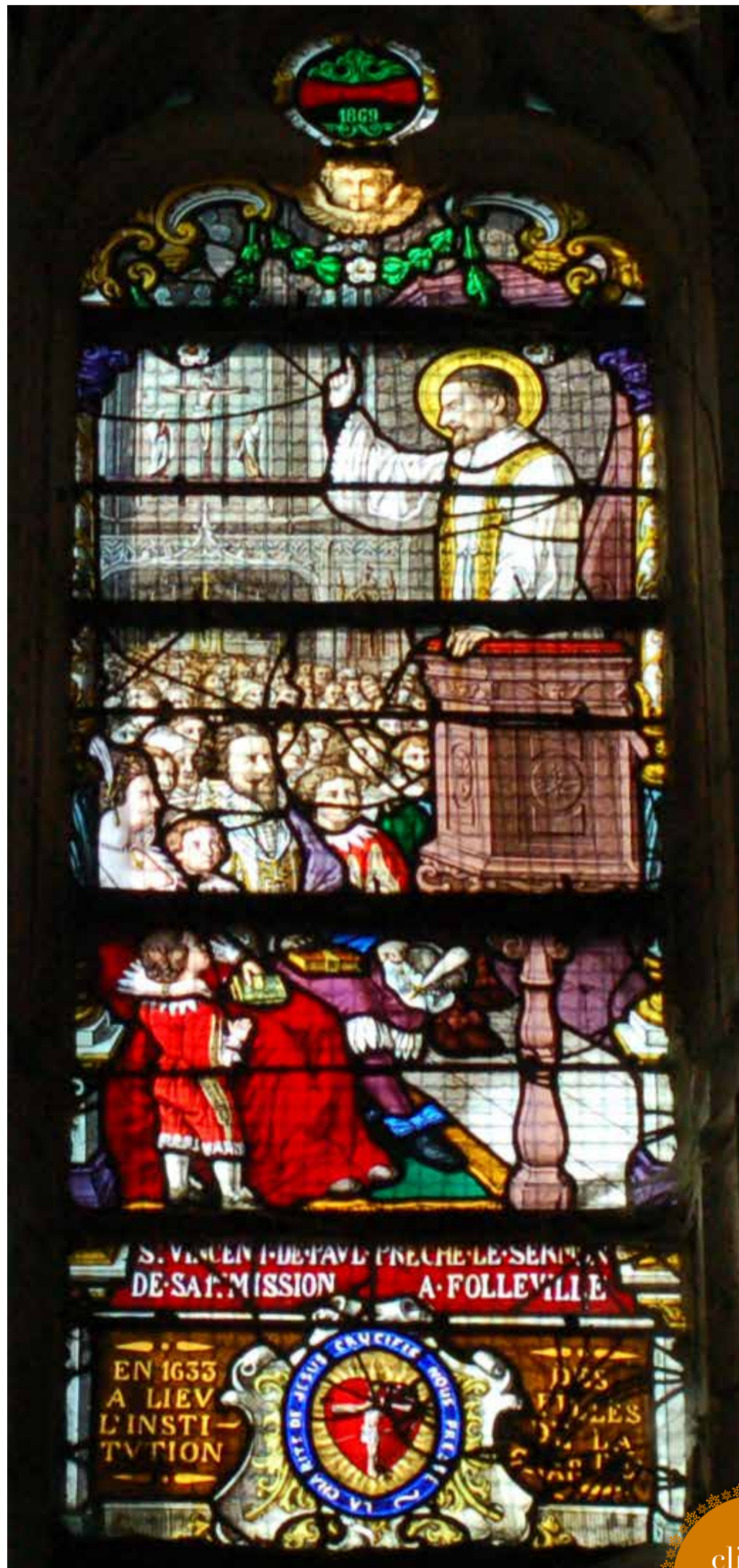




Views of the church at Folleville.  
*Image collection of the Vincentian  
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A window in the church today that depicts Vincent preaching from the pulpit.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



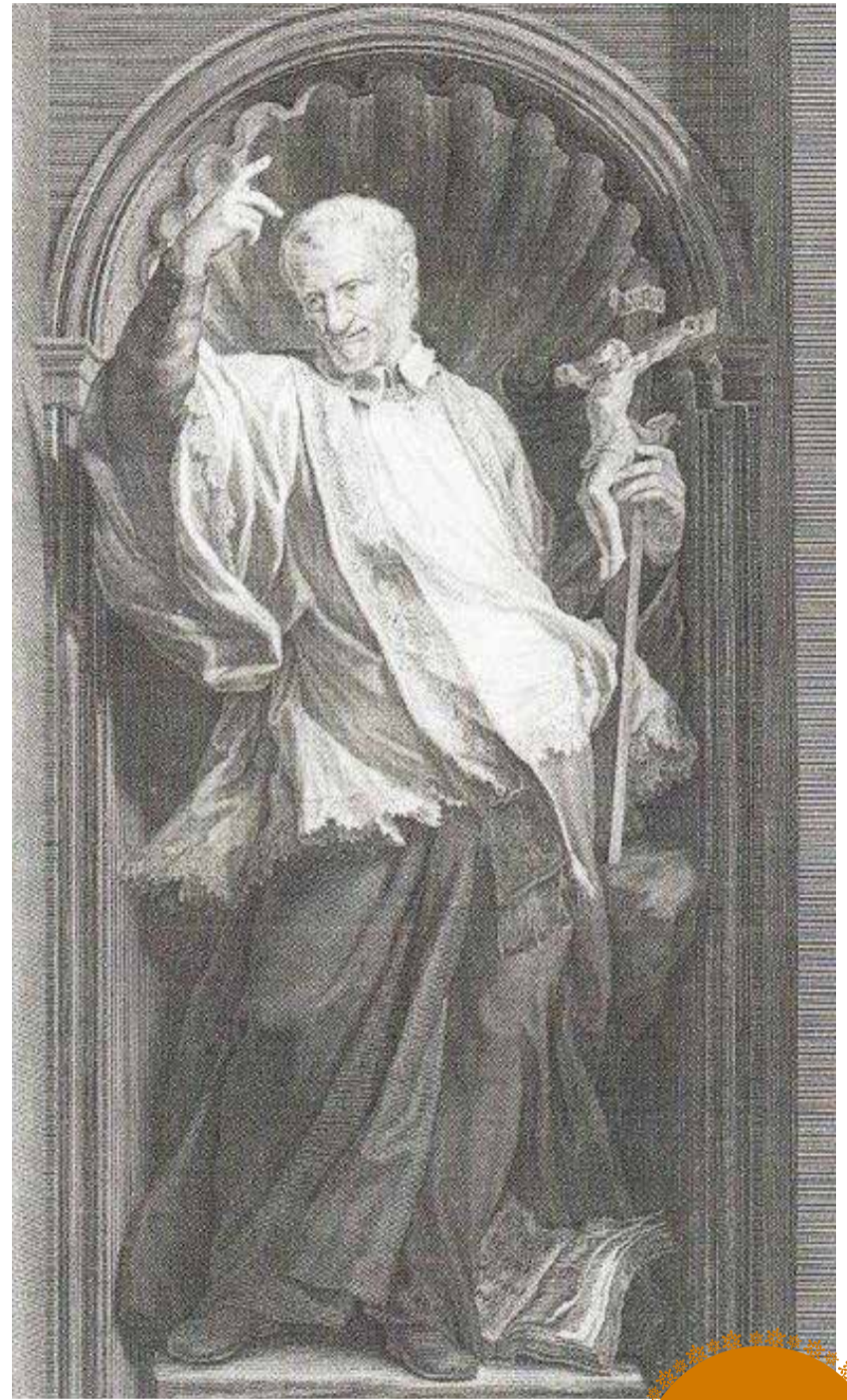
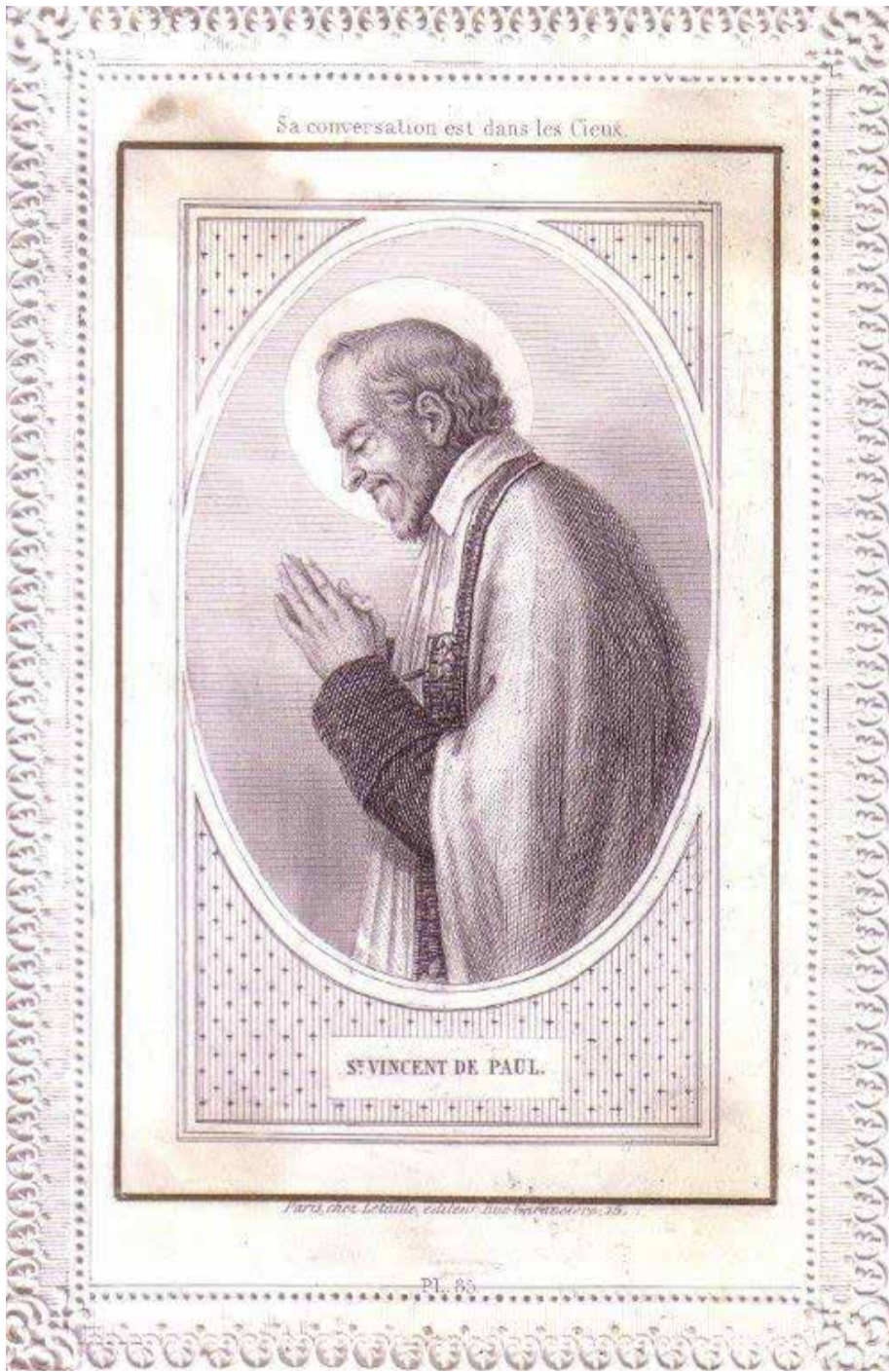


Image from a German Holy Card, depicting Louise and Vincent offering aid to the sick and poverty-stricken.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*







Vincent at prayer; and an engraving of Vincent's statue in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*





# Mathieu de Morgues and Michel de Marillac: The Dévots and Absolutism

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CAROLINE MAILLET-RAO, PH.D.

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The *dévots*, the Queen Mother Marie de Médicis' party represented by Mathieu de Morgues (1582-1670) and Michel de Marillac (1560-1632), are known as the most ferocious adversaries of Louis XIII's principal minister, Cardinal Richelieu. The Day of the Dupes marked the end of their influence in France but not the end of their activity, since they continued in exile to protest against and denounce the cardinal's iron grip on French political life. Mathieu de Morgues was the great defender of the *dévo*t party's position, which he explained in a series of tracts begun in 1617 and continued until the time of the Fronde in 1650. Head of the *dévo*t party, Michel de Marillac held the office of *garde des sceaux* from 1626 until 11 November 1630. His political thought is set out in several documents which he drew up while carrying out his functions. These include three as yet unpublished treatises — one on the role of the *Parlements*, another on the Conseil du roi and the third on the office of *chancelier* — an unpublished speech “sur le bon gouvernement,” his only partly published opinion paper on France's entry into the Thirty Years War, and finally his voluminous correspondence with Cardinal-Minister Richelieu, also only published in part.<sup>1</sup>

The *dévo*t party members' political thinking has been the subject of new interpretations which have not, however, invalidated older viewpoints. As a result, it has been impossible to determine whether the *dévots* were first and foremost *bons français* or *bons catholiques*.<sup>2</sup> They have always been said to be at once ultramontane, pro-Spanish and favorable to limited monarchy, even though it has been demonstrated that de Marillac's absolutism and de Morgues' Gallicanism were evident in the affair of Bellarmin's condemnation in 1621.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Cardinal Richelieu's backers are presented as Gallicans, hostile to the Habsburgs and Spain, and favorable to the emerging absolute monarchy. The idea of the difference between the *dévo*t party and that of Richelieu being that of an opposition

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<sup>1</sup> M. de Marillac, *Mémoire dressé par le garde des sceaux de Marillac principalement contre l'autorité du Parlement* (B[ibliothèque] N[ationale de] F[rance], MS fr. 7549); M. de Marillac, *Traité du Conseil du Roi*, (A[rchives] N[ationales], U 955 a); M. de Marillac, *Traité des chanceliers et gardes des sceaux de France*, (AN, U 948); M. de Marillac, *Discours sur la manière de gouverner l'Etat* (10 June 1630, A[rchives des] A[ffaires] É[trangères], Mémoires et Documents, France, 792, fos 207-14); M. de Marillac, *Mémoire du 20 juillet 1630* (AAE, Correspondance politique, Sardaigne, 12, fos 480-4); P. Grillon (ed.), *Les Papiers de Richelieu* (Paris, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> L. Avezou, “Richelieu vu par Mathieu de Morgues et Paul Hay de Chastelet,” *Travaux de littérature*, 18 (2005), 167-78; D. A. Bailey, “Power and piety: the religiosity of Michel de Marillac,” *Canad Jl History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire*, 42 (2007), 1-24; “Introduction” to Lefèvre sieur de Lezeau, Nicolas, *La vie de Michel de Marillac (1560–1632). Garde des sceaux sous Louis XIII*, transcribed and ed. D. A. Bailey (Québec, 2007), xxv-lxx; S. Hwi Lim, “Mathieu de Morgues, bon français ou bon catholique?,” *XVIIe siècle*, 213 (2001), 655-72; S-M. Morgain, “La disgrâce de Michel de Marillac,” *Histoire et archives*, 7 (2000), 49-69.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Bailey, “The family and early career of Michel de Marillac (1560-1632),” in *Society and Institutions in Early Modern France*, ed. M. P. Holt (Athens, GA and London, 1991), 170-89; Bailey, “Power and piety”; Y.-M. Bercé, *Les Monarchies espagnole et française du milieu du XVIe siècle à 1714* (Paris, 2000), 55; Y. Durand, “Mystique et politique au XVIIe siècle: l'influence du Pseudo-Denys,” *XVIIe siècle*, 173 (1991), 326; S. Hwi Lim, “La pensée politique des ‘bons catholiques’ dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle” (thèse de doctorat, Paris IV, 1998), 389-458; J. Russell Major, *Representative Government in Early Modern France* (New Haven, 1980); H. Duccini, *Faire voir, faire croire. L'opinion publique sous Louis XIII* (Paris, 2003), 453-4.



Portrait of Michel de Marillac (1560-1632).

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



between traditionalists and absolutists is still accepted.<sup>4</sup> First, because Mathieu de Morgues is perceived as having been opposed to the establishment of an absolute monarchy, and secondly, because no one has questioned the idea of the members of the *dévot* party being pro-Spanish.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, the latest studies on the *dévots* have insisted that, in the area of foreign policy, de Marillac was opposed to war with Spain and the Habsburgs out of a desire to preserve Catholic, rather than state, interests.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, these studies validate the traditional thesis of Georges Pagès, who thus remains the authority on the subject.

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<sup>4</sup> On the controversial concept of absolutism, see R. Bonney, *L'Absolutisme* (Paris, 1989); F. Cosandey and R. Descimon, *L'Absolutisme en France. Histoire et historiographie* (Paris, 2002); J. Cornette, "L'histoire au travail. Le nouveau siècle de Louis XIV: un bilan historiographique depuis 20 ans (1980-2000)," *Histoire, Économie et Société* (2000), 561-605; D. Crouzet, "Langage de l'absoluté royale (1560-1576)," *L'Absolutisme, un concept irremplaçable? Une mise au point franco-allemande* (Munich, 2008). According to contemporary ideals of absolute monarchy, political decisions should strictly originate from the king's will according to the doctrine of divine right. Only the king is entitled to determine God's will and to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Yet, far from being tyrannical, such a regime had to operate within particular constraints. These included: the observance of divine law; the enforcement of the kingdom's fundamental laws; and acceptance of the highly regulated right of remonstrance by which kings agreed to take into account their humble subjects' opinions.

<sup>5</sup> G. Pagès, "Autour du grand orage. Richelieu et Marillac: deux politiques," *Revue historique*, 179 (1937), 63-97; Duccini, *Faire voir, faire croire*, 453-4; Lim, "La pensée politique," 669.

<sup>6</sup> Bailey, "Power and piety," 1-24; Morgain, "La disgrâce de Michel de Marillac," 49-69.

As is evident in this analysis of the historiography on the *dévo*t party's political thought, the whole question needs to be revisited, because the *dévots'* thinking is not as incoherent as it is often portrayed. Nor are the criteria mentioned above, designating the political actors of Louis XIII's reign as either good Catholics or good Frenchmen, helpful: we need to critique the position of these same actors on the question of the *ministériat*.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as recent studies on de Marillac's absolutist tendencies have shown, the differences between the *dévo*t party's and Richelieu's political thinking were not as radical as historians have suggested, and scholars have rightly demonstrated certain points of convergence between the two positions. Going one step further, it may be contended that the members of the *dévo*t party, judging by its attitudes towards the monarchy, the Church and foreign policy, would number among the 'good Frenchmen,' their opposition to Richelieu having had less to do with the defense of traditional monarchy than with their opposition to the establishment of a principal minister.<sup>8</sup>

While the *dévo*t party's opposition to Cardinal Richelieu's ministry was based on different arguments relating to ideas on monarchy, on royal government and on domestic and foreign policy, the thesis presented here has to do instead with its conception of sovereignty. Despite Michel de Marillac's status as head of the party, we shall begin by analysing the arguments made by Mathieu de Morgues, because of the greater detail and clarity of his thoughts, before considering those of de Marillac.

## I

The concept of monarchical sovereignty appeared from the beginning as a vision of absolute power held by virtue of divine right. Indeed, medieval jurists defined kings as God's lieutenants on earth and added that, for this reason, they were accountable to no one else. The prince was thus not subject to the law, meaning the law of his predecessors, in conformity with the principle *princeps legibus solutus* from Ulpian's *Digest*. In the fourteenth century, these doctrines were used to reinforce royal power and affirm the king's pre-eminence. However, royal sovereignty was not yet conceived of as absolutist, but rather from the perspective of the enumeration of kingly rights. According to Charles de Grassaille, regalian rights were no longer seen as privileges but as the king's rights. He dispensed with any idea of concession on the part of the people, the princes or the pope.<sup>9</sup> Purged in this way of discussions of the origin of the attributes of sovereignty, medieval legal doctrine was ready to be used by the great absolutist thinkers.

Developed by the members of the *politique* party, the doctrine of absolute sovereignty was based on a voluntarist conception of power. According to Jean Bodin, commands

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<sup>7</sup> C. Maillet-Rao, "La théologie politique des dévots Mathieu de Morgues et Michel de Marillac, opposants au cardinal de Richelieu," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, 32 (2009), 51-77.

<sup>8</sup> C. Maillet-Rao, "Mathieu de Morgues (1582-1670) et Michel de Marillac (1560-1632): les dévots devant l'Histoire" (thèse de doctorat, Tours, 2004), to be published as *La pensée politique des dévots Mathieu de Morgues et Michel de Marillac. Une opposition au ministériat du cardinal de Richelieu*.

<sup>9</sup> G. Leyte, "Charles de Grassaille et la monarchie française," *Pensée politique et droit* (Aix-Marseille, 1998), 315-26.



derive only from the sovereign's will: "Les lois du prince souverain ores [sic] qu'elles fussent fondées en bonnes et vives raisons, néanmoins elles ne dépendent que de sa pure et franche volonté," the latter thus implying the indivisibility of power.<sup>10</sup> This doctrine was the consequence of the challenges to royal power made by monarchomachs and *parlementaires* alike.<sup>11</sup> For his part, Cardin le Bret had deduced from divine right the absolute independence of royal power from both the Holy See and the Holy Roman Empire. By an argument extracted from the indivisibility of sovereignty, he definitively rejected the emperor's claims and submitted his whole kingdom to obedience.<sup>12</sup> Cardin le Bret based himself on French and European history to refute the theses of the Jesuit theologian Jacques Keller, author of the famous pamphlets of 1625, the *Mysteria politica* and the *Admonitio ad regem*. The *Mysteria* denounced the foreign policy conducted by France and counseled by Richelieu. Keller defended the rights of the house of Austria, positioning it as champion of the interests of Catholic Christianity. In contrast, the *Admonitio* demonstrated with great vehemence that the cardinal was responsible for a policy leading to the ruin of Catholicism and the triumph of the Protestant party. Exactly mirroring the Catholic Leaguers' ideas of the sixteenth century, the author recognized the temporal power of the pope to solve the international crisis by excommunicating the king and his ministers. The author also called for popular rebellion, thereby demonstrating his approval of subjects' right to resist.<sup>13</sup> Obviously, these ideas went against those of the absolutist movement in France promoted by the *politiques*, one of whom was Le Bret. It is thus no surprise that he firmly opposed them, on the basis of both French and European history, going back to the time when France dominated Europe and possessed the empire. Then, he distinguished the Roman Empire from the contemporary one to deny the influence claimed by the latter by virtue of being the heir of the former. It was thus never a question of the kingdom of France sharing its power or submitting it to another superior authority.

In line with the thinking of the *politiques*, the goal of the third estate's actions at the Estates General of 1614 was the defense of the total sovereignty of the king against pontifical claims.<sup>14</sup> In the same vein, the *dévo*t party thinkers de Morgues and de Marillac responded to what they saw as a threat to royal authority by brandishing the doctrine of absolute sovereignty.

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<sup>10</sup> J. Bodin, *Les six livres de la République* (1576), i, ch. 8 (Paris, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Descimon and Cosandey, *L'absolutisme*, 43; and O. Beaud, *La Puissance de l'État* (Paris, 1994), 72, 133.

<sup>12</sup> C. le Bret, *De La Souveraineté du roi* (1632), in *Les Oeuvres de Messire C. le Bret* (Paris, 1689), 5-6. Cf. G. Picot, *Cardin le Bret et la doctrine de la souveraineté* (Nancy, 1948), 141, 144-5.

<sup>13</sup> É. Thuau, *Raison d'État et pensée politique à l'époque de Richelieu* (Paris, 2000), 110-13; on the Jesuits' conception of the state, R. Bireley, "Les jésuites et la conduite de l'État baroque," in L. Giard and L. de Vaucelles (eds), *Les Jésuites à l'âge baroque (1540-1640)* (Paris, 1996), 229-42.

<sup>14</sup> R. Mousnier, *L'Assassinat d'Henri IV. Le problème du tyrannicide et l'affermissement de la monarchie absolue* (Paris, 1992 edn), 348.



Portrait of Louis XIII (1601-1643). He ascended to the throne in 1610, at the age of eight-and-a-half, following the assassination of his father.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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Mathieu de Morgues has gone down in history as having virulently denounced Cardinal Richelieu's 'tyranny.'<sup>15</sup> In fact, this criticism derived from a determinedly political opposition to the *ministériat*, that is, to what de Morgues defined as the system of government in which control of the kingdom is delegated to a principal minister. Devised by the cardinal himself, the theory of *ministériat* defended the idea that the king could hand over the government of his kingdom to a *premier ministre*, this latter then theoretically enjoying the widest of powers well in excess of counseling the king. Richelieu even bestowed a quasi-divine foundation on this delegation of power by considering that if the king did not himself wish to govern, it was the will of God that he should entrust a principal minister with this charge. And, in fact, Richelieu saw himself as the instrument of God. In this way, the minister exercised many functions involving the king's sovereign power. For de Morgues, this idea was totally contrary to the spirit of the theory of absolute monarchy. It was nothing less than an attempt to usurp royal authority that could not, in any case, even if the king wanted it, be transferred to a principal minister. The king's power was every bit as indivisible for de Morgues as it was, for example, for his contemporary Cardin Le Bret, who justified absolute royal power by arguing that sovereignty was no more divisible than a geometric point. The defense of absolute monarchy is thus at the heart of this critique of

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<sup>15</sup> J. Bergin, "Three Faces of Richelieu: A Historiographical Essay," *Fr Hist*, 23 (2009), 533.

Richelieu's *ministériat*, which it regarded as tyrannical. Therefore, de Morgues' opposition constituted not a rejection of the practice of absolutism by Louis XIII's government, but rather a demand that the king exercise power alone.<sup>16</sup>

For this reason, insofar as it is founded on the idea of the usurpation of royal power by a minister, de Morgues' criticism of Richelieu's tyranny does not appear to have been a simple repetition of the refrain of the bad counselor.<sup>17</sup> This historiographical commonplace assumes that criticism of the king's advisers is nothing more than an indirect way of attacking the king's absolutist policies.<sup>18</sup> This thesis could be entertained if de Morgues had not himself been in favor of absolutism. Besides, he was manifestly hostile to all favorites, including Mazarin, starting with those of Marie de Médicis, the Concinis:

Votre Majesté eut avis que deux personnes étrangères, qui étant comblées en France de toutes sortes de biens et d'honneurs, s'étaient tellement aveuglées en leur ambition, qu'abusant du pouvoir et de l'autorité qu'on les estimait être la seule cause de toutes nos calamités. A quoi V.M., comme un Hercule vengeur, sut généreusement remédier [...] V.M. a recueilli favorablement tous ses sujets prosternés à ses pieds [...] et, montant sur son trône, elle a voulu mettre le sceptre en sa seule main, pour régir ses peuples à l'avenir.<sup>19</sup>

Thus de Morgues quite rightly appreciated the king taking back power for himself in 1617 and imposing himself as king by a *coup d'état* on 24 April 1617. For some time by then, the domination of the Maréchal d'Ancre, Sieur de Concini (1575-1617), and his wife, Léonora Galigai (1568-1617), the regent's favorites, had become intolerable. The princes, lords and nobility had been the first to react by leaving Paris and taking up arms, mustering their troops under the duc de Nevers and the duc du Maine. Then it was the turn of the council members, Richelieu and Barbin, to make known their discontent by resigning. But it was Louis XIII himself who took the initiative in the *coup d'état*. The young king intended to arrest Concini, incarcerate him in the Bastille and have him judged by the *Parlement*, but the *maréchal* instead met his death under a porch at the Louvre. Having pulled off this coup, the king had Marie de Médicis isolated and began to exercise power himself.<sup>20</sup> If de Morgues approved of the king taking back power in the name of royal sovereignty, he did

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<sup>16</sup> Maillet-Rao, "La théologie politique," 51-77.

<sup>17</sup> *Contra* Lim, "La pensée politique," 306.

<sup>18</sup> P. Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris, 1990 edn), 80-1. On the other hand, in A. Jouanna, *Le devoir de révolte* (Paris, 1989), 237-9, this interpretation is contested by showing that the aristocrats' claims were not motivated by a wish to share power.

<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to one of the assessors of this article for having brought to my attention the fact that de Morgues authored a Mazarinade, as pointed out in R. Bonney, "Cardinal Mazarin and his critics: the remonstrances of 1652," *Jl European Stud*, 10 (1980), 18-19. M. de Morgues, *Consolation aux bons français* (1618), 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Duc de Chaulnes, "Relation exacte de ce qui s'est passé à la mort du maréchal d'Ancre," in MM. Michaud et Poujoulat, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France* (Paris, 1837).





Marie de Médici, Queen of France (1573-1642). Painting by Frans Pourbus the younger.

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not go so far as to blame the ex-regent, his mistress, for the Concinis' faults. The Concinis received all the blame, having been blinded by the queen mother's favors and carried away by their ambition. In fact, de Morgues did not appreciate Marie de Médicis' exile from Paris, writing: "Je ne doute point, Sire, que vous n'ayez témoigné votre bonté, lorsque vous avez prié la reine votre mère de se retirer [...] et ma raison est que l'expérience du passé nous enseigne que les serviteurs qui se sont voulu emparer des personnes de leurs maîtres, pour gouverner tous seuls, les ont toujours soustraits à leurs pères et mères."<sup>21</sup> In de Morgues' opinion, this decision was made under the influence of the new favorite, the duc de Luynes (1578-1621).

At any rate, it was the ambition of favorites that, in de Morgues' view, constituted the real danger for the monarchy, but not everyone went so far as to try to introduce a new institution into monarchical theory. This was why de Morgues counseled the king against trusting anyone because favorites are always inclined to take advantage of such trust for usurping royal power.<sup>22</sup> He argued that this was the case with the Concinis, de Luynes and, above all, Richelieu, who did not hesitate to use his lies to persuade the king to make certain

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<sup>21</sup> De Morgues, *Vérités chrétienne au Roi très-chrétien* (1620), 7.

<sup>22</sup> "Les desseins de ceux qui ont l'honneur d'approcher les grands princes ne montent toujours, et qu'après s'être donnés créance auprès de leurs maîtres ils ne les portent à tout entreprendre. Il y en a peu qui le fassent pour avancer leur gloire, mais pour leur témoigner qu'ils leur sont tout à fait nécessaires, et de là s'acquérir une autorité dans leurs actions, dont bien souvent ils abusent": de Morgues, *Charitable remontrance* (1631), in *Recueil des diverses pièces pour la défense de la reine mère du roi très-chrétien Louis XIII* (1643 edn), i. 247.

decisions, especially ones concerning the queen mother.<sup>23</sup> Taking advantage of his master's benevolence, according to de Morgues, Richelieu even exercised the king's absolute power through the deployment of different sovereign duties. "C'est lui qui de puissance absolue met et destitue les capitaines et autres officiers, qui ordonne des monstres, qui a fait fondre grand nombre de canons, qui ne portent point d'autres écussons que les siens, et qui a pris tous les titres et marques de la souveraineté partout où il n'y a que votre lieutenance."<sup>24</sup> He had thus exceeded his ministerial powers, which consisted of supervising different hierarchies, the stimulation and assistance, when necessary, of those hierarchies, as well as intervention in the exceptional or periodic affairs that put in danger political unity, social order, the common weal, the great royal interests and the laws. These powers were distinct from the satisfaction of current, regular and particular public needs.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, de Morgues felt that Richelieu had also usurped the king's authority over justice during the trial of Louis de Marillac (1572-1632):

S'il est devenu traître en Piedmont, au même instant que la reine votre mère a fait paraître à Paris sa juste indignation, il ne faut point faire de difficulté de renvoyer la connaissance au Parlement, où les officiers de votre couronne doivent être jugés, ni appréhender d'exécuter le criminel en la place de grève. Ses amis ne sont pas si puissants qu'il faille qu'on l'ôte à votre justice. Tout votre peuple la louera et les grands de votre royaume seront instruits par cet exemple, qu'il faut être fidèle à son roi et à son pays. En toutes ces choses que j'ai représentées à V.M., elle ne peut être blâmée ni d'injustice [...]; les juges qui envoient au supplice un innocent ne sont point coupables mais ceux qui accusent ou qui ont déposé fausement. Sire, vous êtes le juge souverain de tout votre peuple.<sup>26</sup>

A loyal military man, Louis de Marillac, brother of the *garde des sceaux*, was elevated to the dignity of marshal of France in 1629 in recognition of his services and sent to Italy in 1630 as a lieutenant general. After the Day of the Dupes, that de Morgues evokes here as the day when the queen mother "manifested her indignation," he was arrested at his camp at Felizzo in Piedmont on 30 November 1630, by Marshal Schomberg, charged with notifying him of the king's order. Brought back to Paris, he was condemned to death after eighteen months of procedure by an extraordinary court made up of judges chosen by Richelieu. Louis de Marillac was beheaded on the place de Grève on 10 May 1632, and buried at the Feuillants' Church. De Morgues affirms that the king's justice should have been exercised by the *Parlement* as sovereign court. After having examined the affair, the *Parlement* could have decided to execute the accused for disobedience to the king. But far from this being

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<sup>23</sup> "Tout cela est suivi d'une déclaration infâme, des saisies des rentes et des meubles [...] pour réduire[...] la plus grande princesse du monde à une extrême nécessité [...] Pour vous porter [...] à permettre qu'on se soit couvert de votre autorité et de votre nom, il faut qu'on ait employé des suppositions et calomnies": de Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi* (1631), in *Recueil des diverses pièces*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> De Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 38.

<sup>25</sup> R. Mousnier, *Les Institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue* (Paris, 1990 edn), 457.

<sup>26</sup> De Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 42.



Engraved portrait, dated 1657,  
of Cardinal Richelieu (1582-  
1642). Artist Robert Nanteuil.

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the case, according to de Morgues, those who judged and executed Marshal de Marillac were not exercising the king's justice but that of Richelieu, who wanted to get rid of his rivals. There was no other reason for establishing an extraordinary court while there was already a court charged with exercising justice in the name, and under the supervision, of the king.<sup>27</sup> By advancing the reason of the king's absolute power, in this case in order to criticize the use of favorites in the kingdom's government, Mathieu de Morgues showed himself to be favorable to absolutism.

## II

It could be asserted in response, however, that sovereignty has always been absolute in its conception, even when the functions of monarchy were restricted. The fact that de Morgues stressed the king's absolute sovereignty would not necessarily mean that he looked favorably on absolutism. Also, de Morgues did not propose, as did Bodin, a formal definition of sovereignty.<sup>28</sup> Instead, he gave a substantial and, thus, more traditional definition, listing the rights and prerogatives essential to the existence of this sovereignty. For de Morgues, the power to make laws, to decide on expenditure and to declare war were exclusively regalian rights: "Ce sont ceux-là, Sire, qui se veulent emparer de votre État, qui ont en leur disposition votre sceau, votre plume, vos finances, vos canons, vos

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<sup>27</sup> De Morgues, *Charitable remontrance*, 329.

<sup>28</sup> Beaud, *La Puissance de l'État*, 139-43.



vaisseaux, et vos principales places maritimes et frontières, qu'ils tâchent à vos dépendre de rendre imprenables à vous-même."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, these same usurpers covet "la justice aussi par laquelle seuls les rois règnent absolus."<sup>30</sup> None but the king can make use of political successes.<sup>31</sup>

Although de Morgues did not adopt a formal definition of sovereignty, he did not envisage that its exercise could be shared since it was founded exclusively on the king's will. Thus, de Morgues saw the voluntarist concept of power developed by Bodin as characterizing absolutism and did not, therefore, take lightly its central importance for the *raison d'état*.<sup>32</sup> In a long and extremely interesting passage, reproduced here in its entirety given its importance in the author's work, de Morgues set out a theory of monarchy founded on the king's will and, for this reason, perfectly compatible with that of absolute monarchy:

Tant s'en faut [il est peu probable] que ce délai ait blessé l'une [l'autorité] ou l'autre [la réputation], comme on a voulu persuader, pour vous porter à employer le pouvoir absolu. C'est une pièce que vous ferez jouer quand il vous plaira. Mais jamais homme de bien, ni serviteur fidèle ne vous conseillera de la faire valoir que dans une grande extrémité. Et afin que V.M. soit pleinement informée de cette vérité, qui est de très grande importance, il est nécessaire de vous représenter pour quelle considération nos bons et justes rois ont établi les Parlements, et autres cours souveraines. Ils leur ont donné le pouvoir de vérifier leurs édits, déclarations et lettres patentes, avec permission de leur faire leurs très-humbles remontrances sur la conséquence de ce qui leur est adressé pour être examiné par eux, non pour être simplement enregistré, ce qui n'est l'office que des greffiers. Ce n'est pas, Sire, que ces corps soient les contrôleurs de vos actions ou tuteurs des rois, qu'ils aient une puissance par dessus la vôtre et soient comme tribuns du peuple. Ceux qui les voudraient rendre odieux le veulent faire croire, ou peut-être quelques particuliers de ces compagnies qui ignorent leur institution se sont imaginés cela, et le peuvent avoir dit. Il est vrai Sire, qu'ils sont tous vos sujets, et vos officiers, ils n'ont point de puissance que celle qu'ils tiennent de vous, et ne doivent user d'aucune répartition, quand vous

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<sup>29</sup> De Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 18.

<sup>30</sup> De Morgues, *Consolation aux bons français*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> "Ce sont ceux-là, Sire, qui vous dérobent votre gloire, qui payent des écrivains pour faire publier partout, qu'eux seuls ont pris la Rochelle, et dompté les rebelles, qu'ils ont battu l'empereur, les rois d'Espagne et d'Angleterre, et le prince de Piedmont, qu'ils ont conquis le pays du dernier, sauvé celui de Mantoüe, et secouru Casal": de Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 17-18.

<sup>32</sup> In this other case, when the king might have decided to punish the cardinal's partisans for abuse of power — an unlikely hypothesis in light of historical events — de Morgues warned the latter that they would eventually have reason to fear the king's will: "Parce qu'ils ont sujet de craindre celle [la justice] qui a la puissance, et qui aura bientôt la volonté de la châtier [leur malice]": de Morgues, *Vrais et bons avis d'un François fidèle* (1631), in *Recueil des diverses pièces*, 118. Thuau, *Raison d'État*, 128.

commandez en Maître. Mais vous me permettez, s'il vous plaît, de vous dire un secret qui vous a été caché. Les bons rois vos prédécesseurs avaient appris, ce que les anciens politiques ont écrit, et que toutes les histoires des empires du monde ont confirmé, que les monarchies qui n'avaient point de tempérament d'aristocratie, étaient de petite durée parce qu'elles se rendaient premièrement suspectes et après odieuses aux peuples qui leur donnaient un mauvais nom. Nos rois ont voulu fuir non seulement l'effet mais le soupçon, ils aperçurent que les lois de leur État et la soumission des français, leur acquerraient une entière disposition de la vie et des biens de leurs sujets, et même de faire des nouveautés, impositions, créations d'offices, et déclarations, selon le rencontre et la nécessité des affaires. Pour faire recevoir ces choses avec plus de raison et apparence de justice, ces mêmes rois se soumirent volontairement à les faire examiner et vérifier par les cours souveraines tant pour la décharge de leur conscience devant Dieu, que pour celle de leur réputation devant les hommes, se réservant toujours d'user de l'autorité absolue, conformément à ces mots qu'ils mettent en toutes leurs lettres patentes et édits: Tel est notre bon plaisir. Les bons princes, comme vous, se contentent de faire écrire ces paroles sur le parchemin, pour montrer leur puissance, ils ne se servent jamais de tout le droit de souveraineté, qui doit être bien ménagé, et ne le saurait mieux être qu'en suivant les chemins ordinaires, qui font aimer comme bon, et estimer comme juste celui qui les tient. Au contraire, on murmure contre celui qui les quitte, et on a mauvaise opinion de son gouvernement, ce qui dispose les esprits à la rébellion.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly, the concept of sovereignty founded on the king's will does not laicize power because decisions are still made in a spirit of respect for divine law and divine will, but does this same concept make the exercise of royal power any harsher?<sup>34</sup> It is true that royal government runs the risk of becoming tyrannical given how much power the king has: "Vous [...] soutenez que tout ce qu'on veut est équitable, parce qu'on le peut [...] vous seriez bien marri, qu'on vous fît fouetter par cette règle, et diriez bientôt que c'est une tyrannie."<sup>35</sup> But royal power is not tyrannical because the king only makes use of it when he judges it necessary. This conception is in strict accord with the exercise of power in an absolute monarchy, as indicated by the following words of Louis XV, spoken at the Flagellation Session: "Le spectacle scandaleux d'une contradiction rivale de ma puissance souveraine me réduirait à la triste nécessité d'employer tout le pouvoir que j'ai reçu de Dieu pour préserver mes peuples des suites funestes de ces entreprises."<sup>36</sup> The two texts, of de Morgues and Louis XV, both written in circumstances of *parlementaire* resistance,

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<sup>33</sup> De Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 76-9.

<sup>34</sup> *Contra Thuau, Raison d'État*, 120.

<sup>35</sup> De Morgues, *Vrais et bons avis d'un français fidèle*, 173.

<sup>36</sup> *Séance royale dite de la flagellation*, 3 March 1766, *Remontrances du parlement de Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (MM. Flammermont and Touneux, *Collection des documents inédits sur l'histoire de France*; Paris, 1895), ii. 558.

saw monarchical power in the same way, namely, as an omnipotent power justly and moderately used. According to Louis XV, government founded on the king's will cannot be abusive because the king governs in accordance with the spirit of monarchy which is "l'esprit de conseil, de justice et de raison."<sup>37</sup> It is the same for de Morgues. The limits constituted by the subjects' right of remonstrance and the obligation to make just decisions must not be construed as impediments on the king's absolute power. Yet absolutism is not the exercise of an unlimited and laicized power. It must take account of its limits which are an inherent part of the functioning of absolute monarchy.

Mathieu de Morgues' thought is thus compatible with the theory of absolute monarchy in that it posits a sovereign power which is absolute but not unlimited. For him, the *Parlement's* right of remonstrance is never equivalent to a form of control over the king's decisions. Thus, it is inaccurate to contend that de Morgues considered the *Parlement* a sort of regulator of absolute power, or even as the representative of the constituent states of the nation, acting in every case as a hindrance to absolute power.<sup>38</sup> The king did not need to "avoir obligatoirement leur concours"; on the contrary, he could impose on them any decision whatsoever.<sup>39</sup> That is why de Morgues counseled the king to retain this limit on the right of remonstrance in spite of the superiority of his power, out of a concern for justice. The maintenance of this limit does not cast doubt on de Morgues' absolutism, it helps to distinguish absolute monarchy from tyranny, rather than from limited monarchy. Indeed, founded on his will, the king's decisions could not constitute tyranny since the king knew the monarchy's limits:

Vous ramassez grand nombre de défenses faites aux Parlements de se mêler des affaires d'État, nous ne doutons pas de la puissance que les rois ont sur les officiers. Ceux qui les peuvent établir, interdire et destituer, peuvent à plus forte raison borner leur autorité mais vous qui êtes si savant en l'écriture sainte, savez bien que celui qui a dit: tout m'est loisible, mais tout ne m'est pas expédient. Tâchez de faire trouver bon tout ce que le roi veut, non tout ce qu'il peut.<sup>40</sup>

De Morgues makes a very important distinction here that must not be overlooked at the risk of misunderstanding his thoughts on the distinction between power and will: "Vous n'établissez la grandeur que dans l'opinion et appréhension de la seule puissance on réduit toutes choses à l'autorité [...] on ne vous parle jamais de bonté, de clémence, de justice [...] on ne vous parle jamais [...] mais de sévérité, de rigueur et de force."<sup>41</sup> Governing based on power is for him a form of tyranny, while governing based on will is

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<sup>37</sup> *Séance royale dite de la flagellation*, 557.

<sup>38</sup> Lim, "La pensée politique," 302-4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>40</sup> De Morgues, *Vrais et bons avis d'un françois fidèle*, 161.

<sup>41</sup> De Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 43.



just because it signifies governing in respect of the limits inherent in absolute monarchy. Bringing the king to govern according to his power and not his will thus constitutes an attack on his authority.<sup>42</sup>

However, de Morgues does stress that the king must impose his authority when circumstances require it. Contrary to what Seung Hwi Lim has suggested, de Morgues clearly defined what he meant by “grande extrémité.”<sup>43</sup> It meant the resistance to the king’s decisions on the part of the *Parlements* which, implicitly, aimed to assume part of his power. In this case, the king can impose his authority on the *Parlement*. The right of remonstrance, here defined as a “tempérament d’aristocratie,” never authorized the *Parlements* to limit the king’s absolute authority.<sup>44</sup> It is in this theoretical context that Mathieu de Morgues invalidated the monarchomach doctrine of the subjects’ right to resist. And de Morgues stresses the firmness that the king showed towards the Huguenots in order to have his absolute power respected:

Notre roi, est celui de tous les princes chrétiens, qui les a poursuivis vivement [...] qui leur a ôté les biens des ecclésiastiques qu’ils possédaient en Béarn, et les a rendus aux évêques, aux abbés et aux prieurs. Qui a rétabli l’exercice de la religion catholique en plusieurs lieux d’où elle avait été bannie 50 ans [...] Qui a renversé l’autorité d’un Parlement, composé de personnes de religion contraire à la nôtre et en a établi des catholiques. Qui a mis entre ses mains les places les plus importantes [...] que la situation [...] aurait fait croire imprenable. Notre roi [...] a travaillé aux moyens de les réduire à l’obéissance entière [...] Il a [...] tâché de faire connaître, à ceux qui s’assembloient contre ses volontés que cette entreprise lui déplaisait. Ayant vu leur obstination, et su les menées qu’ils faisaient dans son État, il a assemblé ses forces, dressé plusieurs armées, est allé dans la principale en personne, a retiré les places [...] A attaqué et battu celles qui ont résisté [...] En a fait ruiner quelques-unes des plus criminelles, et a châtié sévèrement ceux qui avaient été les auteurs de rébellion pour faire

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<sup>42</sup> “Sire, nous nous contenterions d’avoir découvert ce crime, que nous appellerons avec raison de lèse majesté au ler chef, puisqu’il tend à vous faire perdre l’affection de [...] tous vos peuples, et à les faire soulever contre vous”: de Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 44-5.

<sup>43</sup> Lim, “La pensée politique,” 306.

<sup>44</sup> “Nous avons sujet de mettre au nombre des esprits faibles, ceux qui étant pourvus d’offices et dignités [...] se voudraient élever comme sales vapeurs, pour obscurcir la lumière du soleil. Je nem’adresse point à ce grand corps que je révère, et ne fait état que de parler à quelques particuliers. Cependant, on a remarqué en quelques magistrats des fausses générosités [...] que sous prétexte de corriger quelques manquements, voudraient entreprendre contre l’autorité royale, qui les a créés et les conserve. Comme il est à désirer que la cour ne rejette jamais, et même aime les remontrances, on doit aussi souhaiter que ceux, qui les peuvent faire, ne les convertissent pas toujours en plaintes, et jamais en faction, mais en propositions d’expédients, ou pour sortir d’un mal, ou pour avancer un bien, ou pour assister un prince, ou pour soulager le peuple”: de Morgues, *Bons avis sur plusieurs mauvais avis* (1650), 19-20.



Engraved portrait of Michel de Marillac.  
Artist unknown.

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sentir la pesanteur de sa main de justice, à ceux qui avaient refusé la règle de son sceptre; et pour apporter quelque terreur de sa puissance, à ceux qui persistaient dans leur opiniâtreté.<sup>45</sup>

In the same way, Mathieu de Morgues liked the king to decide for himself to exclude from government all those who sought to share an indivisible power, and in particular, his principal minister: “V.M. a de quoi tirer quelque avantage contre les ennemis de son État, de ce que je veux dire, et a moyen de leur faire voir votre puissance, lorsque j’aurai prouvé qu’un serviteur, avec ceux qui ont été en intelligence avec lui, vous a pris dans six ans plus de dix millions d’or [...] V.M [...] étant avertie [...] les arrêtera en ôtant par un arrêt sévère les comptants qui servent de couverture à tous les pillages.”<sup>46</sup> For de Morgues, favorites, even those who have great influence over the decision-making process, are mere pawns or chips that the king can make use of at his own discretion.<sup>47</sup> This is but one more refutation of that theory of *ministériat* which gave the *premier ministre* a far more assured place than that of a fragile favorite who could be disposed of at any moment.

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<sup>45</sup> De Morgues, *Advis d’un théologien sans passion* (1626), 31-4.

<sup>46</sup> De Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 84, 99-100.

<sup>47</sup> “Sire, voilà au vrai l’état où se trouve cette prodigieuse faveur [Richelieu] [...] Arrêtez-là, grand roi: faites lui connaître que vous pouvez la défaire aussi facilement comme vous l’avez faite”: de Morgues, *Très-humble remontrance au Roi*, 104-5.

### III

In de Marillac's thought, the right of remonstrance enjoyed by the court of the Paris *Parlement* also corresponded to the maintenance of a limit appropriate to the spirit of absolute monarchy. Before the slightest conflict had erupted between himself and parlement regarding the registration of the reform ordinance of 1629, de Marillac had taken measures so that the *Parlement* would not use the right of remonstrance to weaken the authority of royal decisions. Indeed, the ordinance in question provided for a delay of six months before the sovereign courts could remonstrate against the king's edicts without, in the meantime, being able to suspend the execution of these edicts.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, if the courts considered that they had to remonstrate with the king, they could not hold up the registration of the decision for more than two months even if, after this time period, they had not remonstrated against it.<sup>49</sup>

These regulations did nothing to avoid inciting opposition from the *Parlement*, which was using the right of remonstrance to refuse to register Michel de Marillac's reform edict. For more than a century, the opposition of the *Parlements* had been based on their right of remonstrance, which allowed them to advise the king of faults of form and substance in legal texts submitted to them for registration. This prerogative was a result of the right of counsel, and *Parlement*, like the other sovereign courts, had long been very proud of it. As the permanent collaborators of the king in whose name they rendered justice and by whom they were consulted on important affairs, and as holders of important 'police' functions, the *parlementaires* tended to forget, from the reign of François I on, that they only exercised their functions by delegation from the king. The *Parlements* struggled regularly against royal power, abusing the right of remonstrance that preceded the registration of letters patent. Thus, they showed their desire to control the exercise of power and to share legislative power. Indeed, the *parlementaires'* attitude grew more rigid throughout the sixteenth century because of the increasing venality associated with hereditary functions, in the form of resignations from office in favor of a third party in return for payment. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *parlementaires* were feeling independent and secure in relation to the monarchy. They even claimed to be able to refuse to register a text, that is, to accept or reject laws. However, to silence the *parlementaires'* arrogance and put an end to the agitation that it created, the king had one useful tool: the *lit de justice*.<sup>50</sup> This

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<sup>48</sup> "Permettons néanmoins aux gens tenant nos cours de Parlement et autres cours souveraines nous faire telles remontrances [...] dans six mois [...] Cependant, voulons nos dites ordonnances être observées, tant dans les jugements des procès qu'autrement, sans y contrevenir ni sans dispenser ou modérer les peines portées par icelles [...] même sous couleur desdites remontrances non faites" : *Ordonnance sur les plaintes des états assemblés à Paris en 1614 et de l'assemblée des notables réunis à Rouen et à Paris, en 1617 et 1626*, Jan. 1629 (ed. F.A. Isambert, Paris, 1829), xvi. 225-6.

<sup>49</sup> "Enjoignons à toutes nos dites cours de procéder incessamment [...] à la publication des édits, ordonnances, lettres patentes qui leur seront par nous adressées [*sic*] si ce n'est que nos dites cours eussent quelques remontrances à nous faire sur aucun point desdits édits et ordonnances: lesquelles [*sic*] ils ne pourront réitérer dans deux mois au plus tard après la date de nos dits édits et lettres. Et après avoir entendu notre volonté sur icelles, nous voulons et ordonnons qu'il soit passé outre à la publication d'icelles toutes choses cessantes et sans aucune remise," *Ordonnance sur les plaintes des états*, 239.

<sup>50</sup> S. Hanley, *Le Lit de justice des rois de France. L'idéologie constitutionnelle dans la légende, le rituel et le discours* (Paris, 1991).



involved the king's solemn appearance in the great chamber of the *Parlement* where he sat on a dais surrounded by both his judge-counselors and the most eminent personages of the kingdom, such as the chancellor, the peers of France, the grand officers and the members of the *Hôtel du roi*. When the king judged that the *Parlement* had exceeded its powers, he came to the chamber in person, thereby signifying that the edict submitted had to be registered forthwith, and forbidding the *parlementaires* to involve themselves with affairs of state. Given the *parlementaires'* opposition to the edict written by the *garde des sceaux* de Marillac, on 28 December 1628, a *lit de justice* was decided upon in agreement with de Marillac and Richelieu. The forced registration took place on 15 January 1629 and, in accordance with the spirit of the aforementioned edict, the king "fit dire par le garde des sceaux qui [sic] si la cour trouvait aux ordonnances quelques articles qui leur semblassent requérir quelques limitations ou interpretations, il aurait bien agréable d'en entendre quelques remonstrances."<sup>51</sup> The magistrates had two months, "l'ordonnance demeurant cependant en sa force et sa vertu." Thus, the ordinance was already in force before the *Parlement* had either remonstrated against it or delivered the edict of registration. This maneuver infuriated the *parlementaires* and the first speaker of the *Parlement de Paris* threatened de Marillac with prosecution for violating the fundamental laws of the kingdom. For eight months, the *Parlement* refused to deliver to the *garde des sceaux* the copies of registration and verification and demanded that execution be delayed while it developed its remonstrances. All this time, de Marillac and the queen mother, who were in charge during the absence of the king and the cardinal at the siege of La Rochelle, kept demanding an edict of registration, even though the *Parlement* had still not presented its remonstrances, thus demonstrating that they had no power to delay the registration of an ordinance. De Marillac also drew up a memorandum in which he answered the *Parlement's* question on its authority, leaving no doubt about his position in favor of absolutism: "La puissance de nos rois est indépendante n'a [sic] nulle nécessité de prendre avis ou compagnie ou de personne aucune dans le royaume [...] Je ne voudrais pas abroger tout à fait cet usage de faire des remonstrances. Je sais bien que les rois doivent régner par justice."<sup>52</sup> The stand-off lasted until the autumn, when it took another intervention of the king to obtain deliverance of the certificate of registration, on 5 September 1629.

This way of thinking about remonstrances is comparable to that regarding absolute monarchy. Thus, in the well-known sitting called the Flagellation, Louis XV recalled that the *Parlement's* remonstrances should not weaken royal decisions:

Les remonstrances sont toujours reçues favorablement quand elles ne respireront que cette moderation qui fait le caractère du magistrat et de la vérité quand le secret en conservera la décence et l'utilité, et quand cette voie si sagement établie ne se trouvera pas travestie en libelles, où la soumission à ma volonté est

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<sup>51</sup> Grillon, *Les Papiers de Richelieu*, iv (1629), 619-20.

<sup>52</sup> Marillac, *Mémoire contre l'autorité du Parlement*, fos 91v-93v.



An elaborate portrait of Cardinal Richelieu, believed 1642, by Philippe de Champaigne. Possibly done to aid in the creation of a bust, given the multiple perspectives.

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présentée comme un crime et l'accomplissement des devoirs que j'ai prescrits, comme un sujet d'opprobre où l'on suppose que toute la nation gémit de voir ses droits, sa liberté sa sûreté, prêts à périr sous la force d'un pouvoir terrible, et où l'on annonce que les liens de l'obéissance sont prêts à se relâcher.<sup>53</sup>

The sovereign considered that this concept belonged to the essence of the monarchy. Indeed, if the *parlementaires* used their right to limit the king's power, they changed monarchy into anarchy:

Mais si, après que j'ai examiné ces remontrances et qu'en connaissance de cause je persiste dans mes volontés, mes cours persévéraient dans le refus de s'y soumettre au lieu d'enregistrer du très exprès commandement du roi, formule usitée pour exprimer le devoir d'obéissance, si elles entreprenaient d'anéantir par leur seul effort des lois enregistrées solennellement, si enfin lorsque mon autorité a été forcée de se déployer dans toute son étendue, elles osaient encore lutter en quelque sorte contre elle, par des arrêts de défense, par des oppositions successives ou par des voies irrégulières de cessation de service ou de démissions, la confusion et l'anarchie prendraient la place de l'ordre légitime, et le spectacle scandaleux d'une contradiction rivale de ma puissance souveraine me réduirait à la triste nécessité d'employer tout le pouvoir que j'ai reçu de Dieu pour préserver mes peuples des suites funestes de ces entreprises.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Séance royale dite de la flagellation*, 558.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

More exactly, this version of the right of remonstrance is based on the idea of the indivisibility of sovereignty. De Marillac continued the demonstration of his attachment to the regime of absolute monarchy in his *Discours sur le bon gouvernement*, insisting on the fact that the king always had to keep the reins of power in his hands. In this unpublished speech given in June 1630, Marillac defines 'good government' as that in which the king holds and exercises power alone, and insists that the king must let no one else usurp his power. This applies to all the orders and bodies of the kingdom, including the *Parlement* and the *premier ministre*. In this speech, given a few months after the Day of the Dupes, Michel de Marillac declared himself clearly opposed to Cardinal Richelieu's *ministériat*.<sup>55</sup>

#### IV

The *dévo*t Catholic party's thinking thus illustrates the idea that absolute monarchy retained its natural limits, and that this distinguished it from tyranny. These limits were not impediments on its power but rather characteristics of it. In this light, the interpretation of the *dévots*' thought takes on a completely different interpretation, namely the one that the great absolutist thinkers gave to monarchy. Indeed, if Jean Bodin and Cardin le Bret envisaged limits on the exercise of sovereignty, they can nevertheless be considered pure absolutists, favorable to rationalism.<sup>56</sup> Far from putting absolute monarchy in question, the limits that Jean Bodin assigned to the exercise of sovereign power were compatible with the idea of absolute sovereignty and did not restrict it.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Bodin explained that the sovereign courts' right of remonstrance is part of the monarchical regime although, given the indivisibility of sovereignty, the right of remonstrance cannot hinder the promulgation of a law:

Si donc le mandement du prince n'est point contraire aux lois de la nature, le magistrat le doit exécuter [...]. Mais si le magistrat connaît que le prince casse le plus juste et plus profitable édit pour donner lieu au moins juste et moins profitable au public, il peut tenir l'exécution de l'édit ou mandement en souffrance, jusqu'à ce qu'il ait fait ses remontrances, comme il est tenu de le faire, non pas une, mais deux et trois fois: et si nonobstant ces remontrances le prince veut qu'il soit passé outre, alors le magistrat le doit exécuter, voire dès la première jussion, si le délai était périlleux.<sup>58</sup>

Far from suffering from the emancipation of the political sphere, religion, too, can be considered as an essential characteristic of the theory of sovereignty: "Quant aux lois divines et naturelles, tous les princes souverains de la terre y sont sujets, et n'est pas en leur

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<sup>55</sup> Maillet-Rao, "La théologie politique des dévots," 55-7, 65-6.

<sup>56</sup> Contra Picot, *Cardin le Bret*, 199; S. Goyard-Fabre, *Jean Bodin et le droit de la République* (Geneva, 1974 edn), 160-2.

<sup>57</sup> Contra Goyard-Fabre, *Jean Bodin*, 164. J. H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin et la naissance de la théorie absolutiste* (Paris, 1993 edn), 166.

<sup>58</sup> Bodin, *Les six livres de la République*, i, ch. 4, 98.



puissance d'y contrevenir s'ils ne veulent être coupables de lèse-majesté divine, faisant guerre à Dieu, sous la grandeur duquel tous les monarques du monde doivent faire joug, et baisser la tête en toute crainte et révérence."<sup>59</sup> Despite the limits comprised by the right of remonstrance and religion, sovereignty is still defined as the exclusivity of the exercise of power.<sup>60</sup> Sovereignty can also be characterized as being anchored strictly in the king's will: "La première marque du prince souverain, c'est la puissance de donner loi [...] mais ce n'est pas assez, car il faut ajouter, sans le consentement de plus grand ni de pareil ni de moindre que soi: car si le prince est obligé de ne faire loi sans le consentement d'un plus grand que soi, il est vrai sujet: si d'un pareil, il aura compagnon: si des sujets, soit du sénat, ou du people, il n'est pas souverain."<sup>61</sup> Definitively, absolute sovereignty carries intrinsic restrictions that preclude neither its absolute character nor its exclusive exercise.

As for Cardin le Bret, he showed little prudence in according a right of remonstrance to the sovereign courts. On the contrary, the limits implied by the necessity of being just and prudent belonged to the spirit of the monarchical state, for they never put the king's absolutism in doubt.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, for Cardin Le Bret, it was sovereignty that limited the sovereign courts' right of remonstrance. They could remonstrate energetically, however, the sovereign courts must stop as soon as the king manifested his wish either to modify the law or to be obeyed. In this latter case, the courts would have no other choice than to register the edict:

On peut encore demander quelle obéissance les cours souveraines doivent rendre aux édits que le roi leur envoie pour les registrer et publier je n'entends pas parler de ceux qui sont justes, d'autant que chacun doit aller au devant, et les recevoir comme des oracles, mais de ceux qu'on appelle bursaux, comme s'il voulait augmenter ses tribus, en établir de nouveaux, et créer des officiers inutiles et superflus, pour en tirer de l'argent. Il me semble qu'il faut distinguer les temps [...] hors le cas de nécessité, j'estime qu'il y va de la réputation des cours souveraines de faire au prince de sérieuses remontrances, et tâcher par toutes sortes de moyens de le détourner de tels conseils [...] Mon opinion est que les compagnies souveraines doivent persévérer, jusqu'à ce qu'elles aient obtenu quelque chose, ou qu'ils en aient du tout perdu l'espérance. Car alors il se faut résoudre à l'obéissance [...]; autrement la majesté et l'autorité royale seraient par ce moyen sujettes aux volontés de ses officiers, ce qui serait trop préjudiciable à l'État du prince souverain.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> J.-F. Courtine, "L'héritage scolastique dans la problématique théologopolitique de l'âge classique," *L'État baroque* (Paris, 1985), 97. Bodin, *Les Six livres de la République*, i, ch. 8, 192-3.

<sup>60</sup> B. Barret-Kriegel, in *Les Chemins de l'État* (Paris, 1986), i, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Beaud, *La puissance de l'État*, 57. Bodin, *Les Six livres de la République*, i, ch. 10, 306.

<sup>62</sup> *Contra* Picot, *Cardin Le Bret*, 192-8, and Thuau, *Raison d'État*, 277.

<sup>63</sup> Le Bret, *De la souveraineté du roi*, 60-1.



Pierre-Cardin Le Bret (1639-1710).

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Thus, the right of remonstrance was not really constraining for royal power. Furthermore, Le Bret added that if the courts found that the king was not disposed to hear the slightest remonstrance, they would not only have to abstain from making any, they would also have to register the edict immediately.<sup>64</sup> And neither did the necessity of governing justly distort the king's absolute sovereignty, since the king held this power in order to give justice to their [*sic*] people.<sup>65</sup> Besides, kings were the only ones able to modify existing laws when justice demanded it: "Les rois peuvent user de leur puissance et changer les lois et ordonnances anciennes de leur État [...], quand la nécessité et la justice le désirent. Il n'appartient aussi qu'aux princes d'expliquer le sens des lois, et de leur donner telle interprétation qu'ils veulent [...]. Mais le sage prince doit prendre soigneusement garde, en usant de cette puissance, de ne pas forcer le vrai sens des lois, et de leur donner une interprétation contraire à la justice et à l'intention de leur auteur."<sup>66</sup> Cardin Le Bret adds a check to the king's absolute sovereignty, the same one that Mathieu de Morgues outlined in his exposé on government, consisting of the notion that the king used his absolute power only when the circumstances required it in order to remain loved by his subjects.

If we can consider Richelieu as a 'true absolutist,' it is not because he recognized no limit to the king's sovereign power. It is true that, contrary to his contemporaries Jean Bodin and Cardin Le Bret, Richelieu does not, in principle, accord any right of remonstrance to the sovereign courts so as not, he explains, to take the risk of harming the king's authority.

Il semble qu'il y ait beaucoup à dire sur un tel sujet et cependant j'en dirai assez en trois mots, si je mets en avant qu'il ne faut autre chose que restreindre les officiers de justice à ne se mêler que de la rendre aux sujets du Roi, qui est la

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



Michel de Marillac, conseiller  
d'état et garde des sceaux.  
Etching by Jean Morin.

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seule fin de leur établissement c'est une chose si importante que, si on laissait aller la bride à ces compagnies puissantes, on ne pourrait plus après les tenir dans les bornes de leur devoir. Il serait impossible d'empêcher la ruine de l'autorité royale si on suivait les sentiments de ceux qui, étant aussi ignorants dans la pratique du gouvernement des États comme ils présument être savants dans la théorie de leur administration, ne sont ni capables de juger solidement de leur conduite, ni propres à donner des arrêts sur le cours des affaires publiques qui excèdent leur portée. Comme il ne faut rien souffrir des compagnies qui blessent l'autorité souveraine.<sup>67</sup>

In fact, the cardinal went so far as to recommend tolerating critics who did not undermine the king's power:

C'est prudence de tolérer quelques uns de leurs défauts en autre genre. Il faut compatir aux imperfections. Il n'y a personne qui ne doive improuver leur procédé quand ils sont emportés par quelques dérèglements, mais, en le condamnant avec raison, il est difficile d'y trouver remède [...] C'est chose si ordinaire à telles compagnies de regarder et trouver à redire au gouvernement des États que cela ne doit pas sembler étrange. Toute autorité subalterne regarde toujours

<sup>67</sup> Richelieu, *Testament politique*, part I, ch. 4, section 3, critical edition published with an introduction and notes by F. Hildesheimer (Paris, 1995 edn), 175.



avec envie celle qui lui est supérieure; comme elle n'ose disputer la puissance, elle se donne la liberté d'en décrier la conduite. Il n'y a point d'esprits si réglés à qui la domination la plus douce ne soit en quelque façon odieuse.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, the cardinal did not ask the question whether the great power that he accorded to the principal minister “blesserait l'autorité du roi.” And yet, the constitutive principles of the theory of *ministériat* appear shocking to a ‘pur absolutist,’ as Mathieu de Morgues’ criticisms of Richelieu have shown.

For several decades, historiography presented the *dévots* in essentially the same way as had Richelieu, their adversary. But can we trust a portrait that someone paints of his adversaries, especially in politics? This analysis reveals that, contrary to the commonly-accepted idea, the *dévots* did not defend the model of limited monarchy. They had always defended and respected the king’s absolute power. Their criticism against *ministériat* was formulated within the limits imposed by the representative of the sovereign power: the right of remonstrance. Not once did Michel de Marillac ever issue an opinion without being solicited by the king. During the pamphlet war opposing the *dévo*t party and Richelieu’s advocates in the wake of the Day of the Dupes, Mathieu de Morgues addressed no more than a single pamphlet to Louis XIII. The pamphlet was framed as a remonstrance entitled *Très-humble, très-véritable et très-importante remonstrance au roi* (1631). The other pamphlets, also mostly from 1631, targeted specifically the cardinal’s supporters as attested to by their titles.<sup>69</sup> Just like Richelieu, de Morgues and de Marillac were absolutists; hence their opposition to the *ministériat*.



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<sup>68</sup> Richelieu, *Testament politique*, 176.

<sup>69</sup> *Vrais et bons avis d'un français fidèle. Sur les calomnies et blasphèmes du sieur des Montagnes, ou Examen du libelle intitulé, Défense du Roy et de ses ministres; Charitable remonstrance de Caton chrestien au Cardinal de Richelieu; Advertissement de Nicocléon à Cléonville, sur son advertissement aux provinces; Réponse à la seconde lettre que Balzac a fait imprimer avec son prince* (1632).



Portrait of Michel de Marillac (1560-1632).

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*







Portrait of Louis XIII (1601-1643). He ascended to the throne in 1610, at the age of eight-and-a-half, following the assassination of his father.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*







Marie de Médici, Queen of France (1573-1642).  
Painting by Frans Pourbus the younger.

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Engraved portrait, dated 1657, of Cardinal Richelieu (1582-1642).  
Artist Robert Nanteuil.

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Engraved portrait of Michel de Marillac. Artist unknown.

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An elaborate portrait of Cardinal Richelieu, believed 1642, by Philippe de Champaigne. Possibly done to aid in the creation of a bust, given the multiple perspectives.

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Pierre-Cardin Le Bret (1639-1710).

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Michel de Marillac, conseiller d'etat et garde des sceaux.  
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# Vincentian Footprints in China: The Lives, Deaths, and Legacies of François-Regis Clét, C.M., and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, C.M.

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ANTHONY E. CLARK, Ph.D.



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St. Vincent de Paul, St. François-Regis Clét, C.M., and St. Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, C.M.

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**T**he Lazarist enterprise in China, as did other Catholic missionary orders and congregations, encountered moments of conflict, both cultural and religious. Despite the antagonisms that accompanied Sino-Missionary exchange, however, there were also significant areas of confluence between Lazarist confrères and Chinese natives. At its worst, Lazarist-Chinese exchange engendered cultural disagreements that resulted in the extended suffering and martyrdoms of François-Regis Clét, C.M. (1748-1820), and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, C.M. (1802-1840), or the strident French nationalism of missionaries such as Bishop Pierre-Marie-Alphonse Favier, C.M. (1837-1905), whose patent jingoism solicited Chinese suspicion. Favier, who arrived in China only a few decades after the cruel martyrdom of Perboyre, wrote of the French protectorate in Beijing:

Once more this incident has proved the necessity of the French protectorate of the Catholic missions, a protectorate which France has never abandoned and which the Church was never willing to take away from her. You will always see a consulate next to a church, and the tricolor sheltering the Catholic cross!... The admirals and officers compete with each other for the glory of the religion and the fatherland....<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Alphonse Favier, C.M., *Péking, histoire et description* (Lille: Desclée de Bouwer, 1902), 269-270. Translated in Arnulf Camps, O.F.M., "The Chinese Martyrs Among the 120 Martyrs of China, Canonized on the 1st of October 2000," in Rachel Lu Yan and Philip Vanhaele Meersch, eds., *Silent Force: Native Converts in the Catholic China Mission* (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, 2009), 528-529.

Remarks such as these, and even several by Perboyre and Clét, well represent the European-Catholic attitude often found in China, distinguished as it sometimes was by an admixture of the “Church Militant” and the “State Militant.”

In the wake of Clét and Perboyre’s martyrdoms in China, Sino-Missionary tensions continued, due mostly to cultural misunderstanding and rumors that the “Western gods” had disturbed the native deities of China — proclaimed responsible for a series of widespread famines on the northern plains. In a letter of 1882, we learn that the Daughters of Charity were reluctant to travel openly for fear of attacks.<sup>2</sup> And in 1884, an attempted assault was made against the Lazarist mission in Tianjin. Indeed, there had already been a violent outbreak in the city against priests and sisters on 21 June 1870, when an angry Chinese mob killed twenty-one foreigners, including two Lazarist priests and ten Daughters of Charity.<sup>3</sup> Missionaries who entered China following such incidents were predisposed to retain their image of “spiritual warfare,” and clear parallels between the early Church in Rome and the nascent Church in China were exploited in the rhetoric of incoming Vincentians. Like their Protestant counterparts, Catholic missionaries in China largely envisioned non-Christian temples as “places where the prince of darkness was worshipped.”<sup>4</sup>

But there was a much more pervasive character to the Lazarist mission in the Middle Kingdom, one that has left indelible footprints in the soil of China. These are the footprints of Chinese and Western confrères and sisters who operated orphanages for abandoned children (mostly girls), ran schools, established seminaries, offered medical services at Lazarist hospitals, and extended the Church’s reach through building new churches in previously un-missioned areas of China. After the deaths of Clét and Perboyre, increasing numbers of such charitable activities were inaugurated by new Vincentian arrivals; most of these were later destroyed during the Boxer Uprising of 1900, and then rebuilt again with reparation funds. The legacy of China’s two Lazarist martyr saints was deeply entrenched in a Vincentian ethos during the post-Boxer era reconstruction; Favier’s North Cathedral displayed a stone monument commemorating Saint Perboyre.

The advent of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 precipitated the comprehensive destruction and confiscation of Lazarist properties in China. Memorial stelae dedicated to Clét and Perboyre were targeted for destruction, and the European sons and daughters of Saint Vincent were expelled. In this study I shall briefly recount Clét and Perboyre’s

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<sup>2</sup> See “Lettre de ma soeur N... à M. le Directeur; Tchín-Ting-Fou, Orphelinat de Saint-Joseph, 14 novembre 1882,” *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* 18 (1885): 296. Hereafter cited as *Annales*.

<sup>3</sup> See “Extrait d’une lettre de M. Humblot, prêtre de la Mission; Pékin, 5 septembre 1884,” *Annales* 50 (1885): 84-86. Also see John K. Fairbank, “Patterns Behind the Tientsin Massacre,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20, no. ¾ (December 1957): 480-511.

<sup>4</sup> See “Lettre de la soeur Turrel, Fille de la Charité, à la très honorée Mère Lamartinie; Yao-tcheou, maison de la Médaille miraculeuse, 5 mai 1897,” *Annales* 63 (1898): 88-90.



imprisonments and executions, discuss the legacies these two missionaries left behind both during and after China's imperial era, and convey a handful of anecdotes regarding my recent personal encounters with their Vincentian footprints during recent trips to Beijing, Tianjin, and Wuhan.<sup>5</sup>

*Lives and the Context of Persecution:*

The Vincentian footprints in China began with the first footprints of young Vincent, who made tracks in the French soil of Gascony along with his four brothers and two sisters. After graduating in theology at Toulouse, Vincent was ordained a priest in 1600 and later, according to two perhaps specious letters, captured by Turkish pirates in 1605 and taken to Tunis, where he declared, though later seemed to retract, that he was sold into slavery.<sup>6</sup> After 1607 the details of his life grow less vague, and in 1625 he at last founded the Congregation of the Mission (from which the present usage of the word "missionary" is derived), and missionary priests began to be trained and dispatched to foreign places. The early Vincentian missionaries had as their motto, taken from the Vulgate rendering of the gospel of Luke, "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me,*" or "He sent me to preach the gospel to the poor."<sup>7</sup>

Vincent's tracks led into the most impoverished areas of France, and the Vincentian footprints in China likewise strode into the country's rural and urban destitution. Writing to one of his confreres, François-Regis Clét recalled that:

Nearly all of our Christians are poor. Most of them live in wretched huts that afford but slight protection against cold and rain. At least two-thirds of them lack sufficient clothing to keep them warm during the long, intensely cold winters that we have here in the mountains. They own neither blankets nor mats, and can make themselves comfortable enough to sleep only by burrowing in the straw of their beds.<sup>8</sup>

Also writing home from China, Jean-Gabriel Perboyre noted that not only were the Chinese he encountered, "the poorest of the poor," but the Vincentians themselves were, "half

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<sup>5</sup> The research conducted for this study was made possible by the generous support of a DePaul University Vincentian Studies Institute research grant, awarded by their Editorial Board and administered through the university's Office of Mission and Values.

<sup>6</sup> There are several sources of information regarding the life and apostolate of Vincent de Paul, principally the materials held in the Archives of La Maison-Mère des Lazaristes, in Paris. Also see M. Collet, C.M., *Life of St. Vincent de Paul, Founder of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Sisters of Charity*, trans. by anonymous priest (Baltimore: Metropolitan Press, 1845). For Vincent de Paul's letters, including the two he wrote in 1607 describing his Tunisian adventure, see Pierre Grandchamp, "Lapréendue captivité de Saint Vincent de Paul Tunis (1605-1607)," reprinted in *Cahiers de Tunisie* (1965): 55-57. For the original French see Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Entretiens, Documents*, 14 vols. (Paris, 1920-1926). While likely fallacious, Vincent wrote to his patron, Monsieur de Comet, that he was enslaved in the Mediterranean and experienced a series of unlikely adventures.

<sup>7</sup> See the Vulgate, Luke 4:18-19.

<sup>8</sup> G. de Montgesty, *Two Vincentian Martyrs: Blessed Francis Regis Clét, C.M., Blessed John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M.*, trans. by Florence Gilmore (New York: Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, 1925), 29.



Alexander Rhodes, S.J.

*Courtesy of Archives Missions  
Etrangères de Paris, Paris, France*



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nourished, living on rice and herbs.”<sup>9</sup> The poverty of China was, as they witnessed, more intense even than in their native France.

Interestingly, it was a Jesuit who inspired Vincent to send missionaries to Asia, and it was later the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 that stirred the Propaganda Fide to send large numbers of French Lazarists to China to occupy the now vacant Society missions. As Pierre Coste, C.M. (1873-1935), recounted in his three volume study of Saint Vincent, it was the popular reports of the Jesuit missionary to Asia, Alexander Rhodes, S.J. (1591-1660), that motivated Vincent to submit a letter to Rome in 1653, requesting permission for Lazarist priests to establish a mission in China. Vincent wrote:

Having learned of the surprising progress of the Christian faith in the kingdom of... China, we have felt our hearts burn with an ardent desire to go to the relief of those people who are buried in the darkness of error and are now beginning to hear the call of Jesus Christ the Sun of Justice.<sup>10</sup>

Typical of Vincent’s legendary pragmatism, he mentioned that the Congregation of the Mission already has:

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Coste, C.M., *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, 3 Vols. (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1953), 3:286-287.



...in Paris at present three chosen priests, of well-known probity and utterly devoted to this hard and difficult cause, who are ready to undertake for Christ's sake a journey full of dangers, and to labor all their life without respite in distant lands.<sup>11</sup>

I quote from Vincent's letter as there is no better description of the motives and experiences of those later Vincentians who at last made their way into the Middle Kingdom.

The first Vincentian arrived in China in 1699, but due to internecine conflicts between Catholic Orders in China, largely related to the unfortunate Rites Controversy, a collective Lazarist presence was not established in the country until 1785.<sup>12</sup> It was in the immediate wake of this era of tension and uncertainty that Clét and Perboyre fashioned new missionary tracks on Chinese soil. One can imagine these two French missionaries couched between two unfriendly cultural contexts; behind them, in their native France, was the fanatic anticlericalism of the French Revolution (1787-1799), and before them, in China, was an increasingly anti-foreign government that had already illegalized Western missionaries and their religion.

Emperor Yongzheng's 雍正 (r. 1722-1735) edict of 1727 is one example of official rhetoric condemning Catholic teachings, which he rebuked as, "without regard for the truth," "injurious to the ways of the world," and "heterodox."<sup>13</sup> It must be noted also that Clét and Perboyre were in deliberate violation of Qing 清代 (1644-1911) law when they entered China, and that local officials were surprisingly tolerant of their long and very apparent presence in the culturally conservative provinces of Jiangxi, Henan, and Hubei (then known as Huguang). It is quite remarkable that Chinese officials turned a blind eye to illegal foreign missionaries for as long as they did; Clét was in China for twenty-eight years, and Perboyre for five, before the local authorities finally moved to halt their illegal proselytization.

In the late-eighteenth century, the Buddhist millenarian White Lotus Sect 白蓮教 had reemerged in northern China (especially in Shandong), and led an anti-Qing rebellion. Christianity's eschatological message appeared suspiciously similar to these rebels, and thus the court turned a more apprehensive eye toward foreigners who brought this evidently "heterodox" teaching.<sup>14</sup> After the successful suppression of the White Lotus Rebellion (1794-1804), a Chinese Catholic was arrested in Beijing in 1811 carrying Western-language

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>12</sup> For a general account of the Rites Controversies, two sources render disparate views: for an account sensitive to the Jesuit perspective see George Minamaki, S.J., *The Chinese Rites Controversy: From its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986); and for a work more attuned to the Dominican view see J. S. Cummins, *A Question of Rites: Friar Domingo Navarrete and the Jesuits in China* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism, 1860-1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 13.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of Chinese millenarian movements see Jean Chesneau, ed., *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), especially pages 24-25 for a brief account of the White Lotus Sect and its connection with Maitreya Buddha's future coming.



St. François-Regis Clét, C.M., beside his cross.

*St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online*

[stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu](http://stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu)



documents for the local bishop. The court suspected the Catholics of anti-Qing espionage, and an imperial edict was published that both reasserted legal prohibitions against foreign missionaries and commanded, “all [Chinese] Christians to denounce their religion before the end of the year.”<sup>15</sup> It was into this political climate that Clét and Perboyre persisted in administering the sacraments, preaching, and catechizing new believers. There is little mystery, then, as to what precipitated the arrests of these two Vincentians in 1819 and 1839, respectively.

#### *Deaths and the Tradition of Miracles:*

A severe anti-Christian persecution began in 1818, and François-Regis Clét was forced to hide in caves, wooded areas, and finally in the home of a Chinese Catholic family in Hunan province, where he remained for about six months.<sup>16</sup> On 16 June 1819, Clét’s location was revealed by an apostate Catholic, and a group of Qing troops seized him, locked chains around his wrists, neck, and ankles, and placed him in prison. He was then subjected to a series of difficult court trials. As was normal procedure, Clét was instructed to *beijiao* 背教, or apostatize by stepping on a cross; refusing this he was made to kneel on chains while his face was beaten with a leather strap until his jawbone was dislocated and his forehead was cruelly cut.<sup>17</sup> Later, Clét was transferred to prisons at Kaifeng and Wuchang, where he was further interrogated and tortured. On the journey between Kaifeng and Wuchang, he was so badly beaten that a witness recorded his condition: his “clothes were stained

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-Yves Ducourneau, C.M., “To the Extremes of Love,” trans. by John Rybolt, C.M., *Vincentiana* 49:1 (January-February 2001): 27-28.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>17</sup> See Montgesty, *Two Vincentian Martyrs*, 81.



Luminous Light Miracle of St. Jean-Gabriel  
Perboyre, C.M.

*St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online*

[stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu](http://stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu)



with blood from cuts and wounds caused by the blows and ill usage to which he had been subjected during the journey.”<sup>18</sup> At last, on 18 February 1820, Clét was executed by slow strangulation, as the emperor had decreed, which was customary for “criminals” of his kind; a placard displayed beside him read, “*Chuanxie jiaoshi*” 傳邪教士, or “Transmitter of heterodox teachings.”

The circumstances of Jean-Gabriel Perboyre’s martyrdom, only two decades later, are remarkably similar to Clét’s. After living in China under the prolonged anxiety of consistent anti-Christian persecution, Perboyre was arrested, betrayed by a Christian member of his small mountain community in a village near Wuhan. He, like Clét, was transferred from city-to-city, and he underwent extended interrogations in which he was also charged to trample on a crucifix and reject his faith. As severe as Clét’s tortures had been, Perboyre’s were even more relentless. The former bishop of Ningbo, China, François-Alexis Rameaux, C.M. (1802-1845), recounted that Perboyre was, “interrogated and endured all the sufferings reserved for the worst criminals: he was made to kneel on iron chains, on pieces of broken crockery, and beaten in all sorts of ways, with the result that his flesh fell off him in strips.”<sup>19</sup> Near the end of 1838 he was transferred to a final prison at Wuchang, where his foot was fastened by iron shackles to his cell wall and the resulting lack of circulation caused a portion to rot away.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Davitt, C.M., “John Gabriel Perboyre,” *Vincentiana* 6:2 (October 1986): 223.

<sup>20</sup> See André Sylvestre, C.M., *Jean-Gabriel Perboyre: Prêtre de la Mission, Martyr en Chine* (Moissac, 1994), 190-191.





Luminous Light Miracle of the four  
Dominican martyrs of China.

*Courtesy of Archives Missions Etrangères de  
Paris, Paris, France*



In a letter written in 1840, Rameaux mentions that during one of his examinations Perboyre was lashed with a bamboo stick 100 times on his body and seventy on his mouth.<sup>21</sup> In addition, he was forced to drink steaming dog's blood — a popular Chinese remedy against magic — dressed in his vestments and ridiculed; the characters “*chuanxie jiaoshi*” were inscribed onto his face with an iron stylus.<sup>22</sup> At last, on 11 December 1840, the emperor ratified Perboyre's decree of punishment, and he was escorted to the execution ground where he was strangled with a chord that was tightened and released three times to protract his torment. Chinese hagiographies note that his death occurred on a Friday, from noon to three PM, which connects his death to Christ's Passion.<sup>23</sup>

Among the more curious aspects of the hagiographical narratives attached to Perboyre are the miracle accounts that have acquired a noticeable patina of ancient Chinese cultural tropes. In the anonymous biography, *Life of Blessed John Perboyre*, published in 1894, we find a Lazarist missionary's letter quoted which reads, “When the servant of God was martyred, a large cross, luminous, and very distinctly formed appeared in the heavens.” We are informed, presumably in anticipation of a formal cause for beatification, that this luminous apparition was witnessed by both “Christians and pagans.”<sup>24</sup> This

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<sup>21</sup> See Ferdinand Combaluzier, C.M., “Vincentian letters related to Jean-Gabriel Perboyre,” in *Nouvelle Revue de Science Missionnaire* (1953): 253-254.

<sup>22</sup> Taiwan Roman Catholic Bishops Committee 天主教台灣地區主教團, *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan* 中華殉道聖人傳 [Biographies of China's Catholic Martyr Saints] (Taipei 臺北: Tianzhujiao Taiwan diqu zhujiao tuan 天主教台灣地區主教團, 2000), 135. Also see Anthony E. Clark, *China's Saints: Catholic Martyrdom During the Qing (1644-1911)* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press and Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 163.

<sup>23</sup> *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan*, 136.

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous, *Life of Blessed John Perboyre, Priest of the Congregation of the Mission, Martyred in China, September 11th, 1840* (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1894), 256. Also see *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan*, 136.



Luminous Light Miracle of the Franciscan martyrs  
of Shanxi, China.

*Courtesy of Archivio Curia Generalizia Ordo Fratrum  
Minorum, Rome, Italy*



description appears in nearly all Western accounts of Perboyre's death, including several French hagiographies, and the Vatican's *Processus* and *Positio* compiled for his possible canonization. The appearance of a luminous sign in the sky also figures in other Catholic martyrdom accounts in Chinese sources; indeed, such signs already existed in Chinese lore long before Christianity had entered the Middle Kingdom.

Just before four Dominican missionaries were executed in 1747 for "disseminating heterodox teachings," we are told in various sources that an apparition of light appeared in their prison cell.<sup>25</sup> The miracle happened while the four Spanish friars were awaiting final news of their sentence from Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1735-1796), who had before the Rites debate been an enduring patron of the Catholic mission in his empire. Hagiographical accounts include an alleged witness of the phenomenon:

有一天，白主教和德神父，華神父三人；在念經的時候；監獄屋頂，忽然敞開，射出幾道火光；光雲一朵朵的徐徐下降，直到主教和神父的床邊；然後就升上。且自床邊透出一道光線，可以望見天空，真真美妙非常。

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<sup>25</sup> See Clark, *China's Saints*, 78-81.



Execution ground (shachang 殺場) of François-Regis Clét and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre.

*Courtesy of Archives Missions Etrangères de Paris, Paris, France*



One day while Bishop Peter Sanz, O.P., Father Francis Serrano, O.P., and Father Joachim Royo, O.P., were reciting their prayers, the prison roof suddenly opened. Rays of lights shot through and a brilliant cloud slowly descended down beside their beds. Then it rose up and turned into a beam of light that rose from beside their beds and could be seen in the sky. It was truly remarkable!<sup>26</sup>

In subsequent Chinese narratives of Christian massacres during the Boxer Uprising (1898-1900), similar miracle accounts appear.

While twenty-six Catholics were being executed on 9 July 1900, in Taiyuan, the provincial capital of Shanxi, a group of nearly 200 faithful were gathered in prayer at a nearby church. A Chinese Catholic named Jia Luosa 賈羅撒 reported that:

7月9日下午約四，五點鐘，我們正在念經，忽聞空中有美妙的秦樂聲，這樂聲從未聽過。在樂聲之處，出現了一潔白雲帶，由西南方向而來，漂往動方向。On July 9, at around 4:00 or 5:00 PM, we were reciting our prayers when we suddenly heard a magnificent sound of music that came out of the sky, such that has never before been heard. A pure white stream of light emitted from where the music was heard; it came from the southeast and drifted toward the northwest.<sup>27</sup>

The recorded apparitions of light connected to the deaths of the two Vincentian martyrs of China, and those of the mendicant Dominicans and Franciscans – who were also canonized in 2000 – conform to a long Chinese history of validating the distinctive significance of important persons. We see that as early as the second century BC, Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145-186 BC) *Shiji* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian] contained similar examples.

<sup>26</sup> *Zhonghua xundao shengren zhuan*, 78.

<sup>27</sup> Testimonial of Jia Luosa 賈羅撒, quoted in Qin Geping 秦格平, *Taiyuan jiaoqu jianshi* 太原教區簡史 [Concise History of the Catholic Diocese of Taiyuan] (Taiyuan 太原: Catholic Diocese of Taiyuan 太原天主教教區, 2008), 321.



In his biography of Emperor Gaozu 漢高祖 (r. 206-195 BC), Sima Qian wrote that, “The First Emperor of Qin, repeatedly declaring that there were signs in the southeastern sky indicating the presence of a ‘Son of Heaven,’ decided to journey east to suppress the threat to his power.”<sup>28</sup> Beams of light and curious emanations in the sky frequently appear in Chinese texts before missionaries entered China during the Tang dynasty 唐代 (618-907), and Catholic hagiographies during the Ming 明代 (1368-1644) and Qing perpetuated this trope.

Perboyre’s fellow Vincentian missionary in China, Jean-Henri Baldus, C.M. (1811-1869), who was made a bishop five years after Jean-Gabriel’s death, voiced skepticism regarding the authenticity of the luminous cross report. In 1851, Baldus wrote of his doubts in a letter, wherein he noted the credulity of uneducated Chinese Christians, and added that even European hagiographies share a “taste for the wonderful and miraculous” that often “leads to exaggeration.”<sup>29</sup> But in the end, Baldus doubted his own uncertainty enough to allow mention of the miraculous apparition in the narratives prepared for Perboyre’s cause for beatification. Despite some persisting questions related to the accuracy of historical sources regarding Clét and Perboyre, their holiness and genuine concern for China, and the successful work of the mission, is generally accepted. Jean-Gabriel Perboyre was canonized a saint on 2 June 1996, and François-Regis Clét was canonized on 1 October 2000.

Beyond recounting the lives and deaths of these two martyrs, my principal aim here is to trace the later footprints of those Catholic missionaries and pilgrims who followed in their tracks, and locate what signs remain today of Clét and Perboyre’s Vincentian legacy in the Middle Kingdom. When the Maryknoll father, James A. Walsh, M.M. (1867-1936), made his first tour of China in 1918, one of the highlights was his visit to the place where Clét and Perboyre were executed in Wuchang, near the banks of the Yangze River. In his lengthy memoirs, Walsh described how an American Franciscan, Father Sylvester Espelage, O.F.M. (1877-1940), escorted him to the Qing dynasty execution ground (*shachang* 殺場) where the two Vincentians were strangled. He wrote, “Here on a slight hillock we found the place where Blessed Perboyre was crucified, a place still used at times for executions.”<sup>30</sup> During a recent trip to China I learned that neither the Vincentians in Beijing nor the local Chinese priests of Wuhan/Wuchang were able to note the precise location of the old imperial execution ground where these saints died; I shall return to this problem shortly.

### *Vincentian Footprints Today:*

Only twelve years after Perboyre’s death in 1840, Vincentian missionaries were filing into China in increasing numbers. By 1852 twenty-five Lazarists served in China, and the

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<sup>28</sup> Translated in Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty I*, Burton Watson, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 54. The original Chinese account can be located in Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian] (Beijing 北境: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1982), 348.

<sup>29</sup> In Davitt, “Perboyre,” 227.

<sup>30</sup> James A. Walsh, *Observations in the Orient: The Account of a Journey to Catholic Mission Fields in Japan, Korea, Manchuria, China, Indo-China, and the Philippines* (Ossining, N.Y.: Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, 1919), 135.



Beijing North Church/Cathedral (a.k.a., Xishiku jiaotang 西什庫教堂), 1937 (at left); and a portrait of Bishop Pierre-Marie-Alphonse Favier, C.M.

*Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*



Vincentian seminary in Beijing was training thirty-six seminarians, many of whom were native Chinese who were keenly aware of Clét and Perboyre's examples of sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> The Congregation's commitment to training native clergy, which fundamentally distinguished it from other Catholic Orders, resulted in a large number of Chinese Vincentian priests and brothers placed throughout China just prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. According to statistics for 1936-1937, there were 260 major seminarians and 875 minor seminarians in China; 637 priests had been educated by the Lazarists in China, 450 of whom joined the Congregation.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, by the early-to-mid twentieth century the Vincentian presence in China had grown to considerable size, with several major centers: Beijing, Tianjin, and to some extent, Wuchang — where there was a growing Catholic sense that Clét and Perboyre were important local saints.

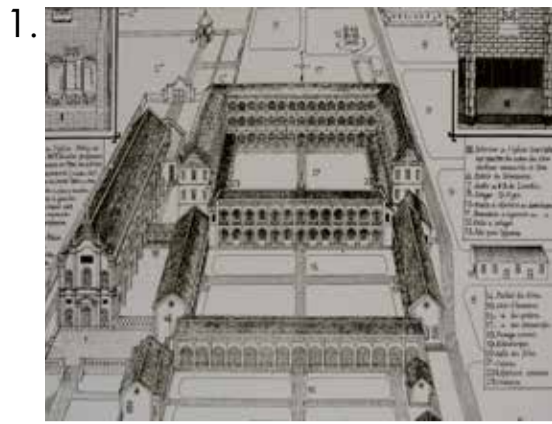
Noticeable Vincentian footprints remain in these three regions today, and more effort is needed to preserve what is left after the destructive Maoist era, from 1949 to 1976. In Beijing, the most eminent Vincentian was the portly bishop of the North Cathedral, Pierre-Marie-Alphonse Favier, who famously survived the brutal attacks against his church during the Boxer Uprising of 1900, and became an important local historian of Beijing.<sup>33</sup> The other Vincentian center in Beijing was the Lazarist seminary dedicated to Saint Vincent at Zhalan Cemetery 柵欄墓地 where Matteo Ricci's, S.J. (1552-1610), tomb is located. Today all that remains of Saint Vincent's Seminary are two of the cloistered buildings beside Ricci's tomb and the remains of a Marist convent. The old Vincentian seminary is called the "mouth"

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<sup>31</sup> Robert P. Maloney, C.M., "Vincentians in China" (unpublished manuscript, 1999), 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Favier maintained an active writing schedule while serving as Beijing's ordinary. Indeed, his book on the history and culture of Beijing remains one of the most useful scholarly sources available on this city's late-imperial past. See Alphonse Favier, C.M., *Pékin: Histoire*. His most famous published work, however, is his journal, which he kept during the Boxer siege against the cathedral from June to August, 1900. See Alphonse Favier, C.M., *The Heart of Peking: Bishop A. Favier's Diary of the Siege, May-August, 1900*, J. Freri, ed. (Boston: Marlier & Co., 1901).



1) Diagrammatic drawing of St. Vincent Seminary at Zhalan Cemetery, Beijing (detail); 2) Tomb of Matteo Ricci, S.J., Zhalan Cemetery, Beijing; 3) Vincentian Seminary – called the “Mouth” Building (kou 口), Zhalan Cemetery, Beijing; 4) Marist Convent – called the “Mountain” Building (shan 山), Zhalan Cemetery, Beijing.

*All Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*



building, as its plan is shaped like the Chinese character *kou*, or 口 “mouth,” and the Marist convent is identified as the “mountain” building, since it is shaped like the graph *shan* 山.<sup>34</sup> The Jesuit cemetery, Marist convent, and Vincentian seminary all now comprise the Beijing Communist Party School.

As an historian what interested me most while tracing the Vincentian history of Beijing was the question of what happened to the materials of the seminary’s library during the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution 文化大革命 (1966-1976). In 1966, Red Guards from a nearby architectural school attacked the cemetery and buildings with the intention of destroying all of the historic tombstones and structures. However, according to official accounts, an employee “came up with the idea of burying the tombstones deeply under the slogan of ‘forever buried, never stand up again.’”<sup>35</sup> The Red Guards were assuaged; the

<sup>34</sup> Two works provide a good summary of the history of Zhalan Jesuit Cemetery and associated Catholic buildings. See Lin Hua 林華, ed., *Lishi yihen Li Madou ji Ming Qing xifang chuanjiaoshi mudi* 歷史遺痕利瑪竇及明清西方傳教士墓地 [Historical Traces of Matteo Ricci and the Ming-Qing Dynasties Western Missionary Tomb] (Beijing 北京: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe 中國人民大學出版社, 1994); and Beijing Administrative College, eds., *History Recorded by the Stones: The 400 Year Story of the Cemetery of Matteo Ricci and Other Foreign Missionaries* (Beijing: Beijing Administrative College, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Beijing Administrative College, *History Recorded by the Stones*, 89.





Books from the Zhalan Vincentian Seminary Library, now at the Beijing Diocesan Library. Photograph by author.

*Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*



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1) Xikai Cathedral (a.k.a., Saint Joseph's). Photograph by author; 2) Frédéric-Vincent Lebbe, C.M., at Tianjin, China; 3) Bishop's Residence at Xikai Cathedral. Photograph by author.

*All Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*



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tombstones were buried beneath the ground and the buildings were left standing. After the Cultural Revolution, the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs ordered that the cemetery and buildings be restored, though the contents of the Vincentian seminary library were already gone. It is widely known that the Vincentian library at North Cathedral was relocated to the National Library of China, where they are still inaccessible without special permission. The library of Saint Vincent's Seminary, however, was divided and the location of its contents was mostly forgotten. After some inquiries I discovered that a portion of the Western language collection of the seminary has survived the Maoist era, and is now located in the new library of the Catholic Seminary of the Diocese of Beijing 北京教區神哲學院, which



Red Guard attack on  
Xikai Cathedral, Tianjin 1966.

*Anthony E. Clark Private Collection*



Remains of the Vincentian Library in the  
Bishop's Residence, Tianjin; and Anthony  
Clark assessing the Vincentian Library in  
the Bishop's Residence, Tianjin.

*Courtesy of History of Christianity in  
China Archive, Whitworth University,  
Spokane, WA; and Anthony E. Clark Private  
Collection, respectively*

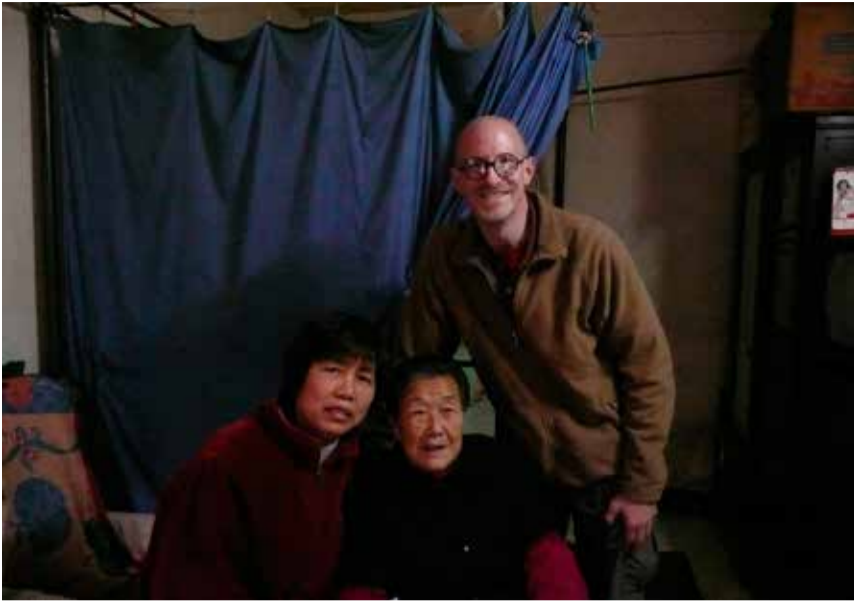
began construction in 2001. Unfortunately, the old Lazarist books are not well catalogued and are rarely used, as the seminarians do not read French.<sup>36</sup>

The second center of Vincentian activity before 1949 was the coastal city of Tianjin, where the famous Xikai Cathedral 西開教堂 (a.k.a., Saint Joseph's) was built by French Lazarists in 1913. Tianjin is where the notable Vincentian missionary Frédéric-Vincent Lebbe, C.M. (1877-1940), lived, and where he formed a small movement to liberate the Catholic community in China from foreign control. Lebbe and his Maryknoll friend, Anthony Cotta, M.M. (1872-1957), were outspoken critics of European dominance in the China mission, and Lebbe himself became a Chinese citizen to better advocate a more indigenous hierarchy.<sup>37</sup> The bishop's residence beside the church held one of China's finest Western and Chinese-language Catholic libraries.

By 1951 the European Vincentians were exiled from China as "imperialist counterrevolutionaries," and in the haste of their withdrawal they left behind precious books; the Chinese priests who remained had little time to attend to the rare books, photos,

<sup>36</sup> For a concise history of the present Beijing seminary see: *Catholic Seminary of Beijing Diocese* 北京教區神哲學院 (Beijing 北京: Diocese of Beijing 北京教區, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> See Jacques Leclercq, *Thunder in the Distance: The Life of Père Lebbe*, George Lamb, trans. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958). Father Anthony Cotta was a former Vincentian. The anonymously written and published Chinese work, *Lei Mingyuan yu Zhongguo* 雷鳴遠與中國 [Vincent Lebbe and China], is widely read today in northern China, and serves to inspire many Chinese Catholics.



Catholic woman, Gan Yulan, 甘玉蘭  
and Anthony Clark, Wuchang.

*Anthony E. Clark Private Collection*



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and documents of the library and archive. The bishop's residence was protected until 1966, when Red Guards stormed the cathedral library, carried the most accessible books out onto the street and burned them in front of the cathedral while chanting Maoist slogans. The radicals only took the first few shelves of books, however, consisting mostly of bibles, which are less rare than the works they fortuitously left behind.<sup>38</sup>

For several decades now local authorities have restricted access to the site of this old library, and scholars and foreign clergy have been unable to verify rumors that much of this Vincentian library remains intact. In a 2011 trip to Tianjin I met with the rector of Xikai Cathedral, Father Leo Zhang Liang 張良神父, who, after extended negotiation, granted me permission to conduct preliminary research on the history of what remains of the Vincentian library, and to produce an initial catalog of the library's present condition and contents.

With the exception of the 1966 Red Guard destruction, the Vincentian library and archive at Tianjin has remained mostly locked and untouched since foreign missionaries left in the 1950s; the materials have suffered from dust, vermin, and mildew, and most of the shelves are beginning to collapse from long-neglect. Based on a preliminary estimate of the library's contents, there are nearly 500 linear feet of books, more than 5,000 volumes, rare maps, and scattered documents left by the Vincentians in 1951. The library remains located on the original two floors of the bishop's residence, and is monitored by the cathedral's rector and the chairman of the Tianjin Catholic Patriotic Association. Among the materials is a complete series of *Le Bulletin Catholique de Pékin*, a series of the *Annales des Franciscaines Missionnaires de Marie*, the annuals from the former Tianjin Vincentian school, Saint Joseph's, and a large number of books related to the Vincentian mission in China. Also of significance is the library's collection of Chinese-language Catholic materials, some dating to the late-imperial era.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Father Leo Zhang Liang 張良神父, at Xikai Cathedral, Tianjin, China, 26 October 2011.





Execution ground of François-Regis Clét and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre (photograph taken in 2008).

*Anthony E. Clark Private Collection*



Bearing in mind that Clét and Perboyre's memory still influences Catholic culture in Beijing and Tianjin, I also visited Wuchang in 2008 (now incorporated into the city boundaries of Wuhan), where they were martyred in 1820 and 1840 respectively. While in Wuhan, presently celebrated mainly for its central role in the anti-Qing movements of 1911, I was provided with the vicar general/cathedral rector's car and driver, and escorted to a location "believed to be near the old Qing execution ground."<sup>39</sup> As the priests of Wuhan no longer know precisely where the execution ground was, they routinely send pilgrims or visiting scholars to what is currently a Catholic elderly residence in Wuchang, actually quite distant from the location where Clét and Perboyre were martyred.

I began to interview the older occupants of the neighborhood, and was recommended by residents to visit a certain woman, Gan Yulan 甘玉蘭, who, as they informed me, was alive during the closing years of the Qing, and lived near the site of the *Qingchao shachang* 清朝殺, or "Qing dynasty execution ground." Based on extant sources we know that the execution ground was located near Lake Sha (*shahu* 沙湖), not too far from Big Mountain (*hongshan* 洪山: this location is mistakenly identified in Western sources as "Red Mountain" because the name sounds similar — *hongshan* 紅山), where their graves were situated.<sup>40</sup> Gan Yulan, who was too frail to accompany me and still constrained by bound feet, provided the exact location of Wuchang's execution ground where Clét and Perboyre were strangled to death; the elderly residents at the location also confirmed the precise site of the *shachang*.

The old execution ground is nestled within an area called Phoenix Hill (*Fenghuangshan* 鳳凰山), and is now obscured from view behind a tall apartment building; the current address is Wuhan 武漢, Wuchangqu 武昌區, Zhongshan Road 中山路, Number 313 三一

<sup>39</sup> The vicar general/cathedral rector was Father Shen Guoan 沈國安; it was also Father Shen who informed me that the precise location of where Clét and Perboyre were executed was no longer known. Interview with Father Shen Guoan, St. Joseph's Cathedral, Wuhan, China, 24 November 2008.

<sup>40</sup> For an extended Chinese account of Perboyre's execution see *Zhonghua xundau shengren zhuan*, 132-238. The entry is under Perboyre's Chinese name, Dong Wenxue 董文學.



Anthony Clark beside the memorial stelae of François-Regis Clét and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, at the Catholic Seminary, Wuchang.

*Anthony E. Clark Private Collection*



三號. The aged door guard of the apartment complex was enthusiastic in his recollections, recalling stories he had heard about the executions conducted there during the late-imperial era.

The second matter I investigated was the present location of Clét and Perboyre's commemorative gravestones, hidden by a local Catholic during the Maoist era. As was customary, their bodies remained briefly on display after their executions — Perboyre's corpse, for example, was not removed from its gibbet until the following day. They were eventually taken by local Catholics for funerary services, then buried at Big Mountain (*hongshan* 洪山) and marked with memorial stelae. Later, their bodies were removed to the Lazarist Motherhouse (La Maison-Mère) in Paris. This caused considerable disquiet among the Chinese Catholic community that had hoped to keep their bodies in China for veneration by the native Church. The gravestones were relocated to the home of a local Catholic and their whereabouts forgotten — or deliberately concealed — until after the Cultural Revolution.

The Chinese bishop of Wuhan, Bernadine Dong Guangqing, O.F.M. 董光清 (1917-2007), conducted a search for the commemorative stelae, and commissioned their restoration and installation at the Wuchang Huayuanshan Catholic Church and Seminary 武昌花園山天主堂神哲學院.<sup>41</sup> The monuments are now displayed in the seminary courtyard near the central statue of Our Lady, and the seminarians routinely place flowers near the stelae and invoke the intercession of Clét and Perboyre in their private prayers. In an interview with Father Joseph Peng Xin 彭新神父, a local priest, I was informed that local authorities are comparatively “strict” regarding Catholic activities in that diocese. He noted that any

<sup>41</sup> See André Sylvestre, C.M., *John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M.: China's First Saint*, John E. Rybolt, C.M., trans. (Strasbourg: Éditions du Signe, 1996), 32. Bernadine Dong Guangqing was the first bishop ordained without a papal mandate, and was made bishop of the diocese of Hankou in 1958 by the Patriotic Catholic Association. He was appointed president of the Patriotic Catholic Association of Wuhan, vice president of the National Administrative Committee of the Chinese Catholic Church, and was a member of the Chinese University of Catholic Bishops.





Chinese Christians beside the grave of Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, Wuchang, ca. 1895.

*Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*



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visits to the stelae, and especially the location of Clét and Perboyre's martyrdoms, should remain discrete, and should not involve more than one or two foreigners at a time.<sup>42</sup>

#### *Conclusion:*

The former prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi (1917-1984), once said that, "Martyrdom does not end something, it is only a beginning." If you talk with Chinese Catholics in formerly Vincentian areas such as Beijing and Tianjin, or in Wuchang, where the blood of two Vincentian saints was spilled, they will often conjure Tertullian's (ca. 160-225) adage that, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christianity." Beijing's North Church, once a Vincentian Cathedral, is the largest and most active parish in the capital. The Diocese of Tianjin now boasts over 100,000 Catholics, and Xikai cathedral is rumored to be the largest parish in China. Local Catholics note that the present growth of Catholicism in the city results principally from the witness of the more than sixty Tianjin martyrs of 1870, many of whom were Vincentian priests and nuns.<sup>43</sup> When I met with the seminarians in Wuchang, I was told that Saints Clét and Perboyre are effectively the spiritual fathers of Wuhan's Catholic community.

In a speech given at the University of Chicago in 1933, the famous May Fourth intellectual, Hu Shi (1891-1962), asserted that, "It is true that the Chinese are not so religious as the Hindus, or even as the Japanese; and they are certainly not so religious as the Christian missionaries desire them to be."<sup>44</sup> Hu's remark was once considered prophetic, but is now widely touted as an example of misguided pessimism regarding China's ability to incorporate Christianity into its culture. There are still Vincentians in China today. The Our Lady of China Catholic community at Beijing's British Embassy (Kerry Center) is pastored by a Vincentian. Occasionally an old Chinese priest will let you know that he is,

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Father Joseph Peng Xin, Wuhan, 25 November 2008.

<sup>43</sup> See Maurice Collard, C.M., *Les Martyrs de Tien-Tsin* (Paris: A. Giraudon, 1926).

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Hu Shi 胡適, *Zhongguo de wen yi fu xing* 中國的文藝復興 [The Chinese Renaissance] (Beijing北京: Waiyu jiaoxue yanjiu chubanshe 外語教學研究出版社, 2001), 115.



“a priest of the Mission.” These Lazarists continue in the footsteps of their spiritual father, Vincent de Paul. In a letter to Louis Abelly (1603-1691), vicar general of Bayonne, Vincent wrote what I think best describes the legacies left behind by Saints Clét and Perboyre: “Our Lord and the saints accomplished more by suffering than by acting.”<sup>45</sup>



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<sup>45</sup> Letter 418, “To Louis Abelly, Vicar General of Bayonne, 14 January 1640,” *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. by Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., *et al*, 1-13a & 13b (New York: New City Press, 1985-2010), 2:6.



St. Vincent de Paul, St. François-Regis Clét, C.M., and St. Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, C.M.

*St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online*

[stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu](http://stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu)







Alexander Rhodes, S.J.

*Courtesy of Archives Missions Etrangères  
de Paris, Paris, France*







St. François-Regis Clét, C.M., beside his cross.

*St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online*

[stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu](http://stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu)







Luminous Light Miracle of St. Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, C.M.

*St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online*

[stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu](http://stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu)







Luminous Light Miracle of the four  
Dominican martyrs of China.

*Courtesy of Archives Missions Etrangères  
de Paris, Paris, France*







Luminous Light Miracle of the  
Franciscan martyrs of Shanxi, China.

*Courtesy of Archivio Curia Generalizia  
Ordo Fratrum Minorum, Rome, Italy*



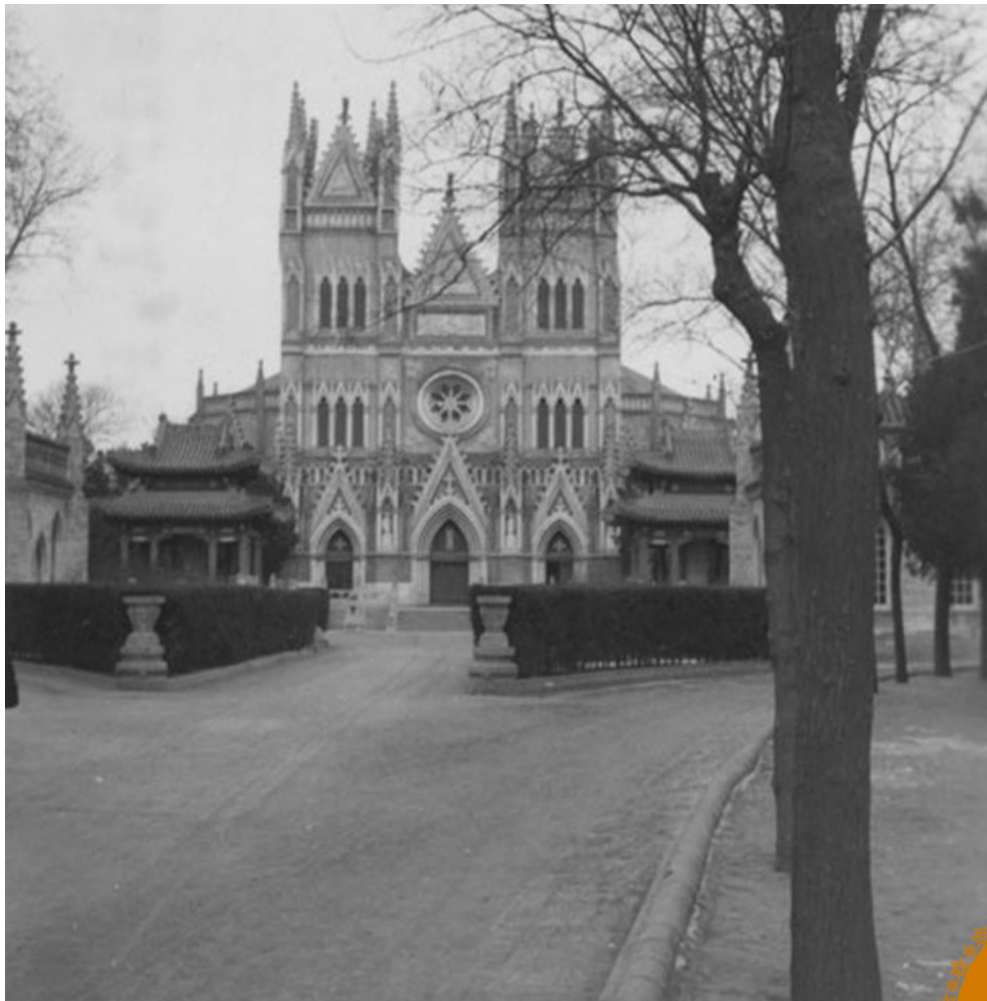


Execution ground (shachang 殺場) of François-Regis Clét and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre.

*Courtesy of Archives Missions Etrangères de Paris, Paris, France*



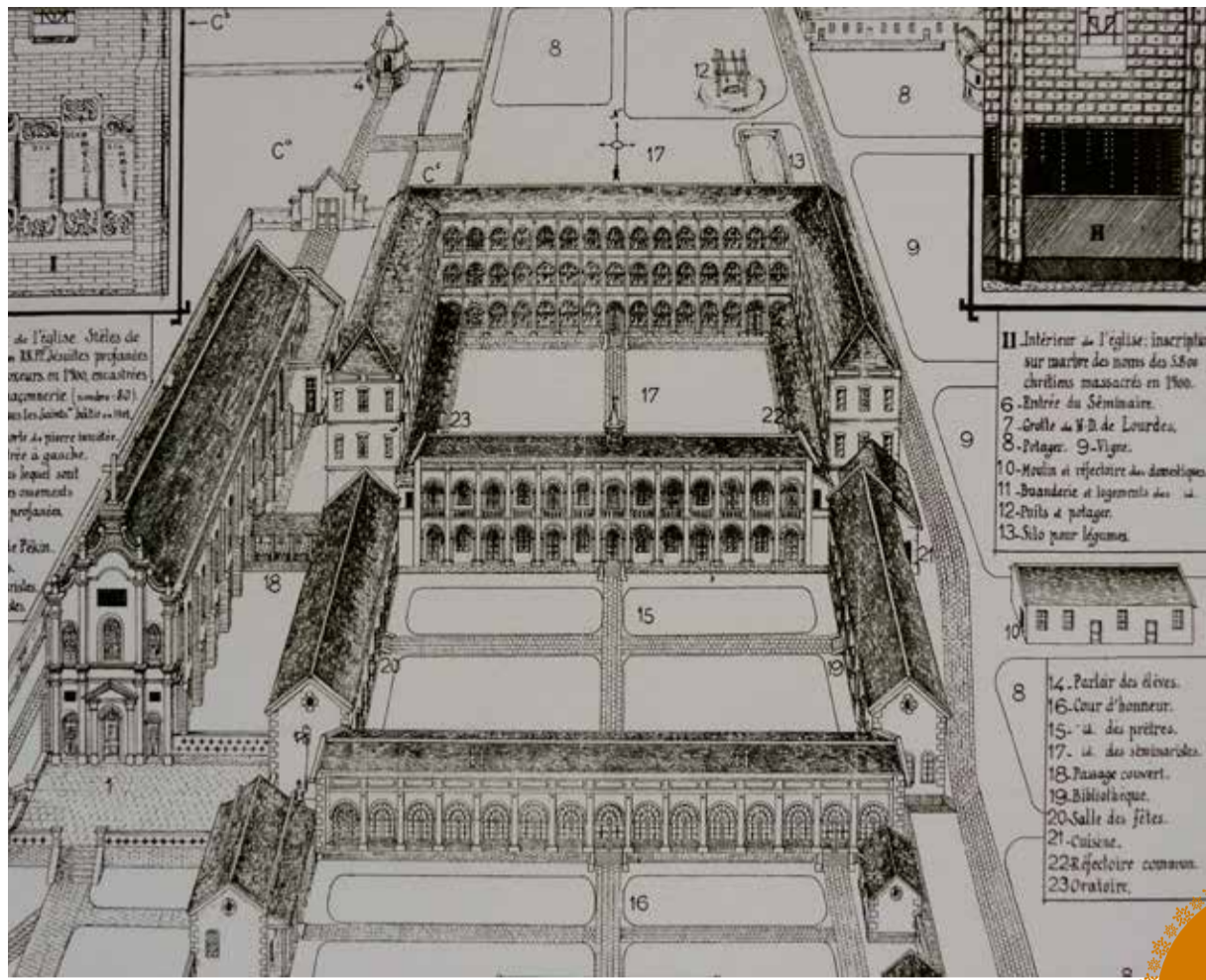




Beijing North Church/Cathedral (a.k.a., Xishiku jiaotang 西什庫教堂), 1937 (top);  
and a portrait of Bishop Pierre-Marie-Alphonse Favier, C.M.

*Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*

1.



2.



1) Diagrammatic drawing of St. Vincent Seminary at Zhulan Cemetery, Beijing (detail);  
2) Tomb of Matteo Ricci, S.J., Zhulan Cemetery, Beijing

*All Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*



3.



4.



3) Vincentian Seminary – called the “Mouth” Building (kou 口), Zhalan Cemetery, Beijing;  
4) Marist Convent – called the “Mountain” Building (shan 山), Zhalan Cemetery, Beijing.

*All Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*





Books from the Zhalan Vincentian Seminary Library, now at the Beijing Diocesan Library. Photograph by author.

*Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive,  
Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*



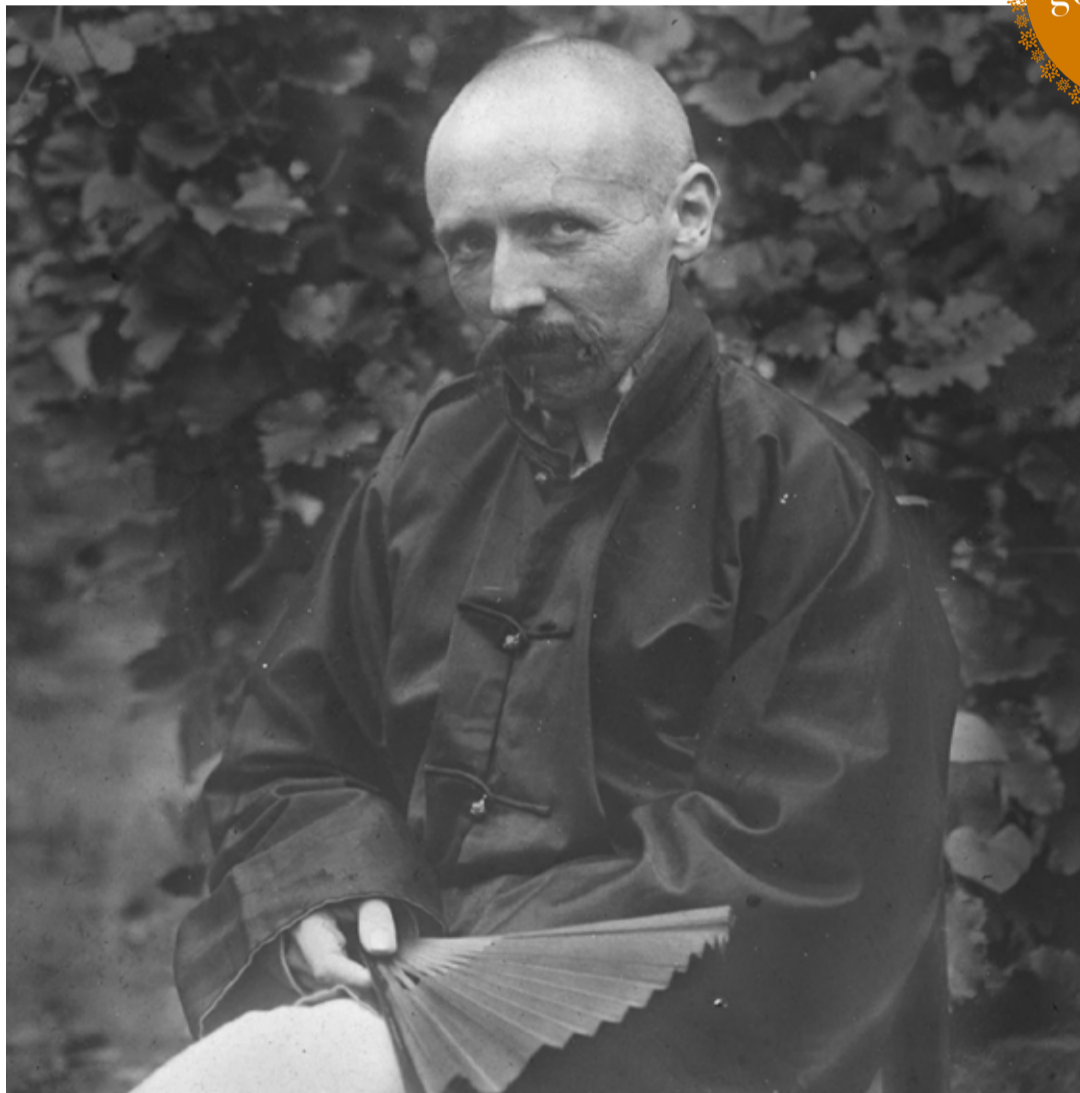


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2.



1) Xikai Cathedral (a.k.a., Saint Joseph's). Photograph by author;  
2) Frédéric-Vincent Lebbe, C.M., at Tianjin, China

*All Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*

3.



3) Bishop's Residence at Xikai Cathedral. Photograph by author.

*All Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive,  
Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*







Red Guard attack on Xikai Cathedral, Tianjin 1966.

*Anthony E. Clark Private Collection*

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Remains of the Vincentian Library in the Bishop's Residence, Tianjin; and Anthony Clark assessing the Vincentian Library in the Bishop's Residence, Tianjin.

*Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA; and Anthony E. Clark Private Collection, respectively*





Catholic woman, Gan Yulan, 甘玉蘭 and Anthony Clark, Wuchang.

*Anthony E. Clark Private Collection*





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Execution ground of François-Regis Clét and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre (photograph taken in 2008).

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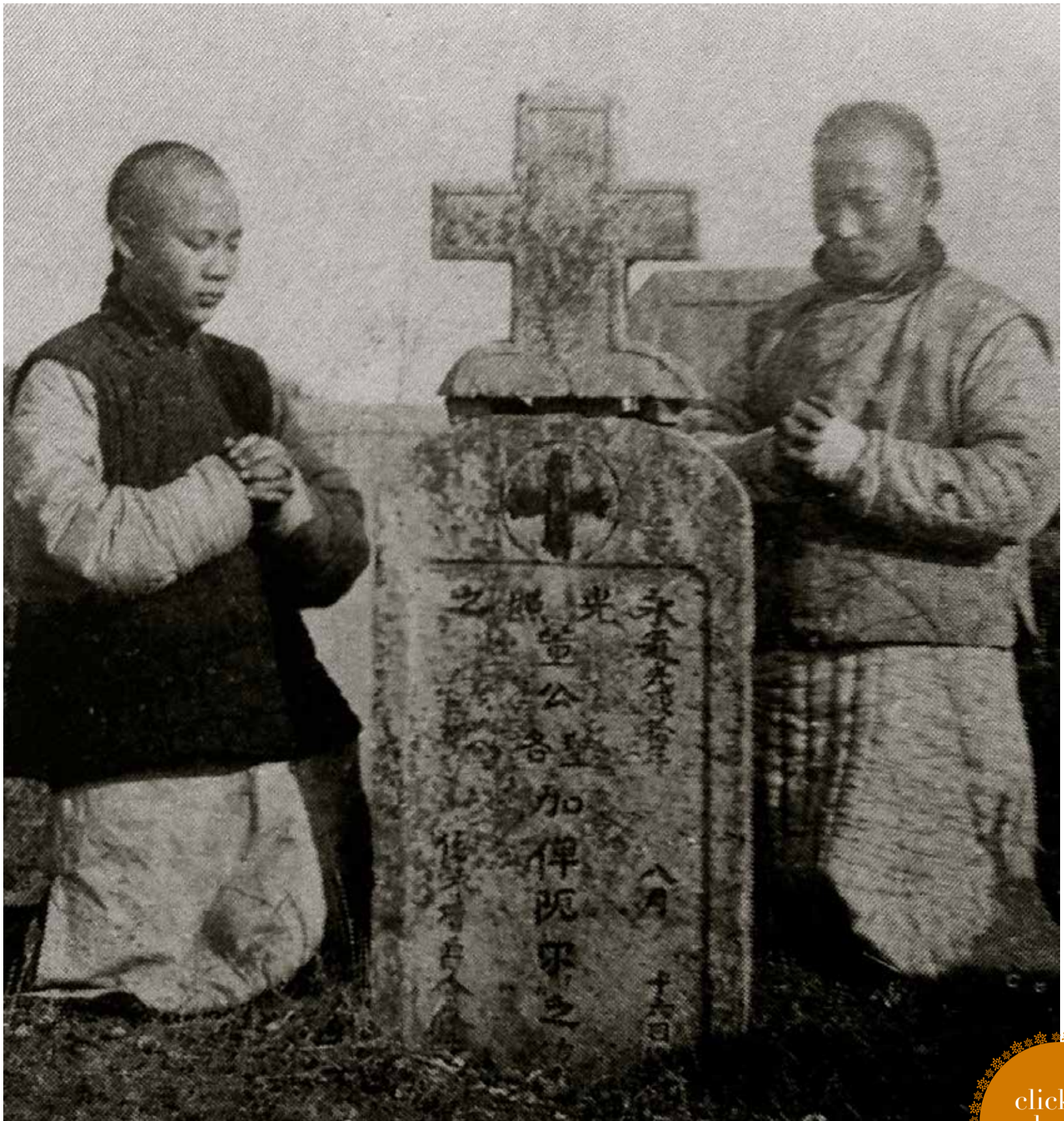


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Anthony Clark beside the memorial stela of François-Regis Clét and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, at the Catholic Seminary, Wuchang.

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Chinese Christians beside the grave of Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, Wuchang, ca. 1895.

*Courtesy of History of Christianity in China Archive,  
Whitworth University, Spokane, WA*



# Frédéric Ozanam: Systemic Thinking, and Systemic Change

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RAYMOND L. SICKINGER, PH.D.

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## Introduction

A number of biographies document the true story of how the young Frédéric Ozanam visited a beleaguered Parisian woman with five children on one of the first visits he made in the spring of 1833.<sup>1</sup> She was in desperate need. When her husband drank to excess — which was often — he became terribly abusive to both her and the children. Nearly all of the wages she herself worked so hard to earn were immediately wasted by him on drink, leaving her children to suffer especially, but not only, from hunger. She was at her wits end when Ozanam visited her. After providing her with the necessary material assistance, Frédéric probed more deeply into the details of her situation. As a young law student he hoped to understand exactly what her legal options might be in order to advise her about advantageous courses of action. Fortuitously he discovered through his legal research that she was never officially married, allowing her the freedom to leave this oppressive household. To assure her, he obtained an official decision from the *Procureur du Roi* stating this fact. When he first informed the woman, Ozanam intimated that she should leave the premises to live elsewhere in Paris with her children. But soon after he realized how great the wrath of the foiled husband was, particularly once he learned of the potential loss of drinking income. The man threatened violence. Concerned for the family's safety, Ozanam suggested a legal procedure to force the man to quit Paris. He took the time, however, to listen carefully to the woman's counsel and, based on her recommendation, he instead sought a legal order that would prevent the husband from leaving Paris. Now the woman would be free to live with her mother in Brittany. A collection was taken up for her travel expenses. When she departed with her youngest children, the two eldest boys, eleven and twelve years of age, were apprenticed with Monsieur Bailly's printing establishment and cared for at the Bailly house.<sup>2</sup> Frédéric had succeeded in working for and with this woman to make the journey out of poverty.<sup>3</sup> In his lifetime Frédéric Ozanam neither heard nor uttered the phrases "systemic change" or "systemic thinking." Yet the story above illustrates a compelling argument that he was committed to helping people move from poverty to a sustainable life, a key element in changing systems that entrap people in poverty.

Thinking about the world as a complex interrelated system rather than as a simple mechanism has been fundamental to modern science, but the actual phrase "systemic change" has most often been applied to the field of education. The term has gradually expanded into other areas, especially the study of poverty and its root causes. It has been

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<sup>1</sup> This story is documented in Kathleen O'Meara, *Frederic Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne, His Life and Works* (New York: The Catholic Publication Society Company, 1891), 64. Hereafter cited as O'Meara, *Life and Works*. The story is related in at least two other publications: in Right Reverend Monsignor Louis Baunard, *Ozanam in His Correspondence* (Dublin: Catholic Truth Society, 1925), 72. Hereafter cited as Baunard, *Ozanam*; and also in Edward O'Connor, S.J., *The Secret of Frederick Ozanam: Founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, LTD., 1953), 32. Hereafter cited as O'Connor, *The Secret of Frederick Ozanam*.

<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Bailly was the first president of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and a member of the initial group of seven that first met in April of 1833.

<sup>3</sup> O'Meara, *Life and Works*, 64; Baunard, *Ozanam*, 72; O'Connor, *The Secret of Frederick Ozanam*, 32.





Frédéric Ozanam, in his academic robes, performing a home visit. Painting by Gary Schumer.

*Courtesy of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, Perryville, Missouri*



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attributed by some to Peter M. Senge, Ph.D., who identified systemic thinking as the “fifth discipline”<sup>4</sup> and inspired the phrase “systemic change.” According to Senge, “Vision without systems thinking ends up painting lovely pictures of the future with no deep understanding of the forces that must be mastered to move from here to there.... Without systems thinking the seed of vision falls on harsh soil.”<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, Senge argues that “systems thinking also needs the disciplines of building shared vision, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery to realize its potential. Building a shared vision fosters a commitment to the long term. Mental models focus on the openness needed to unearth shortcomings in our present ways of seeing the world. Team learning develops the skills of groups of people to look for the larger picture that lies beyond individual perspectives.” He insists, however, that “personal mastery fosters the personal motivation to continually learn how our actions affect our world. Without personal mastery, people are so steeped in the reactive mindset (‘someone/something else is creating my problems’) that they are deeply threatened by the systems perspective.<sup>6</sup> For Senge, the fifth discipline, systems thinking, “integrates the disciplines,” fusing them into

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<sup>4</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 13. Hereafter cited as Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

a coherent body of theory and practice. In the final analysis, he is emphatic that “a shift of mind,” or a change in attitudes, is absolutely crucial to final change.<sup>7</sup>

In 2006, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Reverend Gregory Gay, C.M., responded to the growing interest in systemic change that began with Senge’s work; he formed a commission for the promotion of systemic change. The commission’s expressed mandate was: “To help bring about systemic change through the apostolates of the members of the Vincentian Family,<sup>8</sup> especially those ministering to the oppressed poor.” Once formed, it placed particular emphasis on “self-help and self-sustaining programs,” so that those living in poverty might be “active participants in the planning and realization of the projects envisioned.”<sup>9</sup> Reverend Gay’s call was to all members of the Vincentian Family, to engage in strategies that would help end poverty through systemic change, and to be faithful to Vincentian virtues and values in the process.

According to the definition developed and adopted by the leadership of the international Vincentian Family, systemic change refers to aid that moves “beyond providing food, clothing and shelter to alleviate immediate needs, and enables people themselves to engage in the identification of the root causes of their poverty and to create strategies to change those structures which keep them in poverty.” Just as Peter Senge had intimated, the Vincentian Family also embraced a belief that systemic change “requires changing attitudes that have caused the problem.”<sup>10</sup> In the case of the Parisian mother trapped in an abusive marriage, Frédéric Ozanam indeed moved beyond providing only for immediate needs. He identified a situation that, if left unchanged, would perpetuate a family’s poverty. Acting on this knowledge, Frédéric informed the mother and, more importantly, listened carefully to her wise advice, consequently engaging her directly in strategies that would bring a solution to her problem. Attitudes, including Frédéric’s, were changed in the process. Moreover, in his short lifetime, there is evidence that Frédéric engaged in what might be referred to as systemic thinking because he developed a clear vision for a more charitable and just world, understood the forces that needed to be mastered to achieve that vision, inspired people to participate in the process, attempted to address the political, social, and economic problems that were obstacles in the path of success, and tirelessly worked to change the attitudes of and toward those living in poverty. He, then, has much to offer Vincentians, and others as well, in their effort both to understand and to achieve systemic thinking and systemic change.

The Vincentian publication, *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change* identifies four distinct groups of strategies: Mission-Oriented Strategies; Person-Oriented Strategies;

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Vincentian Family refers to those groups or organizations that were formed in some way by Saint Vincent de Paul and/or that were inspired by his spirituality and vision. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul falls into this latter category.

<sup>9</sup> Robert P. Maloney, C.M., “Commission for Promoting Systemic Change,” *Vincentiana* (January-April 2008): 1, at: [http://cmglobal.org/vincentiana-novus-en/files/downloads/2008\\_1\\_2/vt\\_2008\\_01\\_12\\_en.pdf](http://cmglobal.org/vincentiana-novus-en/files/downloads/2008_1_2/vt_2008_01_12_en.pdf) (Accessed 15 February 2013).

<sup>10</sup> For this definition see: <https://mission.depaul.edu/VincentianIdentity/systemicchange/Documents/Vincentian%20Family%20History.pdf> (Accessed 26 February 2014).



Task-Oriented Strategies; and Strategies for Co-Responsibility, Networking, and Political Action.<sup>11</sup> Within these four groups there are twenty specific strategies that are considered seeds for genuine systemic change. For the purpose of better understanding Frédéric's contributions to a discussion of systemic change, both the twenty strategies in *Seeds of Hope* and Senge's thoughts will serve as the framework. In light of the Vincentian Family desire to foster systemic change, Ozanam is especially relevant, providing us with consistent evidence of both ideas and ideals related to systemic change, as well as possible strategies to achieve it. Much like the twenty strategies, Ozanam's contributions to this discussion as evidenced in his thought and his work may be likened to early seeds of systemic change and systemic thinking.

### **“Regeneration of society”**

At the age of twenty-one, Ozanam identified the crisis in France that would shape his life: “The earth has grown cold. It is for us Catholics to revive the vital beat to restore it, it is for us to begin over again the great work of *regeneration* [my italics]...”<sup>12</sup> After years of revolution and with the onset of industrialization, France faced a difficult future and daunting prospects for resolving its religious, social, political, and economic problems. But Ozanam believed that genuine change could occur, as it had in the past, if there was a profound change in the minds and hearts of his countrymen. Regeneration was his first cherished vision; the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul that he helped to organize was one of the essential efforts to realize this regeneration. Its youthful character was a genuine benefit, and he saw it “situated at the schools' gates, that is, at the wellsprings of the new generation, that generation destined one day to occupy positions where influence is exercised, can give such happy stimulation to our poor French society, and through France, to the whole world.”<sup>13</sup>

After reiterating to his cousin, Henri Pessoneaux, in 1840,<sup>14</sup> his commitment to the great work of “regenerating French society,” he better defined his vision one year later to his fiancé, Amélie Soulacroix. To her he spoke of “a community of faith and works erasing little by little the old divisions of political parties and preparing for a not-too-distant future a new generation which would carry into science, the arts, and industry, into administration,

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<sup>11</sup> Rev. James Keane, S.J., ed., *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change* (St. Louis, MO; The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul for the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change, 2008), 43-48, 76-85, 118-126, and 162-169 respectively. Hereafter cited as Keane, *Seeds of Hope*. See also the Vincentian Family News Blog's *Systemic Change: Seeds of Change* series. This twenty-week series was offered by the members of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change. It highlights the most significant strategies. The series may be accessed at: [http://www.famvin.org/wiki/Systemic\\_Change:\\_Seeds\\_of\\_Change](http://www.famvin.org/wiki/Systemic_Change:_Seeds_of_Change) Any further reference to this series will be simply cited as: *Seeds of Change* series.

<sup>12</sup> “Letter to Léonce Curnier,” 23 February 1835, in Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M., trans., ed., *Frédéric Ozanam: A Life in Letters* (St. Louis: Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Council of the United States, 1986), 64. Hereafter cited as Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*. For the original French text see Léonce Célier, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, and Didier Ozanam, *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam: Lettres de Jeunesse* (1819-1840) (Paris: Bloud and Gay, 1960), v.1, n° 90, 166. Hereafter cited as *Lettres*, v.1.

<sup>13</sup> “Letter to François Lallier,” 7 February 1838, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 131. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 169, 295.

<sup>14</sup> “Letter to Henri Pessoneaux,” 13 March 1840, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 178. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 227, 394.

the judiciary, the bar, the unanimous resolve to make it a moral country, and to become better themselves in order to make others happier.” He readily acknowledged to her that these were “ambitious dreams...”, but also admitted that they consoled him and brought him closer to her.<sup>15</sup> He confessed that every day he witnessed his vision of regeneration becoming a reality. After one celebration of the Society, when he learned that thirty other conferences<sup>16</sup> “in the farthest removed sections of the country” had participated in this solemnity, Ozanam joyfully proclaimed:

How can there not be given some hope to such a strength of association, exerted mainly in the large cities, in every law school, in every enlightened home, upon a generation called to fill a variety of offices and influential posts? And if formerly immorality befell the upper classes, the academies, the judiciary, the military chiefs, the politicians, among the middle class and the people, can we not believe without too much madness that divine Providence calls us to the moral rehabilitation of our country when eight years are enough to raise our number from eight to two thousand, when several of us without the help of intrigue and favor already move in the highest levels of society; when on all sides we invade the bar, medicine, the courts, the professorships; when a single one of our conferences is composed of nearly a third of the *École Normale* and the brightest students of the *École Polytechnique*?<sup>17</sup>

According to *Seeds of Hope*, systemic change strategies should establish “structural and institutional models, where communities can identify their resources and needs, make informed decisions, and exchange information,”<sup>18</sup> as well as “construct a shared vision... toward change.”<sup>19</sup> It was upon this perceived need for “regeneration” that Ozanam constructed his vision and model of an association dedicated to reviving France morally, spiritually, politically, economically, and socially. Authentic regeneration, a complete change in the system, would result only from a dramatic change in the hearts and minds of Frenchmen, not simply from some external program of action. By forming true bonds of “friendship, support, and example,”<sup>20</sup> an indisputable transformation could occur. Those

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<sup>15</sup> “Letter to Mademoiselle Soulacroix,” 28 February 1841, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 224. For the original French text see *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam: Premières années à la Sorbonne, 1841-1844*, Édition critique de Jeanne Caron (Paris: Celse, 1978), v.2, n° 290, 88. Hereafter cited as *Lettres*, v.2.

<sup>16</sup> The conference is the basic unit of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, modeled after the first conference of charity formed by Ozanam and his friends in 1833. These are not to be confused with the conferences associated with Saint Vincent de Paul.

<sup>17</sup> “Letter to Mademoiselle Soulacroix,” 1 May 1841, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 243. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.2, n° 310, 137.

<sup>18</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 118-119; 77 and 83. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 4 and 14.

<sup>19</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 164-165. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapter 18.

<sup>20</sup> “Letter to Léonce Curnier,” 4 November 1834, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 55. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 82, 154.



living in poverty, however, were not to be excluded from these bonds of friendship. As Ozanam wrote in 1834, “But the strongest tie, the principle of true friendship, is charity, and charity could not exist in the hearts of many without sweetening itself from the outside. It is a fire that dies without being fed, and good works are the food of charity... and if we assemble under the roof of the poor, it is at least equally for them as for ourselves, so as to become progressively better friends.”<sup>21</sup>

Peter Senge warned that although a vision is important because it fosters long-term commitment, it can prove fruitless if one does not understand the forces that must be mastered.<sup>22</sup> The Vincentian Family also cautioned that when dealing with those living in poverty, systemic change strategies should always “start with a serious analysis of the local reality, flowing from concrete data and tailor all projects to this reality.”<sup>23</sup> Ozanam anticipated these concerns. Because he was such an exemplary scholar, one might expect that Professor Ozanam would have believed that poverty could best be grasped deductively by applying a grand theory on how society is constructed and functions. But Frédéric understood the serious limitations and implications of such an approach, one that many socialists of his day employed. Monsignor Baunard, the translator of much of Ozanam’s correspondence, argued that Frédéric knew that “all social theories from Plato to Muncer and John Leyden, have only resulted in visionary Utopias, disorder and violence.”<sup>24</sup>

Instead, Ozanam embraced an inductive approach based on experience as the only viable way to get a thorough understanding of the complexity of poverty: “The knowledge of social well-being and reform is to be learned, not from books, nor from the public platform, but in climbing the stairs to the poor’s man garret, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him, sharing the secret of his lonely heart and troubled mind. When the conditions of the poor have been examined, in school, at work, in hospital, in the city, in the country... it is then and then only, that we know the elements of that formidable problem, that we begin to grasp it and may hope to solve it.”<sup>25</sup> For Ozanam, the regeneration of society would help to eliminate poverty and would be accomplished only by forming authentic community and building just, caring relationships between the different social classes who ultimately shared the same goals for society: peace, order, and happiness. He believed that his Catholic faith had much to offer on this subject to those who might be willing to listen and engage in dialogue. Ozanam’s vision of complete “regeneration of society” then has a connection to systemic change strategies and thinking. It is his first contribution, or the first seed.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 82, 154.

<sup>22</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 118-119.

<sup>24</sup> Baunard, *Ozanam*, 278.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 279. See also Albert Paul Schimberg, *The Great Friend: Frederick Ozanam* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1946), 210. Hereafter cited as Schimberg, *The Great Friend*. See also Reverend Henry Louis Hughes, *Frederick Ozanam* (Saint Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1933), 60.



Portrait of Rosalie Rendu, D.C.  
(1786-1856).

*Image collection of the Vincentian  
Studies Institute*



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### **“Let us go to the poor”**

When challenged in the early conference of history to identify what he and his friends were doing for those in need, Ozanam spontaneously responded: “We must do what is most agreeable to God. Therefore, we must do what Our Lord Jesus Christ did when preaching the Gospel. Let us go to the Poor.”<sup>26</sup> The initial group that formed was at first simply called the Conference of Charity. It was composed of only seven members: Augustus Le Tallandier, Paul Lamache, François Lallier, Jules Devaux, Félix Clavé, Frédéric Ozanam, and Joseph Emmanuel Bailly. It was Joseph Emmanuel Bailly “who would become the first President General of the flourishing Society,” and Frédéric Ozanam who would become its “radiant source of inspiration.”<sup>27</sup> Just as systemic change strategies in *Seeds of Hope* now recommend, Ozanam and his friends designed “projects, creative approaches, policies and guidelines that flow from... Christian and Vincentian values and mission.” The purpose of these was exactly what *Seeds of Hope* now emphasizes: to “evangelize while maintaining a profound respect for local culture, thus enculturating Christian and Vincentian charism and values in that culture.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Baunard, *Ozanam*, 65. For the original French text see Antoine Frédéric Ozanam, “Discours à la conférence de Florence,” *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Simon Raçon et Compagnie, 1872), t.2, v.8, 4. Hereafter cited as Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*. See also C.-A. Ozanam, *Vie de Frédéric Ozanam* (Paris: Librairie Poussielgue Frères, 1879), 187. Hereafter cited as C.-A. Ozanam, *Frédéric Ozanam*.

<sup>27</sup> *Rule of the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul* (2003), I, 6. Hereafter cited as *International Rule*.

<sup>28</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 44-7. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 2 and 3.



With the guidance and mentoring of Sister Rosalie Rendu, Frédéric and his young companions not only began to live out the Christian imperative to bring succor to those in need, but also to become imbued with the Vincentian charism. According to Armand de Melun, Rosalie Rendu's collaborator and biographer, Rosalie "recommended to them patience, which never considers time spent listening to a poor person as wasted, since this person already takes comfort in the good will that we demonstrate by attending to the recitation of his sufferings; understanding, more inclined to pity than to condemn faults that a good upbringing did not ward off; and finally, politeness, so sweet to a person who has never experienced anything but disdain and contempt."<sup>29</sup> Sister Rosalie further admonished her young Vincentians to "love those who are poor... The world says, 'It's their fault. They are cowardly... ignorant... vicious... lazy. It is with such words that we dispense ourselves from the very strict obligation of charity. Hate the sin but love the poor persons [who commit it]. If we had suffered as they have, if we had spent our childhood deprived of all Christian inspiration, we would be far from their equal."<sup>30</sup> Her words took seed and rooted deeply in Frédéric.

With a profound understanding of the importance of what he was undertaking, Ozanam eloquently articulated the need that awaited him and his friends in the streets of Paris:

Cast your eyes on the world around us... The earth has grown cold. It is for us Catholics to revive the vital beat to restore it... if necessary to bring back the era of martyrs. For to be a martyr is possible for every Christian, to be a martyr is to give his life for God and his brothers, to give his life in sacrifice, whether the sacrifice be consumed in an instant like a holocaust, or be accomplished slowly and smoke night and day like perfume on the altar. To be a martyr is to give back to heaven all that one has received: his money, his blood, his whole soul. The offering is in our hands; we can make this sacrifice. It is up to us to choose to which altars it pleases us to bring it, to what divinity we will consecrate our youth and the time following, in what temple we will assemble: at the foot of the idol of egoism, or in the sanctuary of God and humanity.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, his recognition that egoism or selfishness was a serious problem to be overcome is a good example of what Senge terms "personal mastery."<sup>32</sup> Ozanam was aware of how human behaviors, including his own, impacted the world.

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Louise Sullivan, D.C., *Sister Rosalie Rendu: A Daughter of Charity on Fire with Love for the Poor* (Chicago, Vincentian Studies Institute, 2006), 210-211. Hereafter cited as Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie*. See also Armand de Melun, *Vie de la sœur Rosalie, Fille de la Charité*, 13e edition (Paris, 1929), 99-100.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> "Letter to Léonce Curnier," 23 February 1835, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 64. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 90, 166.

<sup>32</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 13.

Poised to bring Christian and Vincentian values to a desperate France, Frédéric saw his role, then, as a true evangelizer through commitment to action and example. Moreover, the projects, approaches, and policies that flowed from the young Society were genuinely inspired by Christian and Vincentian values. In a letter to his mother dated 23 July 1836, Ozanam recounted some of the works with which he and his companions in charity were engaged: "...we maintain a house of apprentices for printing where we lodge, feed, and instruct ten poor children, nearly all orphans. We pay two charitable persons a wage equal to a half-pension for each of them... Several of our colleagues have been charged by the president of the Civil Tribunal with visiting children detained at the request of their parents."<sup>33</sup> Again, in another letter to her in April of 1837, he proudly reports that "a lottery was drawn which realized three thousand and six francs for our adopted children."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Saint Vincent de Paul had also made use of such a lottery to raise funds for his orphans.<sup>35</sup> In a third letter to his intended, Amélie Soulacroix, dated February of 1841, Frédéric enthusiastically proclaimed that "1500 families here in Paris alone have been helped, the daily bread brought under the needy roof, wood assured for many a dismal home. Besides twenty boys educated for free in a paternal household, a truly large number supervised, protected, and encouraged, apprenticed in reliable shops, brought together each Sunday for divine service, corrupt fathers have been brought back to an ordered and frugal life...."<sup>36</sup>

In December of 1837 a ministry to soldiers was created in Lyon. To counteract "the perverse temptations of idleness" and the "evil temptations of a great city," the members established a special work — a library of books. As Ozanam faithfully reported to Paris, "we have distributed a large number of leaflets to inform the soldiers of our existence. During the last five months 268 soldiers have attended and have chosen reading matter, according to their taste and their intelligence..."<sup>37</sup> The list of deeds inspired by Christian faith and Vincentian values could easily be expanded. It is no wonder that Frédéric pronounced with conviction in 1837 that "Our little Society of St. Vincent de Paul has grown large enough to be considered a providential fact..."<sup>38</sup> The second seed is then contained in Ozanam's advice to his colleagues: "Let us go to the poor."

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<sup>33</sup> "Letter to his mother," 23 July 1836, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 76. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 121, 220.

<sup>34</sup> "Letter to his mother," 11 April 1837, in *Ibid.*, 110. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 146, 260.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 4, 111.

<sup>36</sup> "Letter to Mademoiselle Soulacroix," 28 February 1841, in *Ibid.*, 224. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.2, n° 290, 88.

<sup>37</sup> "Letter of Frédéric Ozanam," December 1837, in *The Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul*, 21st ed. (Dublin: The Superior Council of Ireland, 1958), 223-224. Hereafter cited as the *Dublin Manual*. For the original French text see "To the General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul," 8 December 1837, in *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam: Supplément et Tables*, Édition critique sous la direction de Didier Ozanam (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1997), v.5, n° 1369 [164 bis], 64. Hereafter cited as *Lettres*, v.5. The location of this report is Lyon. The original French report indicates 266 soldiers rather than 268.

<sup>38</sup> "Letter to François Lallier," 5 October 1837, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 120. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 160, 283.



## **“The poor are our masters”**

The third seed is represented in Ozanam’s belief that the poor are “our lords and masters,” a belief deeply grounded in the words of Saint Vincent de Paul, who first uttered them,<sup>39</sup> and who served as an inspiration to Frédéric and his young companions. In a letter written in November of 1836, Frédéric eloquently stated that the poor are not in the least inferior: “We should fall at their feet and say... *Tu est Dominus et Deus meus*. You are our masters, and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred images of that God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love Him otherwise shall we not love Him in your persons?”<sup>40</sup> According to *Seeds of Hope*, systemic change strategies are predicated upon a deep respect for the dignity of the human person. One must “listen carefully and seek to understand the needs and aspirations of the poor, creating an atmosphere of respect and mutual confidence and fostering self-esteem among the people.” And one must “involve the poor themselves....”<sup>41</sup>

Frédéric’s genuine love for persons living in poverty inspired him to become a true friend of those he visited, always ready to work with them and defend their interests. The personal visit to the home was intended to empower the person in poverty, and to provide insights into her/his genuine needs. Initially Frédéric listened attentively; then he would attempt to engage the person in the journey out of poverty. Reminiscent of what Senge suggests in his discipline of mental models, Frédéric demonstrated a genuine openness necessary to unearth the shortcomings in how he saw the world, particularly the world of those living in poverty. As the French Dominican priest, Lacordaire, fondly remembered: “His [Ozanam’s] manner towards the poor was one of the warmest and most kindly respect. If they came to visit him, he made them sit in his arm-chairs like distinguished guests. When he went to their homes, after giving his time, his conversation and his money, he never failed to take off his hat and say with the gracious bow that was customary with him: ‘I am your servant.’”<sup>42</sup>

## **Spirituality, Friendship, and Service**

Since its origination in 1833, the three essential elements of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul were spirituality, friendship, and service. These elements were fundamental to the formation of members. Vincentian systemic change strategies insist on the necessity to “educate, train and offer spiritual formation to all participants in the project.” For success one must “promote learning processes in which the members of the group... speak with one another about their successes and failures, share their insights and talents, and work

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<sup>39</sup> Conference 164, “Love for the Poor, January 1657,” *Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, ed. and trans. by Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., Marie Poole, D.C., *et al*, 1-13a & 13b (New York: New City Press, 1985-2010), 11:349. Hereafter *CCD*.

<sup>40</sup> “Letter to Louis Janmot,” 13 November 1836, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 96. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 137, 243.

<sup>41</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 76, 78-9. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 10 and 11.

<sup>42</sup> Reverend H.D. Lacordaire, O.P., *My Friend Ozanam*, trans. by a Discalced Carmelite of Yule Island, Carmel, via Papua (Sydney: The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Ozanam House, 1957), 35. Hereafter cited as *Lacordaire, My Friend*.

toward forming effective multiplying agents and visionary leaders in the local community, servant-leaders inspired by St. Vincent de Paul.”<sup>43</sup> From its inception the Society’s early members, and most of all Ozanam, recognized and valued the development of conference members through this trinity of essential elements: “Let us work to increase and multiply, to become better, more tender and stronger...”<sup>44</sup>

In February of 1834 the Society was placed under the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul, not upon the suggestion of Ozanam but of another member, Le Prevost.<sup>45</sup> However, it was Ozanam who was most passionate about fidelity to this patron saint. As he informed his close friend François Lallier in 1838, “we are now reading... *the Life of St. Vincent de Paul*, so as to better imbue ourselves with his examples and traditions.” He insisted that Saint Vincent remain as “a model one must strive to imitate... a heart in which one’s own heart is enkindled....” By “appropriating the thoughts and virtues of the saint” the Society could “escape from the personal imperfections of its members... [and] make itself useful in the Church and give reason for its existence.”<sup>46</sup>

Although the official name of the organization did become the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the conference remained “the primary basic unit” of the group,<sup>47</sup> reflecting the original nature of the first conference of charity as a forum for the discussion of ideas, exchange of information, and a reflection upon what is learned both in study and through visits to those living in poverty. Although the evidence is far from conclusive,<sup>48</sup> there is a possibility that members of the first conference were taught the practice of theological reflection<sup>49</sup> by Sister Rosalie Rendu. When visits concluded, the members may have gathered in her parlour to recount what they did, reflect on their service, and receive both advice and support.<sup>50</sup> Whether or not Sister Rosalie instructed the first members in reflection, certainly reflection became an essential feature of conference life in the Society.<sup>51</sup>

Ozanam remained at the forefront of instructing and encouraging members to improve their lives, and to help others improve theirs as well. In April 1838 he counselled members to meet often because coming together “more frequently we love each other more. The more numerous our meetings in the name of Him Who promised to be in the midst of

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<sup>43</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 76, 80-1. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 12 and 13.

<sup>44</sup> “Letter to Emmanuel Bailly,” 22 October 1836, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 88. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 135, 236.

<sup>45</sup> Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie*, 215.

<sup>46</sup> “Letter to François Lallier,” 17 May 1838, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 143. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 175, 308-09.

<sup>47</sup> *International Rule*, I, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée suggests that there is insufficient evidence to conclude definitively that Sister Rosalie was an ongoing mentor. He has written an excellent history of the Society, *La Société de Saint-Vincent de-Paul au XIXe siècle, 1833-1871. Un fleuron du catholicisme social* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2008). Hereafter cited as Brejon de Lavergnée, *La Société*.

<sup>49</sup> The Vincentian Family often refers to this as apostolic reflection.

<sup>50</sup> Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie*, 211. Sister Sullivan does make this claim.

<sup>51</sup> *International Rule*, I, 9.



those who should come together in His name, the more clearly do we seem to realize the fulfilment of His promise.”<sup>52</sup> Conscious of the potential power the visit had to transform both the visitor and the visited, Ozanam begged members to examine their consciences:

We must bring light into this chill; edification, rather than conversion, is the chief necessity.... But how to make saints, when one lacks sanctity? How preach to the unfortunate resignation and courage which one does not possess? How rebuke them for failings present in oneself? There, gentlemen, is the main difficulty of our position; that is why we are so often overcome by confusion of heart and remain silent in the presence of families we visit who, if they are our equals in weakness, are often our superiors in virtue. It is such a time that we acknowledge, in the words of St. Vincent de Paul, “that the poor... are our lords and masters, and that we are hardly worthy of rendering to them our petty services.”<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, Ozanam’s vision of the world determined that a person living in poverty was not a useless person, because in suffering she/he “is serving God and consequently serving society just as someone who is praying.” This person fulfills “a ministry of expiation, a sacrifice from which we benefit....”<sup>54</sup>

Reverend Robert P. Maloney, C.M., insists that “Forming people for leadership roles is fundamental for bringing about long-lasting change. But experience teaches that a vertical style of leadership is rarely effective in systemic change projects. Servant leaders are needed, men and women who listen, help the group to formulate projects, involve it in implementing them, and engage it in evaluating and re-structuring them.”<sup>55</sup> Frédéric Ozanam was indeed this requisite servant leader. His was no vertical style of leadership. Reverend Shaun McCarty, S.T., readily discerns that “Ozanam’s leadership among his brother Vincentians advocated great openness, flexibility, and diversity kept in unity by sharing the same mission and spirit.”<sup>56</sup> Ozanam may have thought of himself as a weak Samaritan,<sup>57</sup> but others saw him as an authentic servant leader.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam,” 27 April 1838, in *Dublin Manual*, 121. This was actually a report of works given to the General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Lyon. For the original French text see “To the General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul,” 27 April 1838, in *Lettres*, v.5, n° 1372 [173 bis], 71.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 209. For the original French text see *Ibid.*, 72. The quote at the end is from Conference 164, “Love for the Poor, January 1657,” the accepted modern English translation of which can be found in *CCD*, 11:349.

<sup>54</sup> Antoine Frédéric Ozanam, “De l’Aumône,” *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.1, v.7, 299. The original French text is: “l’homme qui souffre sert Dieu, il sert par conséquent la société comme celui qui prie. Il accomplit à nos yeux un ministère d’expiation, un sacrifice dont les mérites retombent sur nous...”

<sup>55</sup> *Seeds of Change* series, Chapter 13.

<sup>56</sup> Shaun McCarty, S.T., “Frederick Ozanam: Lay Evangelizer,” *Vincentian Heritage* 17:1 (1996), 34.

<sup>57</sup> “Letter to Léonce Curnier,” 23 February 1835, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 65. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 90, 167.

<sup>58</sup> “Letter to Ernest Falconnet,” 7 January 1834, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 43. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 67, 122.

When the first president, Emmanuel Bailly, decided to leave the position in 1844, Ozanam was largely responsible for defining the necessary qualities to hold that office. In a June document he portrayed that person as one who had “great piety, in order to be an example to all, and perhaps still greater affability in order not to discourage others by too rigid virtues; he must have the habit of devotion, the spirit of true fraternity, the experience of good works....” Zeal and prudence were equally essential, coupled with an ability “to maintain the Society in the paths of simplicity and prudent liberty....” In his final analysis the president’s character “must attract confidence and respect, while his gentle familiarity renders him the friend of the younger members in the numerous family united around him.”<sup>59</sup> The qualities listed undoubtedly describe an ideal servant leader, and are intimately connected to the fundamental principles of spirituality, friendship, and service.

Peter Senge argued that systemic thinking requires mental models to help identify shortcomings, and team learning that develops skills to see the bigger picture. These three essential elements of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul served as a perfect mental model by which to gauge and overcome shortcomings. They also served as the key to the group’s ongoing learning and formation. Ozanam’s fourth seed, then, is the essential elements of spirituality, friendship, and service.

### “Humble simplicity”

Frédéric used the cogent expression “humble simplicity” in a letter to his fiancé, Amélie Soulacroix, dated 1 May 1841: “Only one thing could hinder and destroy us: the adulteration of our primitive spirit, the pharisaism that sounds the trumpet before it, the exclusive self-esteem which belittles any power other than that of the elite, excessive customs and structure resulting in languor and relaxation or rather verbose philanthropy more eager to talk than to act, or again bureaucracies which impede our march by multiplying our machinery. And especially to forget the *humble simplicity* [my italics] which has presided over our coming together from the beginning...”<sup>60</sup> This expression adheres to the intent of Vincentian systemic change strategy, to start “modestly, delegating tasks and responsibilities, and providing quality services respectful of human dignity.”

Simplicity, with its emphasis on openness, honesty, and modesty, was also one of the hallmarks of Saint Vincent de Paul: “Jesus, the Lord, expects us to have the simplicity of a dove. This means giving a straightforward opinion about things in the way we honestly see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without any double-dealing or manipulation, our intention being focused solely on God. Each of us, then, should take care to behave always in this spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with the simple, and that he conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of

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<sup>59</sup> “Circular Letter of the Vice-Presidents-General,” 11 June 1844, in *Dublin Manual*, 257. For the original French text see “To the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul,” 11 June 1844, in *Lettres*, v.5, n° 1403 [540 bis], 112-13.

<sup>60</sup> “Letter to Mademoiselle Soulacroix,” 1 May 1841, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 243. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.2, n° 310, 137.





Portrait of François Lallier.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



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this world and reveals them to little ones.”<sup>61</sup> An essential feature of Vincentian pragmatism has always been “practical, concrete, and effective services... underpinned by the absolute belief that each person is made in the image and likeness of God and is a temple of the Holy Spirit.... All projects for the poor start modestly and grow into being.” And even today the Rule guiding the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul clearly identifies “simplicity — frankness, integrity, genuineness” as one of its essential virtues.<sup>62</sup> In fact, when Emmanuel Bailly stepped down in 1844, he was praised for his fidelity to the traditions of humble simplicity which he had helped to establish.<sup>63</sup>

Frédéric Ozanam was fully aware of the need to have both an affective and effective organization. To his friend, François Lallier, who was secretary general of the Society under Bailly’s presidency, Ozanam thoughtfully advised the following: “It is your duty, by age and office in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, to reanimate it from time to time by new inspirations which, without harm to its primitive spirit, foresee the dangers of too monotonous a uniformity.” He further cautioned Lallier: “Let us be careful not to straighten ourselves with customs too hidebound, within bounds impassable in number or density. Why cannot the conferences of Saint-Étienne and Saint-Sulpice<sup>64</sup> go beyond fifty members? Why cannot the Society here get larger than forty members? Think about it.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> This quotation is from Vincent de Paul’s *Common Rules* in General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission, *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission* (Rome: 1984; English translation, Philadelphia: 1989), 109.

<sup>62</sup> The first quote is from Ellen Flynn, D.C., *Seeds of Change* series, Chapter 6. See also *International Rule*, I, 10.

<sup>63</sup> “To the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul,” 11 June 1844, in *Lettres*, v.5, n° 1403 [540 bis], 112-13.

<sup>64</sup> Saint-Étienne-du-Mont and Saint-Sulpice are famous parish churches in Paris in which some of the first conferences of the Society were formed.

<sup>65</sup> “Letter to François Lallier,” 7 February 1838, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 131. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 169, 296.

Vincentian systemic change strategies attempt to “systematize, institutionalize and evaluate the project and its procedures, describing measurable indicators and results.”<sup>66</sup> In this spirit, Frédéric Ozanam was faithful to the accurate reporting and honest evaluation of the Society’s works, its accomplishments as well as its failures. There can be little doubt that Frédéric rejoiced in the growth of the Society and its works. Yet, he also maintained an important perspective on the process of growth, informing his fellow Vincentians that they should not only share “statistical statements crammed with enumerations of our successes...”, as important as such reports might be, but that they must also “exchange ideas, our inspirations... sometimes our fears, and always our hopes.”<sup>67</sup> Advising his friends to think of another kind of balance sheet, he exhorted them “to enquire not so much whether our numbers have increased but rather if our unity has grown; not so much whether our works are more numerous but if they are better; to report, indeed, what aid we have given to our poor, but far rather what tears we have dried and how many Christians we have brought back to the fold.”<sup>68</sup> Humble simplicity fostered personal motivation within each member of the Society to think deeply about how their actions were affecting the world — “personal mastery’ in the words of Peter Senge — and proved to be Ozanam’s fifth seed.

## The Rule

It is a given in Vincentian systemic change strategy that any project or undertaking should be “self-sustaining by guaranteeing that it will have the human and economic resources needed for it to last.”<sup>69</sup> The Rule of the Society was intended to provide guidance for long-term sustainability. Shortly after its formation, the conference of charity became known officially as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and a Rule to govern its members’ actions was written and promulgated. Although the writing of the first Rule is generally attributed to Emmanuel Bailly and François Lallier, Sister Louise Sullivan, D.C., suggests that Bailly, Lallier, and Ozanam “were charged with the task.” And she further emphasizes that as early as 1834 it was Ozanam who “had clearly seen the need for greater organization.”<sup>70</sup> Even one of his biographers, Reverend Edward O’Connor, argues convincingly that, at the very least, the concluding portion of the Rule was composed by Ozanam. According to Reverend O’Connor, Frédéric returned to Paris in the autumn of 1835 to complete his doctoral thesis. He was then living with François Lallier, his dear friend, who had the task of completing the final draft of the Rule: “Granted the latter’s natural seriousness of character and lack of imagination, we shall not err in attributing to Frederick [sic] himself

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<sup>66</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 118; 119; 122; 123. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>67</sup> “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam,” 27 April 1838, in *Dublin Manual*, 120. For the original French text see “To the General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul,” 27 April 1838, in *Lettres*, v.5, n° 1372 [173 bis], 71.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 121. For the original French text see *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 119; 124. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapter 8.

<sup>70</sup> Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie*, 221. Albert Paul Schimberg holds a similar view as Sister Sullivan. He contends that Bailly and Frédéric were collaborators and the resulting work “breathes the spirit of Ozanam.” See Schimberg, *The Great Friend*, 102.





Portrait of Joseph Emmanuel Bailly,  
first President General of the  
Society.

*Image collection of the Vincentian  
Studies Institute*



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the conclusion of the Rule, with all its warmth of feeling.” The moving conclusion, to which Reverend O’Connor alludes, read: “Together or separated, near or far, let us love one another; let us love and serve the poor. Let us love this little Society which has made us known to one another, which has placed us on the path of a more charitable and more Christian life. Much evil is being done, said a holy priest, let us do some little good. Oh! How glad we shall be that we did not leave empty the years of our youth.”<sup>71</sup>

The Rule that resulted in December of 1835 came two years after the fact for a reason. According to the Society’s first president, Bailly: “Was it not necessary that it [the Society] should be well established — that it should know what Heaven required of it — that it should judge what it can do by what it already has done, before framing its rules and prescribing its duties?” Bailly continued: “now we have only to embody... in Regulations, usages already followed and cherished; and this is a guarantee that Our Rule will be well received by all and not forgotten.”<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, this practice of embodying what was already proven to work is in the best tradition of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. The Rule of 1835 set forth the Society’s goals, among which were:

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in O’Connor, *The Secret of Frederick Ozanam*, 56. See also *Rules of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and Indulgences*, Printed for the Council of New York (New York: D. & J. Sadlier 7 Co., 1869), 43. This publication includes the original Rule of 1835 in translation. Hereafter cited as *Rules of the Society 1835*. Available at <http://archive.org/stream/rulesandindulge00paulgoog#page/n4/mode/2up> (Accessed 14 February 2013).

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie*, 222. Original in *Règlement de la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris: Imprimerie de E-J Bailly et Compagnie, 1835), 5-6. See also *Rules of the Society 1835*, 9-10.

1. to sustain its members in the practice of a Christian life by example and mutual advice;
2. to visit those who are poor in their homes, to bring them assistance in kind... and to offer them religious consolation;
3. to apply ourselves, according to our talents and the time that we have at our disposition, to the elementary and Christian instruction of poor children, whether free or in prison;
4. to distribute moral and Christian books;
5. to apply ourselves to all kinds of charitable works, for which our resources are adequate [and] which are not contrary to the primary aim of our society....<sup>73</sup>

Its primary aim, however, was “Christian piety,” a growing in holiness by service to those in need. Consequently, members were encouraged to be virtuous and in particular to practice the following virtues: “self-sacrifice; Christian prudence; an efficacious love for one’s neighbor; zeal for the salvation of souls; gentleness of heart and humility in words; and especially fraternal spirit.”<sup>74</sup> In its own way the Rule provided members with the mental model to see the world differently and encouraged team learning to see “the larger picture that lies beyond individual perspectives.”<sup>75</sup>

The Rule today, fundamentally the same as it was in the nineteenth century, emphasizes the importance of reflection upon service experiences as an essential part of the development and growth of its members. Members, known as Vincentians, grow in holiness and lead better lives by visiting the poor “whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live.” By reflecting and meditating on their experiences, Vincentians arrive at “internal spiritual knowledge of themselves, others and the goodness of God...” and transform “their concern into action and their compassion into practical love.”<sup>76</sup> Ozanam provides an excellent example of this: “How often has it not happened that being weighed down by some interior trouble, uneasy as to my poor state of health, I entered the home of the poor confided to my care. There, face to face with so many miserable poor who had so much more to complain of, I felt better able to bear sorrow, and I gave thanks to that unhappy one, the contemplation of whose sorrows had consoled and fortified me! How could I avoid henceforward loving him more.”<sup>77</sup> With the Rule in place the Society continued to flourish and grow, eventually becoming a world-wide organization. It provided the proper guidance for sustainability. Ozanam’s sixth seed is embedded in the Rule.

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 223. Original in *Ibid.*, 7-8. See also *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 222-224. Original in *Ibid.*, 7-10. See also *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>75</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 13.

<sup>76</sup> *International Rule*, I, 9.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in O’Connor, *The Secret of Frederick Ozanam*, 57. See also Baunard, *Ozanam*, 343-44. Original French text in Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.2, v.8, 55; 57.

## Circular letters and letters of report

*Seeds of Hope* counsels that systemic change strategies should foster transparency “by inviting participation in preparing budgets and in commenting on financial reports.” There must be “careful controls over money management” while those participating must fully “support and respect the mechanisms for promoting solidarity that exist among the community members.”<sup>78</sup> Both the circular letters and other letters of report constitute a primary example of promoting transparency and solidarity within the fledgling Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

From its first beginnings, Frédéric Ozanam insisted that regular communication among the members was essential. The president should circulate letters on a regular basis which not only provide facts or describe key events, but which also address key concerns and necessary changes. But there should also be regular reporting from each Society location. For example, Emmanuel Bailly received an appendix to a report from Frédéric in July of 1838. Listing the membership and the monies of the Society in Lyon, Ozanam took great care to provide accurate figures as well as a description of the works they had accomplished. There are numerous other examples of these same kinds of reports which not only bring to light the work, but also provide evidence of good stewardship. Ozanam admonished his friend Lallier in a letter of 1837 to “attend particular assemblies frequently; see the presidents from time to time; take part in the meetings of the administrative council; prod sometimes the excessive tranquility of the president general; do not neglect correspondence with the provincial conferences.” He further counseled: “If you think as I do, when a conference fails to write by a designated date, you should write to it yourself a little in advance of the next date, to ask it to be more faithful in communicating. No longer allow the circular letters to be delayed too long. The one you sent me two months ago was very good and responded to an urgent need; visiting families is not as easy as it seems; instructions in this regard are extremely useful, and it would be good to repeat them.”<sup>79</sup>

Peter Senge advised that mental models focus on “the openness needed to unearth shortcomings in our present ways of seeing the world.”<sup>80</sup> Certainly these circular letters and letters of report, like mental models, provided that openness for Ozanam and the rest of the Society to identify significant shortcomings as well as celebrate successes. Using a cogent organic image, Ozanam once described these letters as “brotherly communications” that “are like the circulation which keeps life in the Society.”<sup>81</sup> They were also in the best tradition of Vincent de Paul, who valued such honest communication. Indeed, the

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<sup>78</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 77; 85; 119; 125. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 9 and 16.

<sup>79</sup> “Letter to François Lallier,” 5 October 1837, in Dirvin, *A Life in Letters*, 120-121. For the original French text see *Lettres*, v.1, n° 160, 283-84.

<sup>80</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 13.

<sup>81</sup> “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam,” 27 April 1838, in *Dublin Manual*, 120. For the original French text see “To the General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul,” 27 April 1838, in *Lettres*, v.5, n° 1372 [173 bis], 71.





Frédéric Ozanam, from a mural painting of Ozanam by the painter-priest Sieger Köder, located in the parish hall of St. Vincent de Graz, Austria.

*Courtesy of the Church of St. Vincent de Graz*



circular letters and letters of report were, and still are, the Society's lifeblood, bringing rich nourishment to both the transparency and solidarity of the Society. In them we discover Ozanam's seventh seed.

### **Hearing humanity's cry for freedom**

Reverend William Hartenbach, C.M., suggested more than fifteen years ago that it "can safely be said that he [Ozanam] involved himself in activities which were directed toward 'systemic social change,'" because Ozanam "was active in politics and was part of a group of Catholic intellectuals who were committed to the democratic ideal."<sup>82</sup> Indeed, those committed to Vincentian systemic change strategies "promote engagement in political processes, through civic education of individuals and communities." They "struggle to transform unjust situations and to have a positive impact, through political action, on public policy and laws." Such persons often "have a prophetic attitude"; they "announce, denounce, and, by networking with others, engage in actions that exert pressure for bringing about change."<sup>83</sup>

An acute appreciation of history eventually guided Ozanam to conclude "that in the nature of mankind democracy is the final stage in the development of political progress, and that God leads the world in that direction."<sup>84</sup> Although Ozanam condemned the French

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<sup>82</sup> William Hartenbach, C.M., "Vincentian Spirituality," *Vincentian Heritage* 17:1 (1996), 46.

<sup>83</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 77; 84; 164; 166; 167. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 15, 19, and 20.

<sup>84</sup> "Letter to Prosper Dugas," 11 March 1849, in "Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam," v.2, Frédéric Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Jacques Lecoffre et Cie, Libraires-Éditeurs, 1865), v.11, 236. Hereafter cited as "Lettres," Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*. See also *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam: L'engagement (1845-1849)*, Édition critique sous la direction de Didier Ozanam (Paris: Celse, 1978), v.3, n° 870, 495-496. Hereafter cited as *Lettres*, v.3. The original French text is: "Ce que je sais d'histoire me donne lieu de croire que la démocratie est le terme naturel du progress politique, et que Dieu y mène le monde." This is also quoted in James Patrick Derum, *Apostle in a Top Hat: The Story of Frederic Ozanam* (Michigan: Fidelity Publishing Company, 1962), 202.

Revolution's Reign of Terror (1793-1794), increasingly he came to appreciate the value of and necessity for democratic reform if France was ever to be resurrected from the ashes of the French Revolution. According to Catholic Church historian Thomas Bokenkotter, Ozanam interpreted the French Revolution "as humanity's cry for greater freedom, and as a key figure in the short-lived Christian democracy of 1848 he tried to move the Church to hear that cry and join the struggle."<sup>85</sup> In the *Correspondant* in 1848, Ozanam published a powerful public call to embrace the masses.<sup>86</sup> He later argued that "instead of espousing the interests of a doctrinaire ministry, of a fearful peerage, or of an egotistical bourgeoisie, we [must] take care of the people who have too many needs and not enough rights and who justly demand a more complete role in public affairs, guarantees for work and against misery."<sup>87</sup> He was clear: "It is in the people that I see enough remnants of faith and morality to save a society in which the upper classes are lost."<sup>88</sup>

Ozanam was not a socialist; he did not want "the overthrow of society," but instead he anticipated the advent of "a free, progressive Christian reform of it."<sup>89</sup> Yet Ozanam was severely critical of those who continued to ignore the cries of the poor: "If a greater number of Christians, and especially clergymen, had looked after the workers for ten years, we would be more sure of the future."<sup>90</sup> Using strong words of caution in April 1848, Ozanam begged the Church to "take care of the workers like the rich people; it is from now on the only way to salvation for the Church of France. The priests must give up their little bourgeois parishes, flocks of elite people in the middle of an immense population which they do not know."<sup>91</sup>

Valuing civic engagement, Frédéric Ozanam took his duties as a citizen of France seriously. In the late 1840's he served in the National Guard and regularly voted in elections. He engaged in a significant journalistic venture during the Revolutions of 1848. He wrote articles on political and social matters in the newspaper *L'Ère Nouvelle* (*The New Era*) as a kind of civic duty, intending to influence minds and persuade people to avoid violence and support necessary democratic reforms. "My share in public life, from which no man should shrink today, is confined to the little I shall do in the *L'Ère Nouvelle*... We must

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas Bokenkotter, *Church and Revolution, Catholics in the Struggle for Democracy and Social Justice* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 131.

<sup>86</sup> He elaborated on this message in an article published in *Le Correspondant* entitled: "Les dangers de Rome et ses espérances." The article appeared on February 10th, just two weeks before the fall of Louis Philippe and the beginning of the revolution of 1848 in Paris. See Philip Spencer, "'Barbarian Assault': The Fortunes of a Phrase," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16:2 (1955), 237.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Mary Ann Garvie Hess, trans., *Cahiers Ozanam*, Nos. 37/38/39, January to June (Paris: Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Council General, 1974), 19. Hereafter cited as Hess, *Cahiers Ozanam*. See also "Letter to Théophile Foisset," 22 February 1848, in *Lettres*, v.3, n° 784, 379.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. For the original French text see "Letter to Alexandre Dufieux," 31 May 1848, in *Lettres*, v.3, n° 814, 432.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. For the original French text see "Letter to L'Abbé Alphonse Ozanam," 15 March 1848, in *Lettres*, v.3, n° 789, 391.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* For the original French text see "Letter to L'Abbé Alphonse Ozanam," 12-21 April 1848, in *Lettres*, v.3, n° 802, 413.





Alphonse de Lamartine, influential in the founding of the Second Republic, stands in front of the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, following the February Revolution of 1848. Painting by Henri Félix Emmanuel Philippoteaux.

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found a new work for these times...<sup>92</sup> The prospectus for that publication (1 March 1848) was signed by Ozanam: It purported to “reconcile religion and the democratic Republic, to demand from the Republic liberty of education, liberty of association, amelioration of the condition of the working men....” It also called for the protection of “all peoples who have lost their nationality by unjust conquests which time cannot rectify, and those other peoples which, following our example from afar, aspire to achieve their own political and moral emancipation.”<sup>93</sup>

Ozanam was approached to stand for election as a representative in the new assembly to be formed following the revolution that had unseated Louis Philippe in 1848. He reluctantly agreed to offer his name as a candidate, stating publicly that he always had “the passionate love of my country, the enthusiasm of common interests,” and that he longed for “the alliance of Christianity and freedom.”<sup>94</sup> Although his personal wishes were against running for office, he felt it was his civic duty to do so. He was not elected, but he left a clear record of his mature political beliefs which had been nurtured by his

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<sup>92</sup> Quoted in O’Meara, *Life and Works*, 230. The original French text can be found in “Letter to A.M.L...,” 12 April 1848, in “Lettres,” Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*, v.11, 219. See also “Letter to François Lallier,” 12 April 1848, in *Lettres*, v.3, n° 800, 409-10.

<sup>93</sup> Parker Thomas Moon, *The Labor Problem and the Social Catholic Movement in France* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 35. Hereafter cited as Moon, *The Labor Problem*. The first quote is from Moon; the latter is a quote from the prospectus itself.

<sup>94</sup> Hess, *Cahiers Ozanam*, 51.



service experiences from 1833 to 1848. In a public statement issued on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April to the constituents of the Department of the Rhône, he declared that the revolution of February 1848 was “not a public misfortune... it’s a progress that one must support.” Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity — the catchwords of the French Revolution — were, eloquently stated, a signal of the “temporal advent of the Gospel...”<sup>95</sup> His implication was clear. The French Revolution of 1789 had been bloody and violent precisely because it had forgotten its religious heritage, a Christian heritage that could and should embrace people in a loving way. Ozanam understood that only a transformation of both the human person and of society would lead to true liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The same year, he warned: “Behind the political revolution [of 1848], there is a social revolution ... One must not think he can escape these problems.”<sup>96</sup> The monarchy had now failed three times to resolve its issues,<sup>97</sup> and Ozanam passionately advocated that it “was time to demonstrate that the proletarian cause can be pleaded, the uplifting of the suffering poor be engaged in, and the abolition of pauperism pursued.”<sup>98</sup> His words were indeed bold and prophetic. He not only called out to his countrymen, but also to “all in the Vincentian tradition to find new ways to seek the temporal Gospel principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity to revitalize democracy, and with it, encourage the flourishing of humanity.”<sup>99</sup> Of most importance, he was intently focused on changing people’s attitudes, so essential to effecting systemic change according to both the Vincentian Family and Peter Senge. Consequently, in hearing humanity’s cry for freedom, and in writing in *L’Ère nouvelle* to champion democracy, support basic human rights, and address the root causes of poverty, Ozanam planted his eighth seed of systemic change.

### “Help that honors”

Vincentian systemic change strategies “consider poverty not just as the inevitable result of circumstances, but as the product of unjust situations that can be changed, and focus on actions that will break the cycle of poverty.” They require “a holistic vision, addressing a series of basic human needs — individual and social, spiritual and physical, especially jobs, health care, housing, education, spiritual growth — with an integral approach toward prevention and sustainable development.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. See “Letter to L’Abbé Alphonse Ozanam,” 6 March 1848, in *Lettres*, v.3, n° 787, 388.

<sup>97</sup> “Letter to L’Abbé Alphonse Ozanam,” *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>98</sup> Baunard, *Ozanam*, 278. The original French text can be found in Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.1, v.7, 212.

<sup>99</sup> Reverend Craig B. Mousin, “Frédéric Ozanam — Beneficent Deserter; Mediating the Chasm of Income Inequality Through Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,” *Vincentian Heritage* 30:1 (2010), 80.

<sup>100</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 44-45, 118-120. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 1 and 5.

In an article for *L'Ère nouvelle*,<sup>101</sup> Ozanam distinguished between help that humiliates and help that honors. He proposed a holistic approach that offers more than simply providing for the material needs of the human person.

Help is humiliating when it appeals to men from below, taking heed of their material wants only, paying no attention but to those of the flesh, to the cry of hunger and cold, to what excites pity, to what one succors even in the beasts. It humiliates when there is no reciprocity... But it honors when it appeals to him from above, when it occupies itself with his soul, his religious, moral, and political education, with all that emancipates him from his passions and from a portion of his wants, with those things that make him free, and may make him great. Help honors when to the bread that nourishes it adds the visit that consoles... when it treats the poor man with respect, not only as an equal but as a superior, since he is suffering what perhaps we are incapable of suffering; since he is the messenger of God to us, sent to prove our justice and charity, and to save us by our works. Help then becomes honorable because it may become mutual.<sup>102</sup>

Painfully aware that poverty was a complex phenomenon, Ozanam ascertained early on that persons living in poverty often were not to blame for their condition. In another article entitled "*Les causes de la misère*,"<sup>103</sup> he articulated a profound and powerful lesson learned through his service to others: "God did not make the poor... God forbid that we should calumniate the poor whom the Gospel blesses, or render the suffering classes responsible for their misery, thus pandering to the hardness of those bad hearts that fancy themselves exonerated from helping the poor man when they have proved his wrongdoing."<sup>104</sup> He ardently advocated for education, worker associations, and other practices that would give a hand up instead of just a hand out.<sup>105</sup> In line with Senge's belief, Ozanam once again proved open to changing the way he saw the world, attuned to looking for the larger picture, and continually learning and sharing how his and other's actions affected his world.

Of course, Ozanam embraced the Christian ideal of detachment from material goods, an ideal reinforced in large part by his scholarly study of and writing on the Middle Ages,

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<sup>101</sup> "De l'assistance qui humilie et de celle qui honore," n° 187, 22 October 1848. See Christine Morel, "Un Journal démocrate chrétien en 1848-1849: *L'Ère nouvelle*," *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France*, t.63, n° 170 (1977): 52. Morel provides an excellent appendix with the numbers and dates of the chief contributors' articles. Christine Franconnet wrote under the name Christine Morel in this article. Hereafter cited as Morel, "*L'Ère nouvelle*."

<sup>102</sup> O'Meara, *Life and Works*, 176-177. Original French text can be found in Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.1, v.7, 292-293.

<sup>103</sup> *L'Ère nouvelle*, n° 180, 8 October 1848. See Morel, "*L'Ère nouvelle*," 52.

<sup>104</sup> O'Meara, *Life and Works*, 248; Original French text in Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.1, v.7, 282-283.

<sup>105</sup> See Moon, *The Labor Problem*, 25-28. See also David L. Gregory, "Antoine Frederic Ozanam: Building the Good Society," *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 3:1 (2005): 33-41.

especially Saint Francis of Assisi (interestingly, some claim that Frédéric was a third order Franciscan<sup>106</sup>). He clearly understood, however, that severe poverty or destitution — the absence of all essential material, physical, and spiritual needs — was something neither to be glamorized nor condoned: “And let no one say that in treating poverty as a priesthood we aim at perpetuating it; the same authority which tells us that we shall always have the poor amongst us is the same that commands us to do all we can that there may cease to be any.... Those who know the road to the poor man’s house... never knock at his door without a sentiment of respect.”<sup>107</sup> The vicious cycle of poverty that often permanently entraps people in its grip was a phenomenon Ozanam became intimately acquainted with, and one which he hoped to break. Waxing eloquent in a letter dated 11 April 1839 to his fellow Vincentians, Ozanam expressed his firm hope “that those who were recently at strife will meet to know and love one another” and that they would embrace “an admirably simple thing, which is as infinite and eternal as the God from whom it comes... *Charity*.”<sup>108</sup> For him love was an essential part of change, and the solution to both alleviating and eliminating poverty. His ninth seed is found in the understanding and promotion of help that honors.

### “World-wide network of charity”

The tenth and final seed Ozanam offered is his vision of a “World-wide network of charity,” with which he aspired “to encircle the world.”<sup>109</sup> By the time he spoke to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul conference in Florence (January 1853), Ozanam had witnessed his dream of a network of charity and justice becoming a reality. To the conference members he emphatically, yet humbly, proclaimed that “God has made our work His and wanted it to spread throughout the world by filling it with blessings.”<sup>110</sup> The Society became a world-wide organization because of a genuine shared vision of charity and justice. According to Vincentian systemic change strategies, one must “construct a

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<sup>106</sup> “Text of the Decree of Introduction of Ozanam Cause,” in *Ozanam: Path to Sainthood* (Melbourne, Australia: National Council of Australia Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 1987), 10. For the opposite point of view, see *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam: Les Dernières Années (1850-1853)*, Édition critique par Christine Franconnet (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1992), v.4, n° 1323, n. 550, 669. In this footnote to a letter from a Franciscan leader, the editors clearly indicate that Frédéric was honored by the Franciscans, but that there is no solid evidence that he was ever made a member of the third order.

<sup>107</sup> O’Meara, *Life and Works*, 177. For the original French text see Ozanam, “De l’Aumône,” *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.1, v.7, 299. It is an extract from *L’Ère nouvelle*. See also Morel, “L’Ère nouvelle,” 52.

<sup>108</sup> “Letter of Frédéric Ozanam,” 11 April 1839, in *Dublin Manual*, 113. See also “Letter to the General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul,” 11 April 1839, in *Lettres*, v.5, n° 1378 [201 bis], 86.

<sup>109</sup> His hope “to encircle the world in a network of charity” was revealed in a letter from Léonce Curnier in 1834. Sister Louise Sullivan indicates that it was Frédéric who wrote the letter to Léonce. She cites: 3 November 1834, *Lettres*, v.1, 152. See Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie*, 212. But unfortunately no such letter exists in the collected works. There is, however, a letter of November 4th to Léonce, in which Ozanam responds to a letter sent to him by Léonce on November 3rd. See 4 November 1834, *Lettres*, v.1, n° 82, 153. It is in the letter of November 3rd to Ozanam (not from Ozanam) that Léonce mentions how inspired he was by Ozanam’s vision of a “network of Charity” for France. In fact, it led Léonce to start a conference in Nîmes. Concerning this letter see Baunard, *Ozanam*, 89. As the Society developed, Ozanam would readily and naturally expand his vision of a network of charity well beyond the confines of France. For this latter view see Thomas E. Auge, *Frederic Ozanam and His World* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966), 24.

<sup>110</sup> The original French is: “...Dieu a fait de notre oeuvre la sienne et l’a voulu répandre par toute la terre en la comblant de ses benedictions.” It can be found in Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.2, v.8, 51.



shared vision..." as well as work to "promote social co-responsibility and networking, sensitizing society at all levels... about changing the unjust conditions that affect the lives of the poor."<sup>111</sup> Constructing the final vision, and promoting a network of friends, can best be attributed to Frédéric Ozanam. Throughout his life he was tireless in his efforts to expand the Society. To that same conference in Florence, he recounted the taunts of young socialists who claimed to have the answer to the future. But he proffered that they were no longer effective; their voices were silent. Instead through its reliance on love, its trust in providence, and its message of truth the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul had prospered and expanded globally.<sup>112</sup>

It is especially comforting to think that in the midst of this quick increase our society has lost nothing of its primitive spirit. Let me remind you what this spirit is for your fraternal attention. — Our main goal was not just to help the poor... Our goal was to keep us firm in the Catholic faith and to spread it among others by means of charity. We also wanted to advance a response to anyone who would ask in the words of the Psalmist: *Ubi est Deus eorum?* Where is their God? There was very little religion in Paris, and young people, even Christians, dared hardly go to church because they were pointed at, that is to say they simulated piety for positions. Today it is no longer so, and, thank God, we can say that young men, older and more educated, are also the most religious. I am convinced that this is due in large part to our Society and, to this point of view, we can say that she glorified God in her works.<sup>113</sup>

The transformation of individuals, and thereby the transformation of the society in which they lived, was the express intention of this network of charity and justice. It was the answer to a regeneration of society, his initial vision. There is no doubt Ozanam believed that the Catholic Church held out hope for both social and spiritual salvation; he wished for it to flourish because it held out the promise of progress. Indeed, he argued: "We must... restore the doctrine of progress by Christianity as a comfort in these troubled days."<sup>114</sup> But he was neither a single-minded, nor a close-minded missionary. For him service to

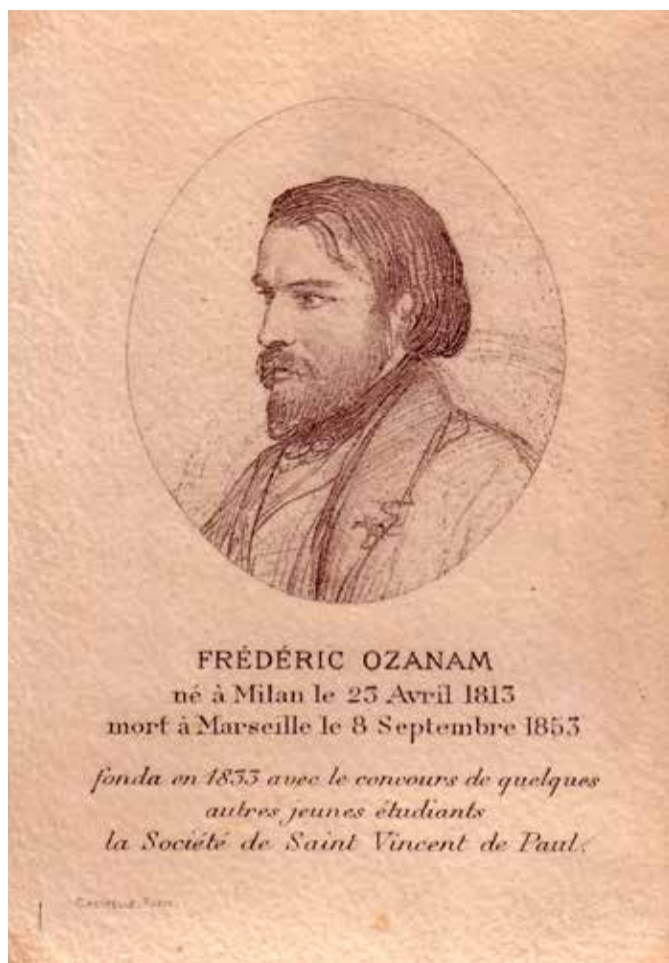
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<sup>111</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 163-165. See also *Seeds of Change* series, Chapters 17 and 18.

<sup>112</sup> Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.2, v.8, 49.

<sup>113</sup> The original French is: "Il est bien consolant surtout de penser qu'au milieu de cet accroissement si rapide notre Société n'a rien perdu de son esprit primitive. Permettez moi de vous rappeler quel est cet esprit, et veuillez me continuer pour cela votre fraternelle attention. — Notre but principal ne fut pas de venir en aide au pauvre, non; ce ne fut là pour nous qu'un moyen. Notre but fut de nous maintenir fermes dans la foi catholique et de la propager chez les autres par le moyen de la charité. Nous voulions aussi faire d'avance une réponse à quiconque demanderait avec le verset du Psalmiste: *Ubi est Deus eorum?* Où donc est leur Dieu? Il y avait dans Paris bien peu de religion, et les jeunes gens, même chrétiens, n'osaient guère aller à l'église, parce qu'on les montrait au doigt, en disant d'eux qu'ils simulaient la piété pour obtenir des places. Aujourd'hui il n'en est plus ainsi; et, grace à Dieu, l'on peut affirmer que les jeunes gens les plus âgés et les plus instruits sont en même temps les plus religieux. Je suis convaincu que ce résultat est dû en grande partie à notre Société, et, à ce point de vue, on peut dire d'elle qu'elle a glorifié Dieu dans ses oeuvres." It can be found in Ozanam, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t.2, v.8, 51; 53.

<sup>114</sup> A. Frédéric Ozanam, *History of Civilization in the Fifth Century*, trans. by Ashley C. Glynn, 2 vol. (London: W.H. Allen & CO., 1868), v.1, 3.



Memorial engraving dedicated to Frédéric Ozanam.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



others was to be based solely upon need, not upon creed. In one famous reported case, a Protestant congregation provided a substantial amount of money to Ozanam and his conference for assistance to those in poverty. Other members of his conference suggested that the sum should first be used to help Catholics. In an impassioned speech, Ozanam informed his companions that if they were to do this, then they would not be worthy of the confidence of the donors. He refused to be a party to such a dishonorable action. Moreover, throughout his life he was also willing to work with secular agencies who took notice of the Society's work, such as the Bureau of Public Assistance that worked with Sister Rosalie and the Daughters of Charity with whom she served.<sup>115</sup>

Peter Senge would likely say that Ozanam's vision was realized because he had a "deep understanding of the forces that must be mastered to move from here to there," and because he was able to integrate the disciplines of building shared vision, mental models, team learning, and personal mastery.<sup>116</sup> In other words, Ozanam engaged in systemic thinking. His elder brother, Alphonse Ozanam, insightfully described his brother's successful vision: "As soon as Ozanam saw the finger of God in the rapid growth of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, he comprehended that the small charitable association... of which he had at first thought, might perhaps begin to realize the design which he had meditated for a long time: *the reconciliation of those who have nothing with those who have too*

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<sup>115</sup> See O'Meara, *Life and Works*, 175; and Sullivan, *Sister Rosalie*, 210, respectively.

<sup>116</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 13.

*much, by means of charitable works.*"<sup>117</sup> It was truly a vision of love which would inspire many long beyond Ozanam's short lifespan.

## Conclusion

As a final note it is appropriate to point out that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, for which Ozanam was such an inspiration, has often been overlooked due to its genuinely transformative character. In *Seeds of Hope* five criteria for systemic change projects are enumerated.<sup>118</sup> Examine all five and it becomes quickly evident that at least in its initial history the Society fulfilled, or came decidedly close to fulfilling, each of these criteria.

The first criterion is *long-range social impact*: the project "helps to change the overall life-situation of those who benefit from it." The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul helped to address the multiple needs of many individuals, improving their lives. The letters of report mentioned earlier provide ample evidence that those aided by the Society often found their way to a better, or more sustainable, way of life. The Rule today stresses that the Society is "committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination."<sup>119</sup> The second criterion is *sustainability*: "The project helps create the social structures that are needed for a permanent change in the lives of the poor, like employment, education, housing, the availability of clean water and sufficient food, ongoing local leadership, etc." Especially through its Rule, the Society ensured its own sustainability to the present day. Its members provided not only for immediate needs, but also opportunities for appropriate food supplies, apprenticeships, and other forms of employment, as well as education. Many of these eventually became the organized "special works" of the Society.<sup>120</sup> No work of charity was foreign to the Society.<sup>121</sup> The third criterion is *replicability*: "The project can be adapted to solve similar problems in other places. The philosophy or spirituality that grounds the project, the strategies it employs and the techniques that it uses can be applied in a variety of circumstances." While the fourth criterion is *scope*: "The project actually has spread beyond its initial context and has been used successfully in other settings in the country where it began, or internationally, either by those who initiated it, or by others who have adapted elements of it." In the case of both, the Society expanded quickly not only in France, but elsewhere. Its principles and strategies were easily transferable to other countries and other needs. In 1855, two years after Ozanam's death, the Society had a presence in approximately

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<sup>117</sup> C.-A. Ozanam, *Frédéric Ozanam*, 210. Frédéric was close to his elder brother, who was a priest. Alphonse advised Frédéric throughout his life and also officiated at his wedding to Amélie Soulacroix. See also Ainslie Coates, trans., *Letters of Frederic Ozanam* (London: Elliot Stock, 1886), 81.

<sup>118</sup> For these five criteria see Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 9.

<sup>119</sup> *International Rule*, I, 16.

<sup>120</sup> See "Circular-letter of M. Gossin, President-General," 2 July 1845, in *Dublin Manual*, 218-221.

<sup>121</sup> Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée emphasizes that the Society did not hesitate to multiply its works. See Brejon de Lavergnée, *La Société*, 44.



thirty-five countries.<sup>122</sup> It currently exists in more than 140 countries throughout the world. The fifth and final criterion is *innovation*: “The project has brought about significant social change by transforming traditional practice. Transformation has been achieved through the development of a pattern-changing idea and its successful implementation.”<sup>123</sup> The Society was actually counter-cultural in its day,<sup>124</sup> aspiring both to resist and to change the systems of thought and practice that were part of French social, economic, political, and religious life.

It would certainly be disingenuous to claim that Frédéric Ozanam was knowingly engaged in systemic change initiatives, because the phrase “systemic change” was not in the vocabulary of his day. However, if Ozanam’s thought, work, and strategies are compared to the Vincentian definition of systemic change, and to the criteria and strategies for creating systemic change recommended in *Seeds of Hope*, remarkable similarities and significant correlation are evident. Likewise, if Peter Senge’s five disciplines are applied to Ozanam’s thought, work, and strategies, significant correspondence and resonance are apparent. Indeed, Senge claims that a “learning organization is a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. And how they can change it.”<sup>125</sup> Ozanam diligently worked to make the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul such a learning organization. It would be equally disingenuous, then, to fail to recognize that Ozanam was attuned to the realities and need for fundamental change in the religious, political, economic, and social systems of his day, and that he sometimes thought systemically, planting seeds which grew into genuine hope for those living in poverty. As *Seeds of Hope* proclaims: “Hope is a tiny seed that contains the germ of life. When watered, it sprouts and generates sturdy plants, beautiful flowers, fruit bushes and trees.”<sup>126</sup> In thought and through his works, Frédéric Ozanam brought such hope to a despairing world. As Pope Saint Pius XII said of him: “The mustard seed sown by Ozanam in 1833 is to-day [sic] a mighty tree.”<sup>127</sup>



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<sup>122</sup> C.-A. Ozanam, *Frédéric Ozanam*, 225.

<sup>123</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 9.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas McKenna, C.M., “Frédéric Ozanam’s Tactical Wisdom for Today’s Consumer Society,” *Vincentian Heritage* 30:1 (2010), 28.

<sup>125</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 13.

<sup>126</sup> Keane, *Seeds of Hope*, 188.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in O’Connor, *The Secret of Frederick Ozanam*, 60.



Frédéric Ozanam, in his academic robes, performing a home visit. Painting by Gary Schumer.

*Courtesy of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, Perryville, Missouri*







Portrait of Rosalie Rendu, D.C. (1786-1856).

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*







Portrait of François Lallier.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*



Portrait of Joseph Emmanuel Bailly,  
first President General of the Society.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*





Frédéric Ozanam, from a mural painting of Ozanam by the painter-priest Sieger Köder, located in the parish hall of St. Vincent de Graz, Austria.

*Courtesy of the Church of St. Vincent de Graz*







Alphonse de Lamartine, influential in the founding of the Second Republic, stands in front of the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, following the February Revolution of 1848. Painting by Henri Félix Emmanuel Philippoteaux.

*Public Domain*







FRÉDÉRIC OZANAM  
né à Milan le 23 Avril 1813  
mort à Marseille le 8 Septembre 1853

*fonda en 1833 avec le concours de quelques  
autres jeunes étudiants  
la Société de Saint Vincent de Paul.*

CRESPELLE, PARIS



Memorial engraving dedicated to Frédéric Ozanam.

*Image collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*

# Pictures from the Past: Mount St. Joseph, Cincinnati, Ohio

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JUDITH METZ, S.C.



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Cincinnati riverfront, 1829.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of  
Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



The first Mount St. Vincent, 1854.

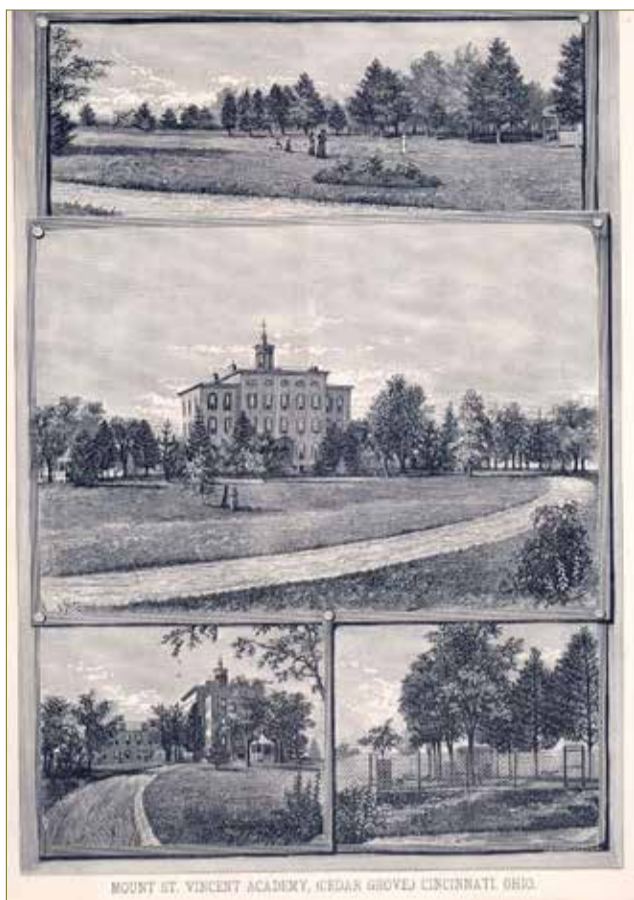
*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of  
Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



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**W**hen the first four Sisters of Charity arrived from Emmitsburg, Maryland, in Cincinnati, Ohio, in October 1829, they opened St. Peter's girls' orphanage and school in a rented house, taking its name from the nearby Cathedral. Within a few years, Bishop John Purcell purchased a mansion just a few blocks from the Ohio River to accommodate the growing enrollment in both the school and orphanage. This building served as the home for the orphanage and school (1836-1854), and later for St. John's Hospital (1854-1866), the first Catholic hospital in the city.

In March 1852 six sisters on the Cincinnati mission, led by Sister Margaret George, formed an independent diocesan congregation, the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. They immediately opened a novitiate, began to expand their ministries, and searched for a suitable motherhouse. Within a year they acquired property on a hillside overlooking the city and named their stately new home Mount St. Vincent. After adding a third story and porches, it became the first motherhouse as well as the location of Mount St. Vincent Academy.



Mount St. Vincent, Cedar Grove, 1857.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,  
Mount St. Joseph, OH*



Mount St. Vincent Academy,  
sister with students.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of  
Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



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Within a few years the needs of the community and the academy outgrew the capacity of this location. The Sisters sold the property, and another piece of land they owned, in order to purchase the 33-acre estate of Judge Alderson, located just a few miles farther west of the city. English author Mary Howitt, who spent a year visiting relatives there, wrote a description of the property in a memoir, *Our Cousins in Ohio*. “The house,” she noted, “stood at a little distance from the road,” and “was white, [and] had green Venetian outside shutters to the windows. In front there was a large two-storied porch, up which grew in wild luxuriance a beautiful prairie rose.... On the sunny side of the house... there ran along its whole length a broad piazza; which, like the porch, was two-storied; so that both the upper and lower rooms opened into it.... It was approached from the road by an avenue of locust-trees; and the lawn itself was scattered over and grouped with cedar and





The Mt. Adams, Cincinnati, incline; and St. Joseph House novitiate, 1869.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



An architect's drawing of Mount St. Joseph, ca. 1883; the ruins of the 1885 fire that burned down the first Mount St. Joseph.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



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catalpa trees.”<sup>1</sup> There was a lovely deer park and a nearby clump of willows called Willow Glen. To the south and west of the home were orchards of apple, plum, peach, and pear trees, and beyond, a wonderful meadow and a deep spring.

The estate, dubbed “The Cedars” by the Alderson family, was renamed “Cedar Grove” after Sister Sophia Gilmeyer’s home in Maryland, while the Sisters fondly referred to the home on the estate as “The Cradle.” This beautiful location served as the motherhouse for the Sisters of Charity until 1884. From here sisters left to serve as Civil War nurses, began their journeys over the Santa Fe Trail to open missions in the New Mexico and Colorado Territories, presided over a growing number of new ministries, and welcomed students to Mount St. Vincent Academy.

Within six months of acquiring Mount St. Vincent, Cedar Grove, the cornerstone for a five-story brick academy building was laid. Opening in November 1858, this addition allowed Mount St. Vincent Academy to expand; while the purchase of additional property and the construction of another building in 1874 is testimony to the ongoing growth of the community and success of the academy.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Howitt, *Our Cousins in Ohio* (London: A. W. Bennett, 1866), pp. 2-3.





St. Joseph Railroad Station.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of  
Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



The front entrance; and the new  
Mount St. Joseph Motherhouse.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of  
Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



The circular main staircase  
constructed of oak.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of  
Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



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But changing times helped determine the future of the Sisters of Charity. The growth of Cincinnati and increasing population pressures in the downtown area led to the construction of five inclines, allowing people to reside on the hilltops surrounding the city while commuting to their jobs. Anticipating this development, the Sisters of Charity purchased a farm in 1869 in Delhi Township, about five miles west of Mount St. Vincent. This delightful spot overlooking the Ohio River would provide an ideal future location for a motherhouse, novitiate, and academy. The red-brick farmhouse, re-named “St. Joseph House,” immediately became the novitiate. The Sisters added a frame addition to provide a chapel, dining room, and infirmary.

When the Price Hill Incline opened in 1874 the Sisters were immediately pressured by real estate developers to sell some of the Mount St. Vincent property for residential purposes. A large portion was sold in the early 1880s. The community used the funds to purchase several additional farms in Delhi adjacent to St. Joseph House, with the intent of eventually moving the motherhouse and boarding academy there.

Mount St. Joseph Motherhouse was designed by Cincinnati architect A.C. Nash. The buildings were of blue limestone, quarried on the property, with sandstone trim. Dedicated in June 1884, the Sisters proudly moved into their new home. The fine building featured a beautiful chapel, with exquisite furnishings, including a hand-carved communion railing created by five of the sisters. Gifts in honor of the Golden Jubilees of two of the founding members, Mother Josephine Harvey and Sister Anthony O'Connell, celebrated in the spring of 1885, further enhanced the new motherhouse. Many sisters had their first glimpse of Mount St. Joseph when they came for retreats and classes during the summer of 1885. Around noon on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, the day after one of the retreats ended, smoke was seen pouring from the roof of the year-old motherhouse. Because fire engines from the city were not able to navigate the steep hill in front of the property, water from the large cisterns went unused. By evening the charred brick walls and fire-proof vault containing the archives were all that remained of the majestic building. The splendid chapel furnishings were destroyed; the clothing and shoes ready to be distributed to the sisters leaving for their various missions were all in ashes.

The infirm sisters returned to Mount St. Vincent, while Archbishop William Elder offered the temporarily closed St. Mary Seminary for the use of the novices. Merchants and bankers were generous in their dealings as the Sisters made plans to rebuild. Railroad officials, who had already put in a special switch at St. Joseph (Railroad) Station for loading and unloading building materials, now made a more generous offer of reduced freight rates "to do what we can to help rebuild your House."

Within several days of the fire, work began on a new Mount St. Joseph, using materials already on the grounds. By the summer of 1886, Marian Hall, the west wing of the proposed new motherhouse, was ready for the Sisters to return. The new structures were designed by Adolph Druiding, a German-born architect/builder whose Chicago firm was known throughout the Midwest German-Catholic community for impressive buildings. Work continued on the center and east wings, with the entire complex completed by 1899.

The new Mount St. Joseph Motherhouse is in the Romanesque-revival style, constructed of red brick with white, rough-cut stones along the first story, in the keystones, and in horizontal bands. The roof is made up of a series of peaks with one squared central bell tower. At the main entrance, huge wooden doors swing open to a second set of doors graced with etched glass. Stained glass windows in nearby parlor transoms, and a richly carved wooden staircase create a sense of strength and groundedness. The long hallways extending on either side of the entrance have high ceilings with wooden arches placed



1) The chapel, ca. 1908; 2) The chapel's organ and choir loft; 3) The present-day chapel.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



The Art Gallery at Mount St. Joseph.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



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periodically along the expanse. The use of quartered oak throughout the building is one of the most dramatic features, evident in arches, circular stairwells, abundant wainscoting, and wooden blinds.

Immaculate Conception Chapel was dedicated in 1901 and consecrated two years later. Built in the shape of a Latin cross, this magnificent four-story design is an expression of Renaissance/Romanesque architecture. Vaulted ceilings coalesce to form a central dome, which is enhanced with a fresco celebrating the Blessed Sacrament painted by Richard Bachman. A second large fresco in the sanctuary dome is by German-born artist, Wilhelm Lamprecht. Eleven months in its execution, it depicts the passage from the book of Revelations: "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars."<sup>2</sup> God the Father and the Holy Spirit appear above her head and the entire painting is surrounded by angels and cherubs. The chapel was renovated in 2000 to create a more contemporary worship space. A new octagonal altar was placed on a circular peninsula at the center of the architectural cruciform of the chapel. The white marble of the original altar was used in a pedestal on

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. 12:1.





Students on lawn of Mount St. Joseph Academy.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*

The College of Mount St. Joseph class of 1921-1922.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



1) The cemetery, ca. 1890; 2) The cemetery cross; 3) Terracing in the cemetery.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*

which the tabernacle rests and a Baptismal font. The painted glass windows and frescoes were restored, the lighting was improved, and new seating included a combination of chairs and pews.

A second remarkable location at Mount St. Joseph is the Art Gallery. Its ornate woodwork balcony including decorative haunches, wrought iron railings on the circular staircase and the second floor balcony, and ceiling medallions, make it one of the most beautiful rooms in the building. A rosette theme is carried throughout the woodwork on the underside of the balcony, along its outer edge, and in the wrought iron railing. The stained glass windows in the doors were created by art students at the College of Mount St. Joseph. Although pressed into service for other uses through the years, it currently displays paintings, furniture, pottery and other pieces of art belonging to the Sisters of Charity.

Besides serving as the motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity, Mount St. Joseph served for several years as the home of St. Aloysius Academy for boys before it moved to another location. In 1906 Mount St. Joseph Academy for Girls opened. The Sisters closed the boarding academy at Mount St. Vincent, Cedar Grove, at that time, but continued to operate a day academy there.



The grotto; and the grotto building converted from an ice house.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



Mother Margaret Hall Infirmary, ca. 1947.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



The academy building, Mount St. Vincent, Cedar Grove.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*

Through the years the Academy expanded its curriculum, offering “post-graduate” courses as women began to seek further education. Flowing from this, the College of Mount St. Joseph opened in 1920. It soon outgrew the space available, and in 1927 Seton Hall, containing offices, a library, classrooms and bedrooms, was opened. As college enrollment continued to expand, the Sisters closed Mount St. Joseph Academy in 1947 to devote all available space to the college.

With the use of the motherhouse extending more than a century, changes, retooling, relocations, and renovations have been the order of the day. This became especially true when the College of Mount St. Joseph relocated to a new facility in 1962. Former dormitories became bedrooms; classrooms became offices and meeting rooms. For a time the Mount Campus School and Eldermount, an adult day center, were located at the motherhouse. But over the many years and through the many changes, every effort has been made to retain its original beauty and architectural integrity.

Other notable features of the campus include:

- A cemetery at the rear of the property was created in 1884, even before the first Mount St. Joseph was completed. The original burials were laid out in a circular fashion around a smaller inner circle surrounded by stately oak trees. By terracing hillsides to the north

of the original plots, additional space for burials was created in 1930. In recent years a further addition was made.

- In the days before electricity, a pond and ice house was built. When this became obsolete, the ice house was transformed into a grotto honoring Our Lady of Lourdes. Around 1950 these statues were moved to a more prominent place on the campus and a new shrine was built.
- In the late 1940s, Mother Margaret Hall, a home for aged and infirm sisters, was built. A six-story structure, it has been extensively renovated through the years to meet changing needs.
- Fine outdoor statuary graces the grounds. Some, such as the statue of St. Joseph, have historic significance. This statue was located near the edge of the hill on which Mount St. Joseph stands with the express intent of placing this protector-saint in charge of making sure the hill did not slide! So far he has lived up to his responsibility.

In addition to the Motherhouse buildings, the extensive property owned by the Sisters of Charity is now occupied by two sponsored ministries: The College of Mount Saint Joseph; and Bayley, a continuing care retirement community. What used to be farmlands and orchards is now home to seniors, and what was once a turkey farm now educates students to become mature and responsible citizens of the world.







Cincinnati riverfront, 1829.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*





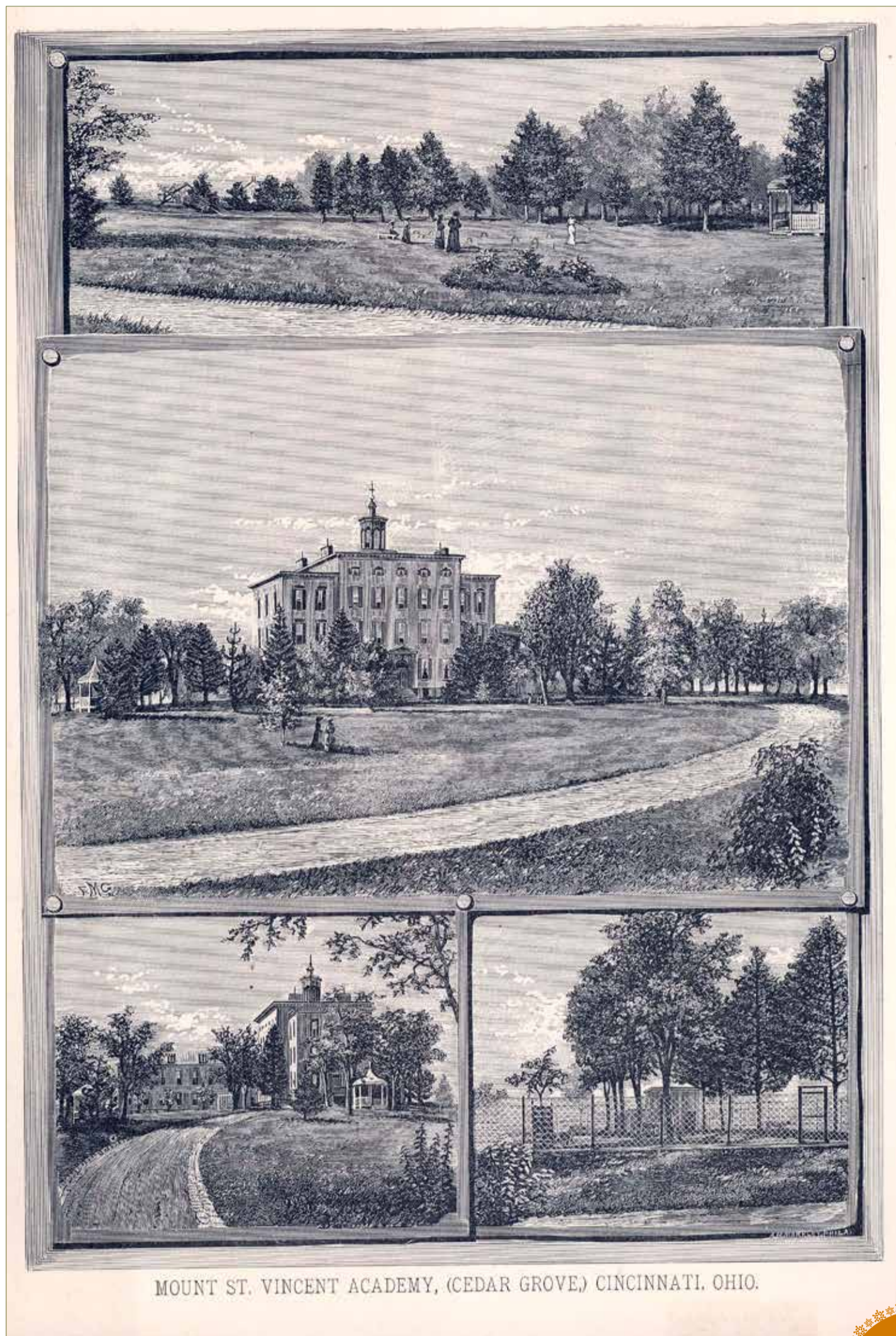


The first Mount St. Vincent, 1854.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*







Mount St. Vincent, Cedar Grove, 1857.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*





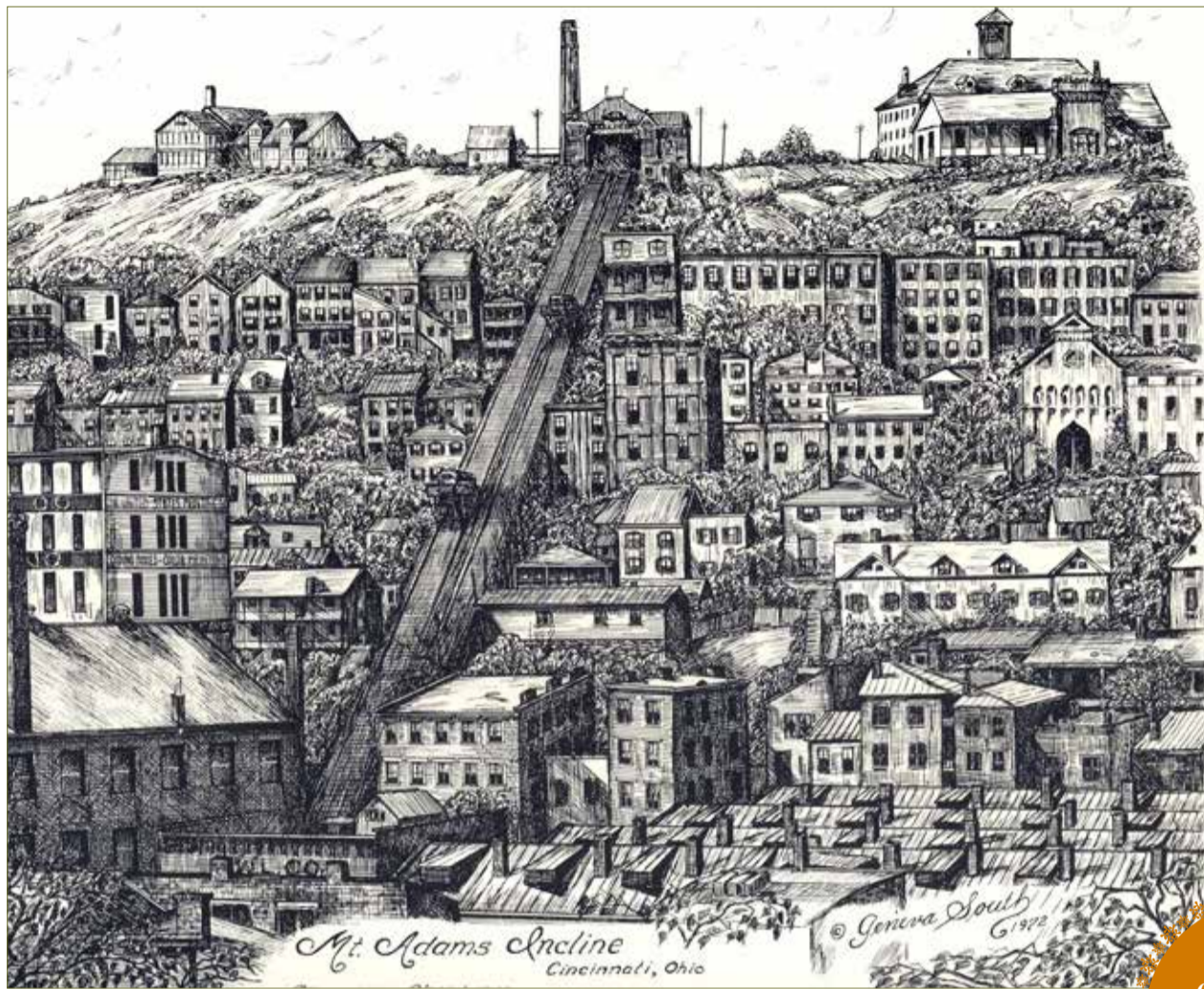


Mount St. Vincent Academy, sister with students.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*







The Mt. Adams, Cincinnati, incline; and St. Joseph House novitiate, 1869.  
*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*





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An architect's drawing of Mount St. Joseph, ca. 1883; the ruins of the 1885 fire that burned down the first Mount St. Joseph.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*





St. Joseph Railroad Station.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*







The front entrance; and the new Mount St. Joseph Motherhouse.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*





The circular main staircase constructed of oak.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*





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1) The chapel, ca. 1908; 2) The chapel's organ and choir loft

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



3.



3) The present-day chapel.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*





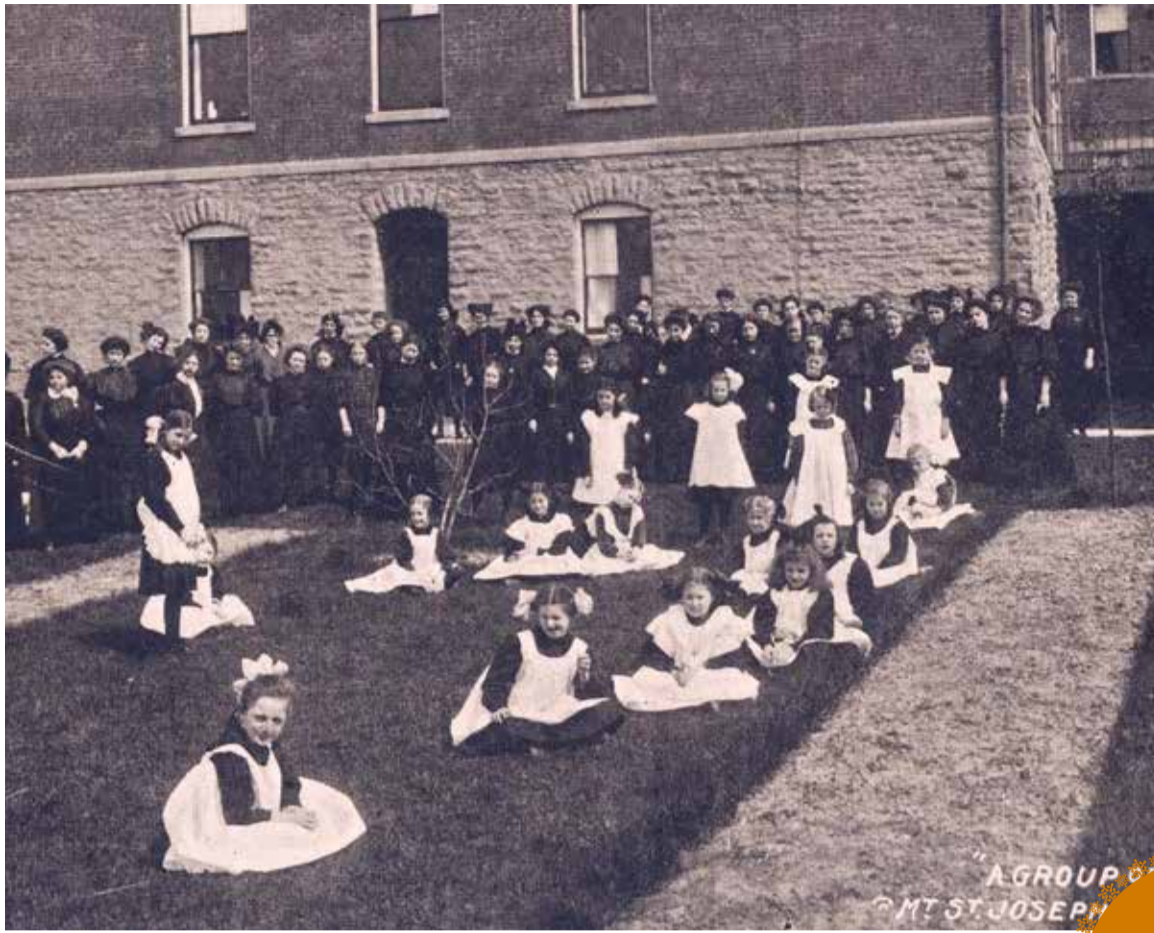


The Art Gallery at Mount St. Joseph.

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The College of Mount St. Joseph class of 1921-1922.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



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The grotto; and the grotto building converted from an ice house.

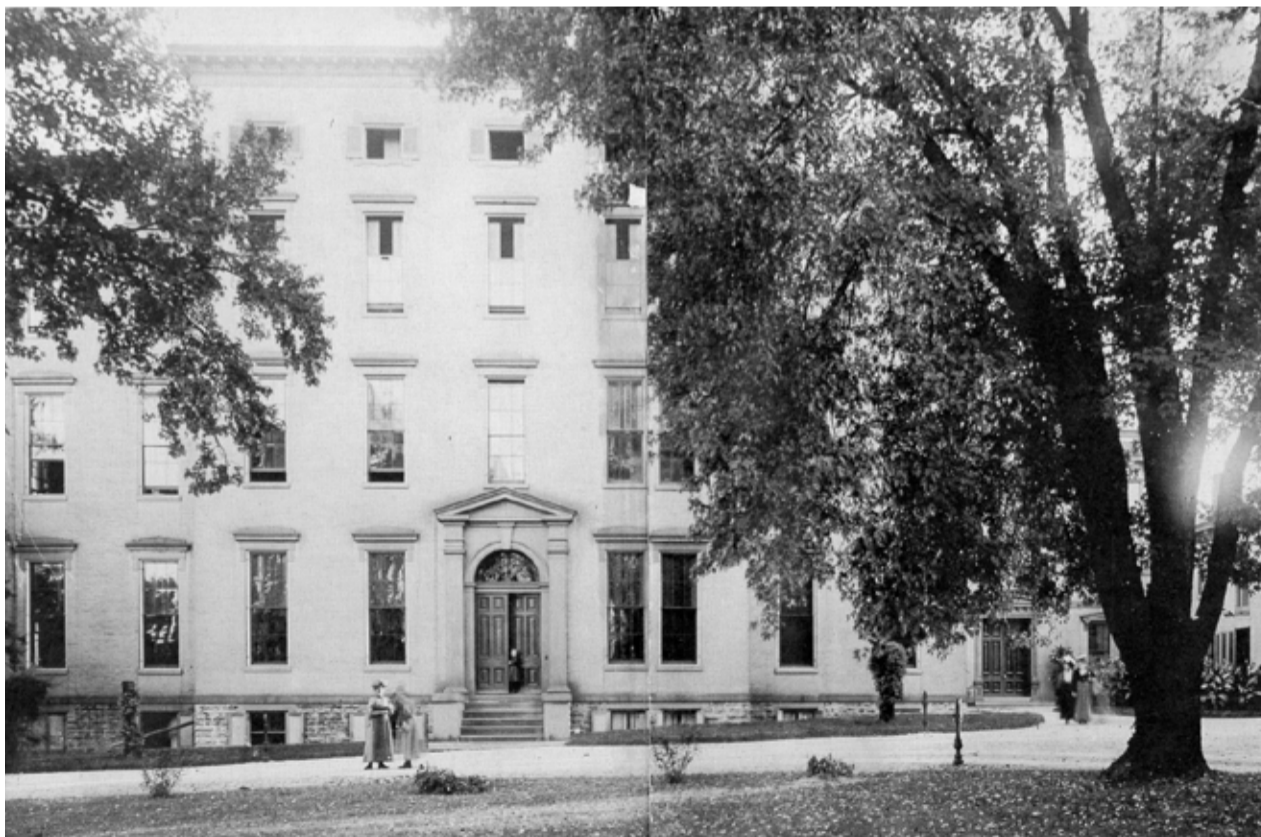
*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*





Mother Margaret Hall Infirmary, ca. 1947.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,  
Mount St. Joseph, OH*



The academy building, Mount St. Vincent, Cedar Grove.

*Courtesy Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Mount St. Joseph, OH*



# Newsnotes

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# Newsnotes

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## NEWS

### *Changes to the Editorial Board*

In the spring of 2013 long-time Vincentian Studies Institute member and Editorial Board contributor John Sledziona, C.M., of the New England Province of the Congregation of the Mission, announced that he would be stepping down from the board. We would like to express our thanks to Fr. Sledziona for his many years of service and invaluable contributions to Vincentian scholarship on our behalf.

The vacancy will be filled by Alison Forrestal, Ph.D., Lecturer in Early Modern History, at NUI Galway, Ireland. Dr. Forrestal earned her Doctorate in History from the University of Manchester in 2000, and she is an accomplished author, lecturer, and 17<sup>th</sup> century historian. Her published works include the books *Catholic Synods in Ireland, 1600-1690* (1998); *Fathers, Pastors and Kings: Visions of Episcopacy in Seventeenth-Century France* (2004); and numerous articles, including "Migrations of Martyrdom in the Post-Reformation Era: The Bishop in Seventeenth-Century France," *The Seventeenth Century* (2005); "Irish Entrants to the Congregation of the Mission, 1625-60," *Archivium Hibernicum* (2009); "Vincent de Paul: The Principles and Practices of Government, 1625-60," *Vincentian Heritage* (2009); "Venues for Clerical Formation in Catholic Reformation Paris: Vincent de Paul and the Tuesday Conference and Company," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* (2010); and "Collaborative Networking: Vincent de Paul and the Jansenist Conflict, 1643-55," in *Saint-Cyran, Le Jansénisme* (forthcoming 2014).

Dr. Forrestal has also delivered an impressive number of conference and seminar papers on French and Catholic history, the history of the Congregation of the Mission, and Vincent de Paul. Over the course of her career she has been awarded multiple grants to support her research, including from the Millenium Research Fund, NUI Galway, for the project "Vincent de Paul: The Formation of Identity and Culture in Early Modern Catholicism" (2006); from the IRCHSS Research Fellowship, for "Vincent de Paul: The Making of an Icon" (2009-10); and the Digital Humanities Award: website and editorship of online collection of primary documents, funding body: DePaul University (2012-15).

We take this opportunity to welcome Dr. Forrestal to the Editorial Board, and offer our thanks to her as she begins her work with us to shape the future of the Vincentian Studies Institute and our publications.



## *Barbara Diefendorf, Ph.D., receives the Pierre Coste Prize*

A modern day scholar of French history was honored for her distinguished contributions to Vincentian historiography on 27 September 2013, the feast day of St. Vincent de Paul.

Barbara Diefendorf, Ph.D., a Boston University professor of history, is the 2013 recipient of the Vincentian Studies Institute's Pierre Coste Prize. Named for the Reverend Pierre Coste, C.M., the 20<sup>th</sup> century French Vincentian historian known as the father of modern Vincentian studies, the award recognizes distinguished contributions in Vincentian scholarship.

Chair of the Vincentian Studies Institute and Senior Executive for DePaul University Mission, Edward R. Udovic, C.M., said "Dr. Diefendorf is being honored for her signal contributions to the religious historiography of 17<sup>th</sup> century France, which have in turn greatly contributed to the contextualization of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac and the foundation of the Vincentian tradition."

Dr. Diefendorf attended the University of California, Berkeley, where she earned undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees in French and history. She has taught European history at Boston University since 1980, and is the author of *Paris City Councillors in the Sixteenth Century: The Politics of Patrimony*; *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris*, which was awarded the New England Historical Association and National Huguenot Association book prizes; *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris*, which was awarded the J. Russell Major Prize by the American Historical Association; and *The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: A Brief History with Documents*.

"I came to study 17th century French spirituality as a way of exploring the Catholic revival that followed France's Wars of Religion, an earlier subject of my research," said Dr. Diefendorf. "Although my first interest lay in the penitential and ascetic spirituality that grew out of the wars, I quickly realized that I needed to account for very different spiritual currents as well."

"The apostolic charity that lay at the heart of the work of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac in particular intrigued me, because of its contrast with the inward-looking asceticism that followed on the heels of the wars," Dr. Diefendorf said. "I first attempted to bring these diverse strands of piety together in a paper presented at the Vincentian Heritage Symposium held at DePaul University in 1992. I had no idea of it at the time, but the title I chose for that paper, "From Penitence to Charity," would offer not only the title but also the essential narrative of my next book. The fact that I first presented this work at DePaul makes the Pierre Coste Prize especially meaningful for me."

The Pierre Coste Prize was established in 2003 in preparation for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Vincentian Studies Institute. Previous honorees include, Marie Poole, D.C., editor of the Vincentian translation project (2004); Stafford Poole, C.M., a Vincentian historian and longtime member of the V.S.I. (2006); Louise Sullivan, D.C., author of several

Vincentian works including *Saint Louise de Marillac: Spiritual Writings* and *Sister Rosalie Rendu: A Daughter of Charity on Fire with Love for the Poor* (2010); and the late Paul Henzmann, C.M., the archivist at the Maison-Mere of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris (2010).

### ***Announcement: "What did Louise Say?" Online quotes database debuts***

What did Louise say? ([topaz.cstcis.cti.depaul.edu/ldm](http://topaz.cstcis.cti.depaul.edu/ldm)) DePaul University has launched a searchable, interactive Internet database that provides worldwide access to the wisdom of St. Louise de Marillac. It serves as a companion to "What did Vincent Say?" ([topaz.cstcis.cti.depaul.edu/quotes](http://topaz.cstcis.cti.depaul.edu/quotes)) a popular database launched in January 2012 offering quotes from Vincent de Paul.

Scott Kelley, assistant vice president for Vincentian Scholarship in the Office of Mission and Values at DePaul University in Chicago, directed the project. "While there are thousands of pages of primary source material available online through the Vincentian Heritage Collections, many people often ask to source a quote they came across from Vincent or Louise. The Louise de Marillac site is intended to showcase the profound wisdom of a woman who is a co-founder of the Vincentian family."

There are almost 400 quotes in the database. Users simply search by word or phrase to locate a specific quote or to identify a quote on a particular topic. All quotes were taken from the *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*, edited and translated from the original French edition *Sainte Louise de Marillac: Ecrits Spirituels* by Sister Louise Sullivan, D.C., and published in 1991. Users can also recommend their favorite quotes for consideration if they are not yet included.

So what's next? Plans are underway to create a database for Elizabeth Ann Seton to be released sometime in 2014.

### ***Announcement: New collection of Catholic and Vincentian History Available Online***

The Vincentian Studies Institute of DePaul University has launched a new online research archive that will provide access to an array of historical documents on the Catholic Reformation, with special focus on Vincentian history. The website, which was created by Dr. Alison Forrestal of the National University of Ireland, Galway, and Dr. Felicia Roşu of Leiden University, Netherlands, can be found at: [earlymoderndocs.omeka.net/](http://earlymoderndocs.omeka.net/).

The first materials posted to the site are a collection of sources relating to Vincent de Paul and the Congregation of the Mission from the 1620s to the 1670s. These are drawn from the archives of the Holy See, especially from the archives of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in Rome.



The material will be invaluable to specialist researchers. It also contains information that will be of interest to the general public on topics such as the Vincentian missions in North Africa and Madagascar, jurisdictional disputes, political relationships and popular devotions. The collection includes summaries of individual documents, and will eventually house transcriptions of particularly valuable correspondence, reports and minutes. More documents will be added soon.

The creation of the website and the publication of the collection are the fruits of a project first funded by the Irish Research Council, but now supported by DePaul University, Leiden University, and the National University of Ireland, Galway.

“DePaul University’s collaborative support of this research highlights its role as the premier international center for Vincentian studies,” said the Rev. Edward R. Udovic, C.M., DePaul’s senior executive for university mission. “We believe it will be a valuable resource for both historians and others interested in the history of the Church and the Vincentians.”

### *DePaul University Libraries Presents: The Vincentian Holy Card Digital Collection*

DePaul University Libraries, in cooperation with DePaul’s Vincentian Studies Institute, is proud to announce a new digital collection of devotional cards featuring St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. These cards span several centuries and many languages, and reveal the trends and shifts in the iconography of St. Vincent through the 19th and 20th centuries. Objects such as holy cards also give a fascinating glimpse into the history, and distribution, of Catholic material culture.

This collection represents a small portion of DePaul University’s Vincentian Studies Collection, which includes books, journals and serials, newspapers, catalogs and bibliographies, maps, archival material, illustrations and art objects, as well as a large collection of ephemera.

The Vincentian Holy Cards digital collection can be viewed at: [digicol.lib.depaul.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15448coll4](http://digicol.lib.depaul.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15448coll4)

## PUBLICATIONS

### *Notable Books*

Robert Emmett Curran, *Shaping American Catholicism. Maryland and New York, 1805-1915* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 320 pp. ISBN 978-0813219677.

An important contextual study given the importance of Baltimore and New York as early centers of the Vincentian experience in the United States. From the jacket: “Distinguished historian Robert Emmett Curran presents an informed and balanced study of the American Catholic Church’s experience in its two most important regions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Spanning the years 1805 to 1915, Curran highlights the rivalry and tension between the northeast and southeast, specifically New York and Maryland, in assuming leadership of the church in America and the Society of Jesus. Slavery, polity, religious culture, education, the intellectual life, and social justice — all were integral to the American Church’s formation and development, and each is explored in this book. The essays provide a unique vantage point to the American Catholic experience by their focus on two communities that played such an incomparable role in shaping the character of the church in America. Based on exemplary archival research and scholarship, the book offers an engaging history of the northward shift in power and influence in the nineteenth century.” [Available here](#)

Matthew Gerber, *Bastards: Politics, Family, and Law in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 274 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-975537-0.

This volume explores the evolving jurisprudence and social customs in Early Modern France with respect to illegitimacy and the political history of the family. The first two chapters in particular provide fascinating insights into Louise de Marillac’s conflicted status as the acknowledged “natural daughter” of Louis de Marillac, born out of wedlock. Chapter 1: “Bastardy in Sixteenth-Century French Legal Doctrine and Practice.” Chapter 2: “Jurisprudential Reform of Illegitimacy in Seventeenth-Century France.” [Available here](#)

Kristine Ashton Gunnell, *Daughters of Charity: Women, Religious Mission, and Hospital Care in Los Angeles, 1856-1927* (DePaul University Vincentian Studies Institute, 2013), 259 pp. ISBN 978-1-936696-06-2. Paperback: \$18.00.

The first women to incorporate a business in Los Angeles, the Daughters of Charity played a pivotal role in shaping the quality of health services for the county’s indigent sick. As hospitals transformed from social welfare institutions to medically oriented businesses in the late nineteenth century, these Roman Catholic sisters developed innovative business strategies to retain their historic leadership position in the city’s hospital industry without relinquishing their religious commitment to care for the poor. This work provides new insights into women’s entrepreneurial activities and social advocacy work in the West,



while documenting the rich heritage of a religious community and its impact on nursing history.

Kristine Ashton Gunnell is a Research Scholar at UCLA's Center for the Study of Women. Title available here: <http://tinyurl.com/GunnellBook>

Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (NYU Press, 2013), 277 pp. ISBN 0814795560.

From the publisher: "For many Americans, nuns and sisters are the face of the Catholic Church. Far more visible than priests, Catholic women religious teach at schools, found hospitals, offer food to the poor, and minister to those in need. Their work has shaped the American Catholic Church throughout its history. Yet despite their high profile, a concise history of American Catholic sisters and nuns has yet to be published. In *Called to Serve*, Margaret M. McGuinness provides the reader with an overview of the history of Catholic women religious in American life, from the colonial period to the present. ...Rigorously researched and engagingly written, *Called to Serve* offers a compelling portrait of Catholic women religious throughout American history." Of note, the volume makes mention of the contributions of the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. [Available here](#)

Michel Nassiet, *La France au XVIIe siècle. Société, politique, cultures* (Belin, 2006), 318 pp. ISBN 978-2701-143026.

From the jacket: "Pour une population qui était environ un cinquième de l'Europe, la France a été au XVIIe siècle le théâtre des efforts gigantesques de deux acteurs collectifs: effort durable d'action cohérent et rationnelle de la monarchie, effort massif de conversion et de contrôle des populations par l'Église catholique. Face à une diversité foisonnante, l'histoire sociale est ici un observatoire privilégié dans une perspective du synthèse: les rapports de production et d'échange sont étudiés en liaison avec la conjoncture économique; les relations inter-personnelles et les aspects de société d'ordres sont observés in liaison avec l'activité monarchique, et des niveaux sont distingués pour analyser les processus culturels." [Available here](#)

Ronald Ramson, C.M., *Hosanna! Blessed Frederic Ozanam: Family and Friends* (WestBow Press, 2013), 192 pp. ISBN 978-1449796808.

From the cover: "2013 marks the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Blessed Antoine-Frederic Ozanam. The worldwide Society of Saint Vincent de Paul has planned celebrations for his birthday and feast day. This new biography, the first in English in many years, is dedicated to this remarkable Catholic layman." Fr. Ramson has been speaking on the life and spirituality of Blessed Frederic Ozanam for a good number of years throughout the United States, Canada, Haiti, and during his time as a missionary in Kenya. He is the author of *Praying with Frederic Ozanam*. [Available here](#)

Elizabeth Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion: The Story of the Religious Orders and How They Shaped Our World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 337 pp. ISBN 978-0-8028-6588-5. \$24.00, paperback.

Of particular interest, chapter 4: “The Age of Confessionalism in which Rapley describes the role of religious orders in the Catholic regions of Europe, focusing primarily on France. The attempt of religious women to move beyond the requirement of cloister imposed by the Council of Trent is portrayed with the story of Ss. Jeanne de Chantal and Frances de Sales and the foundation of the Visitation. St. Vincent de Paul and the Congregation of the Mission, St. Louise de Marillac and the Daughters of Charity, and St. Jean-Baptiste de la Salle and the teaching brothers demonstrate the importance of the social ministries of charity and teaching. The reform of Armand-Jean to Rancé and the origins of the Trappists conclude the chapter.” [Available here](#)

John E. Rybolt, C.M., *Advent and Christmas Wisdom from St. Vincent de Paul* (Ligouri Press, 2012), 128 pp. ISBN 978-0764820106.

“St. Vincent de Paul was very faithful to meditation, which sets a good example for us in our busy world. Advent and Christmas Wisdom from St. Vincent de Paul endeavors to present his thoughts in a way that can help us spend some quiet time meditating. His thoughtful words will lead to a deeper relationship with God, a better appreciation of our own Christian life, and greater love for all, especially the poor. The writings of St. Vincent are mainly meditative in style, keeping with the peace-filled and prayerful season. Vincent de Paul was keenly aware of the greater issues of our life in Christ, whose Incarnation is celebrated during this season. This book of seasonal meditations uses selections from his writings, along with scriptural reflections to encourage us in our Advent journey.” [Available here](#)

Owen White and J.P. Daughton, eds., *In God's Empire: French Missionaries and the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 336 pp. ISBN 978-0195396447.

“A collection of original essays by leading scholars in the field. It examines the complex ways in which the spread of Christianity by French men and women shaped local communities, French national prowess, and global politics in the two centuries following the French Revolution. More than a story of religious proselytism, missionary activity was an essential feature of French contact and interaction with local populations. In many parts of the world, missionaries were the first French men and women to work and live among indigenous societies. For all the celebration of France's secular “civilizing mission,” it was more often than not religious workers who actually fulfilled the daily tasks of running schools, hospitals, and orphanages. ...This book explores how France used missionaries' long connections with local communities as a means of political influence for colonial expansion.” Of particular note, and of great interest to Vincentian historians, is the chapter



“Charity Begins Abroad: The Filles de la Charité in the Ottoman Empire,” authored by Sarah A. Curis, professor of history at San Francisco State University. [Available here](#)

Anthony D. Wright, *The Divisions of French Catholicism, 1629-1645, 'The Parting of the Ways'* (Ashgate: 2011), 216 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-2084-2.

“For much of the sixteenth century, France was wracked with religious strife, as the Wars of Religion pitted Catholic against Protestant. Whilst the conversion of Henri IV to Catholicism ended much of the conflict, the ensuing peace highlighted the fractious nature of French Catholicism and the many competing threads that ran through it. This book investigates the gradual division of the French Catholic reform movement, often associated with those known as the ‘devots’ during the first half of the seventeenth century. Such division, it is argued, was emerging before the publication in France (1641) of the posthumous “Augustinus” of Jansenius, not simply as a sequel to that. Those who were already distinguishing themselves from other ‘devots’ before that date were thus not yet identifiable as ‘Jansenists.’ Rather, the initial defining sentiment was increasing French hostility towards Jesuit involvement in Catholic Reform, both at home and abroad.

Drawing on sources from the Jesuit archives in Rome and on Port-Royal material in Paris, the book begins with an investigation into the development of Catholic Reform in France showing the problems that emerged before 1629 and the degree to which these were or were not resolved. The second half of the book contrasts the fragmentation of the movement in the years beyond 1629, and the context of Richelieu’s new directions in French foreign policy.

Covering a crucial period in the lead up to the establishment of an absolute monarchy in France, this book provides a rich new explanation of the development of French political and ecclesiastical history. It will be of interest not only to those studying the early modern period, but to anyone wishing to understand the roots of French secular society.” [Available here](#)

Ernest P. Young, *Ecclesiastical Colony. China’s Catholic Church and the French Religious Protectorate* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 408 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-992462-2.

From the Publisher: “The French Religious Protectorate was an institutionalized and enduring policy of the French government, based on a claim by the French state to be guardian of all Catholics in China. The expansive nature of the Protectorate’s claim across nationalities elicited opposition from official and ordinary Chinese, other foreign countries, and even the pope. Yet French authorities believed their Protectorate was essential to their political prominence in the country. This book examines the dynamics of the French policy, the supporting role played in it by ecclesiastical authority, and its function in embittering Sino-foreign relations.

In the 1910s, the dissidence of some missionaries and Chinese Catholics introduced turmoil inside the church itself. The rebels viewed the link between French power and the

foreign-run church as prejudicial to the evangelistic project. The issue came into the open in 1916, when French authorities seized territory in the city of Tianjin on the grounds of protecting Catholics. In response, many Catholics joined in a campaign of patriotic protest, which became linked to a movement to end the subordination of the Chinese Catholic clergy to foreign missionaries and to appoint Chinese bishops.

With new leadership in the Vatican sympathetic to reforms, serious steps were taken from the late 1910s to establish a Chinese-led church, but foreign bishops, their missionary societies, and the French government fought back. During the 1930s, the effort to create an indigenous church stalled. It was less than halfway to realization when the Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949. *Ecclesiastical Colony* reveals the powerful personalities, major debates, and complex series of events behind the turmoil that characterized the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century experience of the Catholic church in China.”

[Available here](#)



## *Journals*

*Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad.*

Septiembre-Octubre, Volume 120:5 (2012), contains:

- Corpus Juan Delgado Rubio, C.M., “Correspondencia inedita de San Vicente de Paul”
- Fernando Quintano, C.M., “La vida fraternal para la Mision”
- Maria A. Infante, D.C., “Hijas de la Caridad, martires en Madris (II)”

May-Junio, Volume 121:3 (2013), includes:

- Jose Luis Cortazar, C.M., “Federico Ozanam, una gran figura del siglo XIX en Francia- 200 Aniversario de su nacimiento (1813-2013)”
- Teodoro Barquin, C.M., “Federico Ozanam, apologist de la fe en el siglo XIX”
- Santiago Azcarate Gorri, C.M., “Federico Ozanam, hombre de fe, comprometido con la Iglesia al servicio de la sociedad”

*Compostellanum: revista de la Archidiócesis de Santiago de Compostela.*

Volume 57:1-2 (January-June 2012), contains:

- José Ramón Hernández Figueiredo, “Solución des Papa Pio IX a la ‘cuestión de las Hijas de la Caridad españolas,’ célebres por su aportación benéfico-asistencial,” pp. 351-383

*Echos de la Compagnie: The monthly international magazine of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.*

Issue Number 6, Novembre-Décembre 2012, includes:

- Jean Morin, C.M., “Vers ques pauvres saint Vincent est-il allé? Vers quells pauvres nous envoie-t-il?”

*Echoes of the Company (English edition): The monthly international magazine of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.*

Issue Number 6, November-December 2011, features:

- Bernard Koch, C.M., “The Incarnation and Christmas, According to the Mind of Saint Vincent,” pp. 587-593
- Bernard Koch, C.M., “Pure Love in the Writings of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise,” pp. 594-602

*French History, Published on behalf of The Society for the Study of French History.*

Volume 26 (June 2012), includes:

- Katharine J. Lualdi, “Catholic liturgy and the making of early modern French identity,” pp. 164-181

*U.S. Catholic Historian*. A scholarly journal devoted to the history of the Catholic Church in the United States, published by The Catholic University of America Press.

Volume 31, Number 1 (2013), contains:

- Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., "The Daughters of Charity: Courageous and Compassionate Civil War Nurses," pp. 51-72

*Vincentiana*: This magazine of the Congregation of the Mission is published every two months by the General Curia in Rome.

Volume 56, No. 3, July-September 2012, themed upon, "Ministry to the Daughters of Charity," features:

- John P. Prager, C.M., "Vincent de Paul. Co-Founder of the Daughters of Charity"
- Antoinette Marie Hance, D.C., "Louise de Marillac and the Spirituality of the Daughters of Charity"



# About Vincentian Heritage

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*Vincentian Heritage* is the journal of the Vincentian Studies Institute of the United States. Founded in 1979 the Institute is dedicated to promoting a living interest in the historical and spiritual heritage of Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-660) and Saint Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), the patrons of the wide-ranging Vincentian Family including the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the Ladies of Charity, the Sisters of Charity, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and a number of other congregations, communities, and lay movements who share a common dedication to serving those in need.

*Vincentian Heritage* welcomes manuscripts, poetry, and other expressions of Vincentian themes that meet the publication criteria. All articles should relate directly to topics of Vincentian interest, be researched and documented in a scholarly fashion, and directed toward Vincentian oriented groups in the reading public and the Vincentian family. Ordinarily, articles should not exceed thirty typewritten pages and should be submitted twelve months prior to anticipated publication.

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